

The Interior-Designer Trick That Looks Like New Architecture

Want to give a room a makeover that appears structural but isn't? Design pros say paint your wood trim anything but white—and suggest seven alternatives.



OF A PEACE In the Surrey, England, home of Claire Vero, founder of skin care company Aurelia London, designer Nicole Salvesen used a rich baby blue in the reading room to unify architectural elements. 'It makes the room feel more calm,' she said.

PHOTO: SIMON BROWN

HOW OFTEN do you think about trim? Chances are, rarely. Probably because white woodwork is the default—timeless but tiresome.

Colorful, contrasting millwork, on the other hand, is the swizzle that transforms interiors with a whisk of a paintbrush, say design pros.

Swap white trim for black, and voilà, a salon of sophistication. “The trim makes the space fully decorated,” said New York interior designer Tara McCauley, who upgraded her apartment by underscoring pale aqua walls with teal-blue baseboards. Philadelphia interior designer Glenna Stone pulls trim color from art, a rug or a pillow for cohesiveness—a design tactic she adopted in about 20% of her projects this year. Mrs. Stone sees contrasting trim as a way to differentiate your interior from the rest of the world’s. “It adds in a dash of the unexpected,” she said.

Standout trim has an illustrious history—George Washington’s Virginia quarters, Mount Vernon, are a famous case in point. “In 18th-century America, trim was an indication you could afford a higher level of craftsmanship,” said Kirsten Moffitt, materials analyst for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s Conservation Department in Williamsburg, Va. Color on chair-rail, wainscot and cornices called attention to the woodwork and wallpaper, said Ms. Moffitt. It elevated an interior as well as distinguished a prestigious parlor from lesser, utilitarian rooms.

“The pendulum is swinging back,” said Ms. Moffitt. Hierarchy and separation are replacing all-white open plans whose architecture doesn’t delineate function, and highly visible woodwork is playing a part.

Here, seven trim trends that will give your interiors definition, depth and fanfare.



Marc Goldberg, founder of Interiors Matter in Long Valley, N.J., chose high-gloss black for this trim. ‘It literally sparkles,’ he said.

PHOTO: MARC GOLDBERG

Raise a Gloss

Unlike semi-gloss, which is the standard finish for painted architectural woodwork, high-gloss adds drama. “It’s that glossy, lacquered finish that puts it over the top,” said interior designer Marc Goldberg, who used lustrous jet-black pigment against snowy matte walls in a Long Valley, N.J., house. Stacked black-and-white photos in noir frames draw the eye up to the ceiling’s elegant edging, said Mr. Goldberg, founder of local design firm Interiors Matter. He chose to soften the high

contrast of the window frames, also shiny ebony, with silver-gray linen curtains.



To introduce a small adjacent office painted teal, Nashville interior designer Stephanie Sabbe outlined a doorway to it in the same dusty blue-green.

PHOTO: LISA PETROLE

Herald the Next Room

“Framing can either accentuate a threshold or hide it,” said Liza Curtiss, principal at Le Whit in Brooklyn, N.Y. Trim painted the same color as an adjacent room disappears. In a hallway papered in Clarence House’s Tibet Tiger in black and jade, the designer painted the doorway leading to an obsidian-hued living room a recessive black. Similarly, in a kitchen clad in a yellow, leafy Morris & Co. pattern, Nashville interior designer Stephanie Sabbe outlined both a doorway to a small office (and the office itself) a contrasting dusty teal. “What you see is the inside, like taking a bite of an apple,” Ms. Sabbe said.



Philadelphia interior designer Glenna Stone matched the crown molding of a 1750s home to the creamy antique documents hung as art.

PHOTO: REBECCA MCALPIN

Echo the Décor

In a 1750s home, Mrs. Stone hung antiquated documents as art then tinted the trim a creamy hue that matched the artifacts. “It was a way to pull the room together but not in a way to attract [too much] attention,” she said. Enamored of a pattern on a dining chair’s slipcover, Caroline Brackett, an interior designer in Greenville, S.C., chose a powder blue found in the velvet print to highlight the room’s millwork, doorways, crown molding and wainscoting. “The pretty color keeps the eye traveling around the room,” she said.



In Ms. Vero's study, Mrs. Salvesen coated all the architectural woodwork the same blue 'for as much continuity as possible.'

PHOTO: SIMON BROWN

spiral pilasters.

Simplify the Complex

To bring continuity and calm to this room, interior designer Nicole Salvesen, of London's Salvesen Graham, carried a bubbly blue across a fireplace mantel, wainscoting, built-in shelves and windows. "This room is a study—you don't want to create too many different contrasts," she said of the space in the Surrey, England, home of Claire Vero, founder of skin care company Aurelia London. The monochrome unifies and simplifies the ornamented millwork, which includes details such as inset panels and



Seattle designer Lisa Staton cut the formality of the craftsman-style details with midcentury modern furniture and fluffy sheepskin.

PHOTO: HARIS KENJAR

Go With the Grain

One of Seattle interior designer Lisa Staton's clients asked her to preserve the chocolate-hued fir of the window frames and baseboards in a 1920s craftsman-style family home. The woodwork and craftsmanship nodded to the historicism of the original owner, a prominent judge. As an antidote to the "gutsy and masculine" floor molding and corniced windows, Mrs. Staton restrained the palette to whites, beige and black and introduced interior design rich in midcentury curves and

plush sheepskin throws. To modernize a period home, she said, "it's important not to match the [furniture to the] era of the house."



In his East Hampton, N.Y., home, Dan Scotti used a blue-gray 50% darker than that on the walls.

PHOTO: SHADE DEGGES

glass to the landscape,” he said.

Try Tone-on-Tone

Décor without depth can feel flat, cold and uninspired, said interior designer Dan Scotti. He noted that in his East Hampton, N.Y., guest bedroom, the gray-blue trim is 50% darker than the chalky lime paint on the walls. “Look closely at a piece of driftwood,” he said. “It comprises varying shades of soft grays, with bluish undertones.” He added that the rich color on the window sashes makes for better viewing. “White will stop the eye. The dark gray allows your eye to travel through the



Malachite-green woodwork stands up to busy, playful wallpaper in Ms. Vero’s powder room. ‘It creates balance,’ said Mrs. Salvesen, the designer.

PHOTO: SIMON BROWN

Play With Wallpaper

In the main guest powder room of Ms. Vero’s Surrey home, Mrs. Salvesen highlighted the door and window frames, as well as the paneling, in a bold green to keep the loo’s equally spirited wavy wallpaper from becoming oppressively exuberant. “Neither element is shouting,” she said of the visual balance. Surprisingly, Mrs. Salvesen chose a leafy hue not found in the multicolored paper. “This green is not exact—it is another layer to the room,” she explained. “If it was an exact match, it would have felt too

graphic.” With more sober wallpaper, she added, millwork trickery can lighten the mood: “All-over wallpaper makes a room feel formal, but having a colored trim makes it look less stuffy.”