



# The right white

Renovate's interior design expert Donna White shares her insight on choosing the right white.

COLUMN Donna White

One of my friends said to me: "Don't worry, I will paint my interior white." I know she did not want to trouble me, but my immediate thought was, "Oh my god, do you know how many 'whites' are out there?!" I know white seems like the easiest, safest and most straightforward way to go when choosing paint colours, but you would not be the first person to become confused by the seemingly endless spectrum of white paint on offer.

Strangely, some people choose white for their walls, because they are afraid of making a mistake with colour. Other people choose white because they enjoy the simplicity of white rooms. However, white is not 'one size fits all'. Choosing the right white requires as much thought and planning as choosing any other colour.

White is not just white. It comes in a myriad of undertones. The untrained eye may not see these shades, but if you place a white paint swatch against a sheet of plain white copy paper, the undertone should become clear. You will see that whites have undertones of black, blue, red, yellow, orange, green, or brown.

These different shades of white will have a cool or warm feel. Cooler whites have blue, green, purple or black undertones resulting in bright whites and various shades of grey. Warmer whites have red, yellow, orange or brown undertones – the beiges and creams.

To find the ideal white for your home, it is important to understand and be able to pick out the subtle differences. There is a simple guide for sorting through the shades of

white, because different types of white tend to suit different styles of interiors. Some whites suit minimalist modern interiors, and others suit ornate traditional interiors. The reason for this is to do with natural light. Most modern dwellings have lots of windows and good natural light. Older homes often have smaller windows or fewer windows giving less natural light.

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Cool whites tend to suit contemporary spaces or rooms with lots of natural light. A pure white, or a white with a blue, green, purple or black undertone, will complement this style of interior. To find a true white, hold your paint sample up to a piece of plain white paper. All whites will look warmer or deeper than the paper, but this will help you see which colour samples are closest to the pure white of the paper.

An overly clean, bright white will often feel out of place and cold in a room with little natural light, or in an older house, especially if it has classical decoration and furnishings. Warmer, toned-down whites – creams and beiges – will have red, yellow, orange or brown undertones. Like worn wood flooring, they express age, character and warmth. If, however, you are including new furniture in an

older home, then a bright white may provide a dramatic juxtaposition to the traditional architecture.

The amount of natural light in a room is key to whether you will need a warm or a cool white. To determine which undertone of cool or warm white to select, consider your existing furnishings. If you want to enhance what you own, without making it more intense, choose a white with some of that colour in it. If, for example, you dislike that green sofa, but it is staying, choose a white with a green undertone, because it will minimise contrast.

If you would like to bring out the colour of your existing furnishings, choose a white that contains its complement on the colour wheel (paint shops sell colour wheels). For example, if you want to make your wood floor appear richer, a blue-based white will pull out orange tones.

To ensure you are entirely happy with your chosen white, I recommend that you buy a test pot and apply two coats to a piece of cardboard (at least A3 in size). Move it around your space to test it in natural light as well as in artificial light sources, and to see how it looks with your furnishings and other colours.

White is a versatile colour. It can match everything, and never goes out of style. It may take a little extra time and consideration to find the perfect match, but picking the right shade and undertone will make all the difference. ■