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## House Decoration

### THE PROS AND CONS OF A PLAIN WALL

By Eleanor Allison Cummins in Keith's Magazine

It often occurs to the unprejudiced observer that people are obsessed by wall papers. The average woman thinks of papering as the only possible wall treatment, whereas quite often it is extremely undesirable for rooms like hers. As papering affords great scope for the work, and incidentally the charge, of the professional decorator, he, quite naturally, encourages her to paper.

Let us consider for a moment the type of room which demands the wall of more or less pattern which is supplied by papering. There is, to begin with, the very large room, very high, perhaps badly proportioned, and with large unbroken wall spaces. Such rooms require something to correct the defective proportions, to reduce the apparent size of the wall spaces and to remove the effect of bareness so common in very large rooms.

Then there are rooms of a formal character, halls and reception rooms, from which all the more intimate belongings are necessarily absent, where pictures may not be advisable, or their number very limited, and for rooms like these nothing takes the place of a wall paper of decorative quality.

Again, in old houses, whose walls have bulged, whose floors have settled, and whose lines are generally out of plumb, a wall paper without too much pattern does much to divert attention from these irregularities. Besides this, for the very old house, wall paper has the advantage of being in harmony with the period of the house.

When we have admitted the advantages of wall paper in many instances, the average room remains, the room neither very large nor very small, which is primarily a background for the family life, a life which finds expression in books and pictures and ornaments, all of which demand a setting which shall give them their highest value. For these rooms the plain wall surface of good and harmonious coloring is almost always advisable.

The plain wall has other advantages than merely as a good background for pictures. It allows of much more variety in furnishing than the patterned wall. There is a very wide range of upholstery fabrics, of which the French cotton tapestries are typical, many of them copies of antique designs, beautiful in coloring, but almost all of them with such large patterns as to be impossible in a room with a figured wall.

Another point of importance in these days when we lay so much stress upon hygienic consideration is that the plain wall is sanitary, which the papered one is not. The painted wall can be washed with an antiseptic solution. Walls covered with the various compositions can be recoated with trifling expense. Moreover, the cost of the self-colored wall is comparatively small, at least as contrasted with the price of wall paper of good quality and the expense of laying it.

### Which?

Given the desirability of the plain wall, what shall it be? Shall it be painted, or shall it be of some one of the various compositions made for wall finishing, or shall it be merely kalsomine?

Of the three treatments, the last is the cheapest, also the least durable. Still kalsomine has greatly improved in quality of late years, and when laid upon a thoroughly cleaned wall will last for a couple of years. Anyone who can wield a brush can lay it and it is valuable as affording a means of tinting the walls of a new house, before the final finish has been decided upon. A second coat of kalsomine cannot be applied without the removal of the first coat, a dirty and troublesome process.

The painted wall is an old friend. When walls have cracked and been pointed up, the scars are concealed by paint better than by anything else. On the other hand it is never desirable to apply paint to new walls, as it is almost impossible to paint over a crack in a painted wall, as the paint changes color slightly, even in a few weeks. The most satisfactory painted wall has three thin coats of paint, and sometimes an agree-

able variety and suggestion of texture is given by stippling the third coat, but this requires an unusually skillful worker. Wonderful things in this line have been done by artists, who have used different layers of color, stippling them into a sort of iridescent effect.

There is a third treatment which is neither paint nor kalsomine, altho applied like the latter and requiring only a single coat. This is a mineral powder which when mixed to a paste with water and applied to a surface sets like cement, giving a very hard surface, not easily broken, and which can be renewed without disturbing the original layer. The range of color is a wide one and the darker colors are quite as good as the light ones, altho more expensive. It is an admirable ground for stencilling, with other colors of itself.

### Modifications of the One-Colored Wall

It may be objected that however good a background the plain wall is, large unbroken spaces above the eye line are inevitable, and not agreeable. The best answer to this objection is to recommend the use of the deep drop ceiling, thirty inches, or in an unusually high room, even three feet deep. This is a mode of treatment which is particularly good for small rooms much broken by doors and windows, in which the wall spaces are apt to appear high in proportion to their width. It introduces the principle of the broken line, always so valuable when applied to decoration.

This treatment of the deep drop ceiling is often very effective when considerable prominence is given to the separating moulding, use being made of what is known as a card rail, whose primary function is to support a line of photographs, and which occupies a place midway between the plate rails and the picture mouldings. This rail should be painted or stained to match the woodwork of the room, and an excellent treatment is to place a band of ornament just below it, either a line of stencilling or a paper border. The latter treatment is particularly good with white woodwork in a bedroom, the color and design of the border to some extent repeating that of the cretonne used for furnishings. A specially interesting treatment consists of an irregular arrangement of sprays of some trailing plant like wistaria, cut from wall paper and applied in such a way as to suggest the way in which such a vine should hang about the top of a window. Naturally a certain amount of artistic skill is required, but not more than goes to elaborate stencilling.

When the plain wall is carried uninterrupted to the ceiling line, it may be finished there with a very simple moulding, and a nosegay border used to outline the surbase and the frames of doors and windows. This is an old fashion and a pretty one when the walls are not too high. It is an excellent treatment for a bedroom with old fashioned furniture.

The plain wall is also admirable with the wide landscape friezes, and enables one to balance the considerable expense of a good frieze. The tone of the wall should be the same as that predominant in the frieze, and not perceptibly lighter.

### The Choice of Colors for Plain Walls

It requires a certain discretion to decide upon the best coloring for a wall of plain surface. It must be remembered that, with an absolutely plain surface, color goes much further than when it is diversified by pattern or by the suggestion of texture or relief, such as is given by wall paper. A paper in three tones of red, all of them reasonably strong, may be quite agreeable, while a plain wall of the lowest of the three tones will be glaring and strong blues and greens will be absolutely hideous.

The plain wall is at its best in cool tones, gray, gray blue, gray green and greenish gray and cool fans. It is not easy to say why a painted wall in yellow or lavender is so unsatisfactory, but the reason is the same as with lavender and yellow cotton materials. The two colors seem to demand a certain richness of material. Of the warm colors, the most successful in paint or composition is one or other of the terra cotta shades. Few things are better for a hall than a wall painted terra cotta, not a pink, but a red one, low in tone with a suggestion of yellow.