

# Home & Garden

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## DECORATING



Eve Ashcraft challenges color rules, like the idea that old houses require historic hues. Bright colors like this powder blue can be used to enliven period interiors.

Simon Upton / "The Right Color" (Artisan Books)

## Advice from the paint whisperer

Expert Eve Ashcraft shows color-phobes how to embrace bold combinations

By Chantal Lamers  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Common sense suggests that today's abundance of paint choices would make mastering the perfect palette for every room delightfully simple. Yet thousands of tiny paint chips can have the opposite effect, leaving some would-be painters woefully hesitant about what consequences their selection might have.

When the well-to-do find themselves in this pickle, it's often Eve Ashcraft they call upon to lift them from their dithering or any number of gone-horribly-awry painting scenarios. Ashcraft — who has garnered a reputation as the paint whisperer — is one of the country's most sought-after color authorities. Her new book, "The Right Color" (Artisan Books, \$29.95), is a liberating, every-person's guide to approaching paint and color delivered in her effortlessly reassuring tone.

Ashcraft inevitably discovered color from her mother, who painted fearlessly, coating the living room walls with a canary-

*Ashcraft continues on M7*



Taking risks, such as painting a porch an unexpected color, can be "satisfying and liberating," writes Ashcraft in "The Right Color."



William Abranowicz Art+Commerce / "The Right Color" (Artisan Books)

## ENTERTAINING

### Little luxuries make guests feel welcome

By Chantal Lamers  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Playing host to overnight guests is all about the right mix of tried-and-true etiquette with a little bit of frivolity thrown in. While a hotel can't compare to the warmth of a friend or family member's home, there are practical tips hosts can adopt, starting with lending guests a set of spare keys. We asked some of San Francisco's tastemakers to divulge what's in their arsenal of tricks for making guests feel at home.



Victoria Smith, writer of the blog SF Girl By Bay (sfgirlbybay.com), says she tells her guests to make themselves at home. "What's mine is theirs to use — from my book collection to the stacks of blankets I keep close by for chilly nights. Whatever's in the fridge is theirs to enjoy too. I like to stock it with lots of fresh fruits, cheeses, wine and local gourmet specialties like Hooker's salted caramels from Bi-Rite, made here in San Francisco."

"Another thing I like to leave out in the guest bedroom are maps, Muni schedules

and guidebooks on San Francisco. Guests shouldn't have to feel like they can't go off adventuring on their own.

"And maybe most importantly, I cozy up the guest room. I usually put out fresh flowers, candles, fresh linens with lots of comfy pillows and a fluffy duvet — kind of my way of creating their own little bed and breakfast."



Chad DeWitt of DeWitt Design Studios, Inc. (dewittdesignstudios.com) jokes that he's not much of a host, and his idea of making someone feel welcome is a shot of whiskey. However, he's gleaned some seasonal-appropriate tips

*Guests continues on M4*

Photos by Russell Yip / The Chronicle



FROM THE COVER

# The paint whisperer shares her wisdom

*Ashcraft from page M1*

yellow hue paired with fuchsia silk cushions and Chippendale chairs. Color never made Ashcraft nervous, and she refined her aptitude at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she earned a degree in fine arts.

The simple and not-so-simple answer to why color can be so antagonizing, says Ashcraft, is light. "Without light we cannot see color. The vexing part is that light won't sit still, it's always changing. As the light changes, so does the color we see. The best hedge against this ever-changing and vexing situation is to paint a test patch of a color you think might be right for your room and view it at different times of day, with the light fixtures that you plan on using."

**Consultant to the stars**

For more than 20 years, the New York-based Ashcraft has zig-zagged the world as a color authority. Her assignments have ranged from consulting with Martha Stewart on two paint collections (one palette inspired by the green and blue eggs hatched by Stewart's hens) to adjusting a single wall color of the Armani Casa store in New York to producing a modern color scheme to coordinate with the signature yellow and orange plastic fixtures in a handful of Burger King restaurants.

Ashcraft's keenness for color also lands her in the homes of celebrities (including Steve Martin) and regular folk, who look to her to interpret light, form and function in palettes.

"The Right Color" is divided into sections that take readers through the same step-by-step process she employs with clients. In "Color and Context" she illustrates how real and artificial light, materials, architecture, intended function of a room and, on occasion, the landscape beyond the windows can translate to dreamy palettes.

When asked how she might interpret the palette of a room subject to chronic San Francisco fog, Ashcraft revealed two options contingent on the occupant's temperament. "I like the idea of matching the fog," she says, in which case she would recommend a compatible arrangement of pale silvery creams and grays. "I always find fog to be like a sedative, calming and peaceful."

Ashcraft encourages those who suffer from fog fatigue to mimic the vigor of sunlight. "Try something more energizing, something that makes you forget about the fog," she says. "Go with a bold, warm color to really offset the fogginess, something that actually feels like a temperature or time of day."

Small doses of a bright color can have the same effect, she says. "Maybe it's not the whole room, but painting the door frames bright yellow or painting the trim, one wall or a piece of furni-



Small doses of a bright color can activate a space. Bright purple on the back wall of a bookcase provides a dramatic backdrop for blue and white rosewater sprinklers. Fritz von der Schulenburg / "The Right Color" (Artisan Books)



William Abranowicz / "The Right Color" (Artisan Books)

**Art doesn't have to be displayed on white walls. "Old portraits with deep black backgrounds spring to life against a field of modern lime green," writes Ashcraft.**

ture a different color to activate the space."

While more people are willing to play around with dark, saturated paint nowadays, pale colors still frequently lead to unexpected, disappointing outcome.

"Pale colors people think will stay pale are famous for betraying them when they get home," Ashcraft says. "It's the pastel-y colors that will become much bigger colors and take over a room. If you like a color when it's little, choose something that's dirtier and not quite as bright."

**Inspirational palettes**

Naturally, Ashcraft dedicates much of the book to steering readers in the right direction. She offers heaps of advice for using paint to lend large spaces intimacy or to change scale and give area definition. The photography in the book references this pool of palettes, indoors and out, from bright-white sunrooms to bookcases with purple backdrops, to salmon-swathed bedrooms and even a khaki-colored colonial in Connecticut.



William Abranowicz Art+Commerce / "The Right Color" (Artisan Books)

**Pink is a color worthy of spaces outside girly girl bedrooms. "A soft pale pink is beautiful in almost any room," writes Ashcraft, but its sweetness needs to be offset by dark woods, deep tones or metals.**

In "Finding Your Home's Palette" Ashcraft demonstrates how to glean a set of colors from a collection of beloved objects or favorite places. The chapter walks readers through six inspirational palettes that are paired with practical directions for adapting ideas to walls. If you're still having difficulty visualizing colors, check out the chapter "Twenty-Eight Colors that Work," which includes recommendations for trim, walls, ceilings and even-

ning adjoining rooms. Ashcraft also corrects popular misconceptions about paint. Her teachings often break from so-called color convention, from painting with black to using white with intent rather than as a fallback. She applauds pink, insisting that it's worthy of spaces outside girly girl bedrooms. She'll also opt for dark hues in the bathroom, which she says work as a counterpoint to countertops and mirrors.

Playing it safe is not Ashcraft's style. After all, she writes, neutrals have the potential to be "clunkers" in poorly lit spaces. She recommends warming up to darker colors by experimenting first with bolder hues in small spaces. "If even that's too big a leap, paint the back wall of a bookcase or a porch in an unexpected color," she writes. "It's satisfying and liberating."

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**Ashcraft's tips for painting**

As tempting as it may be to skip on the prep work, this step that may seem unimportant is actually huge when it comes to the finished product. "A professional painter spends far more time prepping than painting," Ashcraft writes in the chapter "Ready, Set, Paint," which includes a glossary on paint types, recommendations for the painter's tool kit and tips for the painting process. "Paint is a thin film that evenly covers the surface. It's not designed to fill or mask



Heather Smith MacIsaac

flaws and, in fact, does a good job of highlighting them." Once you've cleared out or covered the contents of the room, follow Ashcraft's steps to getting the most out of your respective paint can.

**Stage:** Designate a protected area for paint and materials. Organize tools and, using tape and a permanent marker, label paint cans by color, finish and room. Use resealable bags to store hardware you remove from walls, doors and cabinetry.

**Prep:** Remove loose paint and plaster from surfaces. Ashcraft gushes that her favorite tool, second to the paintbrush, is the five-in-one that she uses to scrape and pick plaster loose. Use gloves, a dust mask and eye protection. Check [epa.gov/lead](http://epa.gov/lead) for information on lead and debris removal on houses built before 1975.

**Clean:** Clean dusty surfaces with a shop vacuum and/or damp cloths. Fill seams with caulk, use Spackle for small surface holes and joint compound fortified with plaster for large surfaces. Use Bondo wood filler for trim. Allow areas to dry before sanding each by hand or with an electric sander. The type of sandpaper or sanding blocks will vary by the area and surface. Clean once more to remove all dust from the work area.

**Prime:** Apply a single coat of primer, which will stabilize the surface and prepare it for adhesion. Use brushes and rollers for walls and ceilings. (A spray gun will work for all surfaces.) It's normal for walls to look patchy after they've been primed.

**Paint:** Once the primer has dried, it's time to paint. Start at the top of each surface and work your way down, starting with the ceiling, trim and the walls. Use the finest brushes your budget will allow, which will make the work go faster and look better. (Ashcraft prefers Purdy brushes.) Avoid thick rollers, which can leave an "orange peel" texture, except for stucco and thick surfaces. A short-napped roller sleeve works best for smooth surfaces. Take the time to apply two thin coats, rather than one thick coat.

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