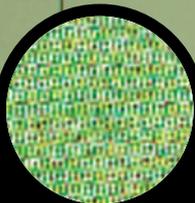


# COLOR

## in the Kitchen

A designer's savvy approach to using color will help you create a standout space

BY COURTNEY FADNESS



### DESIGNERS BEWARE

Magazine images and online design sources should only be used as a rough starting point when honing in on color selection. The accuracy of the color in these formats varies greatly due to things like image processing, printer technology, ink type, and monitor color calibration. If you find a color you like in an image, always track down a physical sample, and bring it into the space where it's being considered for implementation before committing completely.

**I** work for Hutker Architects, a full-service architecture and interior-design firm with three offices in Massachusetts: Falmouth, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket. Our goal is to cultivate our clients' lifestyles, explore what "living well" means to them, and then match their life patterns with the homes we help create. Color plays a significant role in that effort.

When it comes to selecting colors for a home, and specifically its kitchen, I've seen trends come and go over

the years. However, when considering kitchen designs of the past, one thing is crystal clear: Using color in some way is an enduring trend. The success and timelessness of a colorful kitchen design lie in the selection of the color itself and how it is implemented.

My approach to implementing color in the kitchen is based on a few important factors: commitment, budget, and style. The goal is to create kitchen spaces that best exemplify the architecture of a home and also the



## CHOOSE A COLOR SCHEME

Choosing one color for your kitchen can be daunting. Selecting multiple colors can seem downright impossible. Once you settle on a color that you like, employ one of these four color schemes to tie your kitchen design together.



MONOCHROMATIC



COMPLEMENTARY



TRIADIC



ANALOGOUS

Turn the page to see each of these approaches at work. ➔

signature features of that home's particular region and specific setting.

### Weigh your commitment to color

A person's perception of color can have a dramatic impact on the scope of a kitchen design. When you are unsure of how a color might affect the space, it is far easier to take the safe approach and not use it at all. In such an instance, a kitchen design can easily fall flat. Color infuses a space

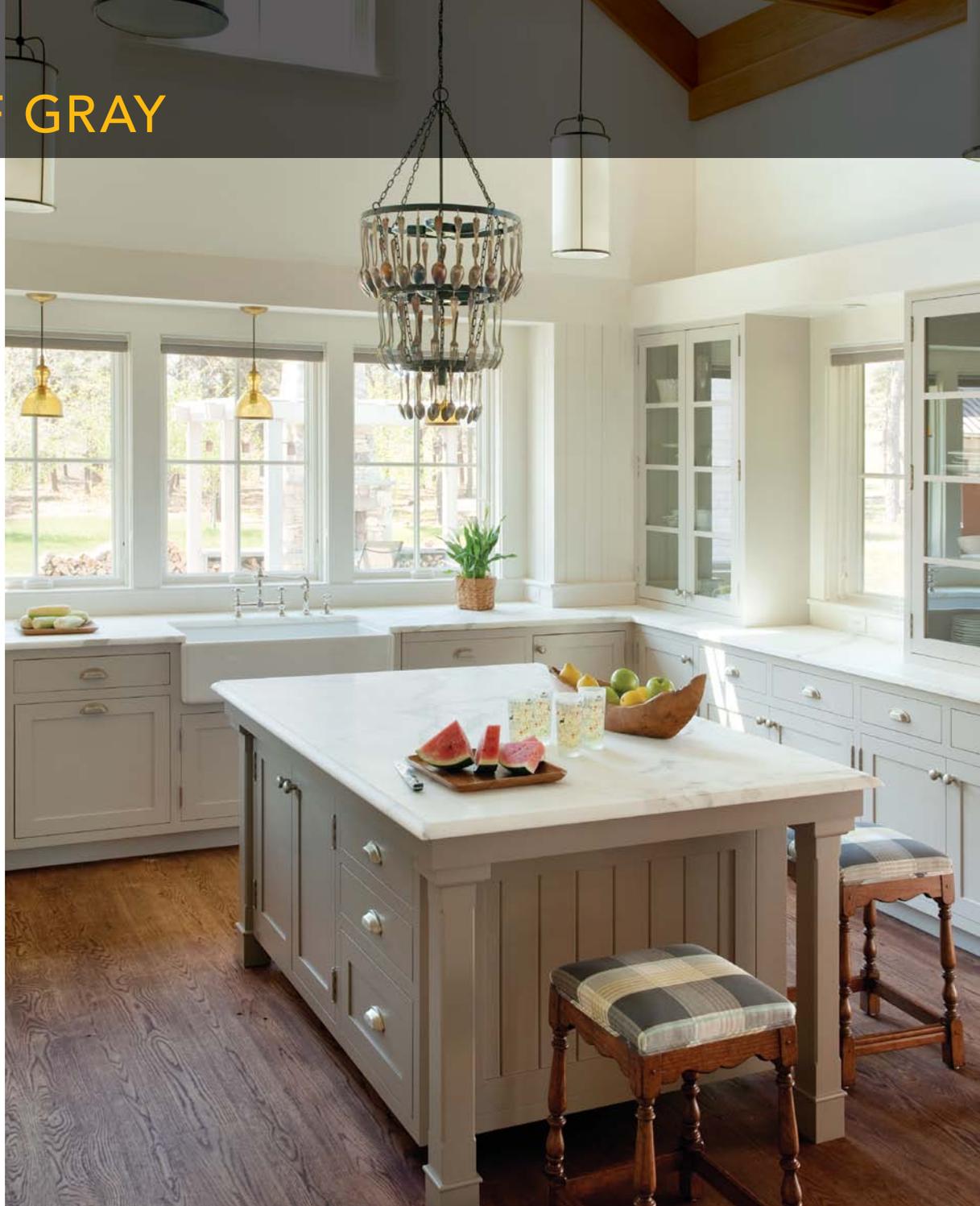
with life and energy, even if it's used sparingly. For example, an entirely white space feels livelier with even a few colorful accents.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, a love of color can often lead to a lack of restraint. Overzealous application of trendy colors can date a kitchen quickly and lead to greater expenses down the road.

When I work with clients who are not so adventurous when it comes to color but who also don't want their

# SHADES OF GRAY

In this example, we used a low-risk/low-cost approach to incorporating color. We utilized furnishings and fixtures as the basis for adding color: the large-scale plaid fabric on the stools, the amber glass pendants hanging over the sink, and the accessories scattered on the countertop. All of this would be relatively straightforward to replace down the road. The overall palette is neutral, with shades of white, cream, and greenish gray, which we punctuated with small doses of yellows and greens. Even the island color, a greenish-gray, reads as a color set against the white-cream backdrop. This subtle approach comes with a lot of flexibility, as the largest components of the kitchen remain a neutral canvas from which to rotate colors as the homeowner wishes, with minimal cost and effort.



**MONOCHROMATIC** This scheme uses a single color in various shades paired with white, black, gray, and/or other neutral tones. The easiest and most foolproof approach, it can be implemented for any level of color commitment. It provides a subtle, calming effect with little contrast.



space to look dull or bleak, I begin by identifying the colors that they do like and feel most comfortable with. If that is difficult to ascertain, I ask to peruse their wardrobe. Clothing preferences are often a direct indicator of color preferences. And don't discount "neutrals."

I caution the timid to avoid falling victim to colors "of the moment." Not that these fashionable colors aren't often lovely, but color selection should be driven more by personal preferences than what is in vogue.

As a color lover myself, showing restraint with color is far more difficult than employing it. Kitchens are largely comprised of hard and permanent surfaces that are unforgiving and difficult to alter in the future without a significant amount of money and effort. I've found that using a single color in a large statement is one of the best ways

a color lover can achieve a dramatic effect that will stand the test of time. Painting the cabinetry in a single color is effective in achieving this. Smaller doses of secondary colors can then be added to easily changed items such as furniture, textiles, and accessories.

## Why budget matters

When designing kitchens, I always consider the client's budget, both short and long term. The budget directly affects which areas of the kitchen can be updated, the size and scope of the project, and also the level of risk I'm going to assume. For example, changing out a large item, such as a tile backsplash, is more expensive than, say, adding a few colorful runners to the floor. Likewise, if my client's budget limits

# A MODEST MOVE

Here, we took the level of color integration up a notch without overcommitting by applying color to more permanent features—namely, the countertop and the backsplash. The blue engineered stone provides a contemporary touch to an overall traditional kitchen. It works here because the color is juxtaposed against the warmth of the wood cabinetry. This pairing mellows the visual punch and vibrancy of such a pure hue. Black, Windsor bar chairs provide contrast and balance the space further (see photo, pp. 16-17). The handcrafted tile backsplash supports the color story in its cool, plum-gray tone. Upon closer inspection, however, you can see variability in the glaze color of each tile used. Amid the plum-grays are yellow, green, purple, light blue, and more. This creates a textural effect and provides some visual movement.

**COMPLEMENTARY** This scheme uses opposing colors on the color wheel. For example, blue and orange impart high visual contrast within a room and are most effective when one color is dominant and the opposing color is used for secondary accents.



the frequency of remodeling work in the future, I adjust the level of risk and the commitment to color accordingly. If they have to live with it for a while, it's best to make sure they love it.

I consider furniture, textiles, art, and accessories first. Adding color through these “soft” elements is straightforward, easy to implement, and relatively easy to modify if tastes eventually change. Often, I swap out a wood stool for an upholstered option in a saturated solid or a poppy stripe—for example, the classic Tolix or Thonet stool in a bright color. I suggest showcasing colorful dishes, crockery, and glassware in glass-door cabinets. Any open wall space can be used as an opportunity to showcase art. I'll lay down a runner or two for added punch; Dash & Albert have loads of options in bright colors and pat-

terns. I'll also paint the inside of a glass-door cabinet with a client's favorite hue.

I'm careful not to overlook the obvious; a simple assortment of fruit in a bowl adds freshness and life to a bland kitchen.

For clients with a bit more gumption, I consider color options for smaller-scale yet permanent kitchen elements such as backsplashes, island cabinetry, wall colors, light fixtures, and window treatments. These items tend to come with a higher price tag, so I make it clear to clients that they should be prepared to live with them for longer.

In projects of this scope, I may swap out boring blinds for fabric Roman shades in a geometric pattern or a neutral tone with contrasting colored trim. I may also replace a tired ceramic backsplash with

# SPARINGLY BOLD

The three colors in this kitchen are spaced equally apart on the color wheel. The red; the dark gray, which is a tinted blue; and the blonde ash wood demonstrate that one doesn't need to deal with bold colors to execute a color scheme. In this treatment, we used the largest elements—cabinetry, walls, and floors—to apply the color. This keeps the space from feeling chaotic. Three colors applied to smaller elements would feel less cohesive. We kept one color, the red lacquer stain on the cabinets, as the purest hue and paired it with the dark gray on the island and the tall fridge built-in. We reinforced this gray on the floor through concrete inlays. The blonde ash wood adds lightness and provides contrast. This scheme will live well for a long time, since we've used naturally occurring hues rather than overly saturated ones.

**TRIADIC** This scheme uses three colors equally spaced on the color wheel. It offers visual contrast while retaining balance and color richness. Featuring less contrast than a complementary scheme, it is most applicable when applying color to larger elements.



a back-painted glass option in a vibrant hue. Paint is a miracle worker; I may try a pretty pastel for the island, or paint the back of open cabinetry or glass-door cabinetry a punchy turquoise. Even door and window trim offers an opportunity for working color into a space. It doesn't always have to be painted white.

Finally, with clients willing to take the largest risk, I discuss the largest elements in the kitchen to impart color: cabinetry, flooring, and ceilings. This approach involves more labor and expense, but it will certainly make a big impact.

In this case, I may paint all of the cabinetry a stunning, rich hue or a soft pastel, or I may add a painted pattern over a worn wood floor. Ceilings can be painted a bold color, and if they are wood or paneled,

I enrich them with a bright lacquer finish. If they're drywalled or plastered, I'll even consider adding patterned wallpaper.

## Let style guide you

Certain architectural styles lend themselves to a particular degree of color usage. Some can accommodate a more prolific use, while others are best suited to a restrained approach. Equally important is to consider the home's landscape, climate, and access to natural light. Though I don't think one has to be a slave to the house style or region, it is important to consider these prevailing features.

For example, Arts and Crafts-style homes naturally lend themselves to a more muted approach to color since there is a strong design con-



# ALL-OUT TASTEFUL

Here, we used a larger and more permanent feature to incorporate color: the kitchen cabinetry. The overall palette of the room is relatively neutral, with light maple floors and woodwork, stainless-steel elements, and light walls. This provides a perfect backdrop for showcasing color. The two cabinetry colors used here, blue-green and yellow, were kept light in tone so that they wouldn't create too high of a contrast with the surrounding finishes. Additionally, both colors have a slightly gray undertone, which keeps them from being too harsh or vibrant. They still read as bright and colorful, but they are more sophisticated than similar colors in a more pure hue. Although two colors are used, the effect is harmonious because we employed an analogous color scheme.



**ANALOGOUS** This scheme uses colors adjacent to one another on the color wheel, with one being the dominant color. This is just as easy to create as the monochromatic scheme, but it can look richer. Using colors that are either all cool or all warm works best.



nection between their interior and exterior, and an abundant use of natural materials in their construction, finish, and furnishing. Their wood tones pair nicely with muted colors found in the landscape.

On the other hand, New England architecture is well suited to a light, natural palette of blues and greens due to the region's proximity to the ocean, mountains, and forests.

Kitchens in urban homes can accommodate a more prolific use of color in more vibrant tones. Since these homes don't have a direct connection to the natural landscape, they can tap into the energy of the surrounding architecture; thus, varied and radiant hues feel fitting.

Beyond the specific style of a home, consider its region's climate. For instance, if clients are going to be cooped up for seven months of

winter every year, I warn them that a dark kitchen may not create the cheerful environment they're looking for.

## Design that suits you

Be honest when assessing which colors are likely to remain favorites over time and which are merely trendy. A beautiful, timeless kitchen is one that is energized with equally intimate and warm colors. Strike a balance between visual tension and contrast through color, and your kitchen will live well for a long time. □

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