



COLOR, COLOR, COLOR!



SEXY DREAMY DRAMATIC

"EACH ROOM
HAS ITS OWN COLOR
NARRATIVE"



Designer Benjamin Dhong gave the dining room of a San Francisco house a sumptuous backdrop with gilded wallpaper, Margot by Sandberg. He paired a vintage Knoll tabletop with a Julian Chichester Dakota base and made the rug from broadloom remnants. The plaster Aura chandelier by Alexandre Logé adds sculptural interest. Ceiling and trim are painted Stratton Blue by Benjamin Moore. **OPPOSITE:** A 1950s Italian candelabra hangs above Louis XVI-style chairs from Tara Shaw.




**AMERICA'S
FAVORITE PAINT
COLOR**

**GRAY LIVING ROOMS
WERE NECK-AND-
NECK WITH WHITE
AND BEIGE
FOR THE TOP SPOT
IN OUR SURVEY**

*See page 38
for full results!*



Gray walls covered in Kneeder-Fauchère's Fine Hemp give the living room a "sexy nighttime coziness and sophistication," Dhong says. Lavender silk pillows add a jolt of iridescent color, and the viscose rug from Stark "shimmers like a pool of water." Gleaming polished nickel Porter lamps from Robert Abbey flank the Belgian Slope Arm sofa from Restoration Hardware and William Curtis Rolf photograph. Reproduction Egg chairs face a vintage coffee table attributed to Karl Springer. Garden stools, the VanCleve Collection. Emily Scheibal plaster sculpture, Myra Hoefler Design.

DAVID A. KEEPS: Every room here has a distinctive personality.

BENJAMIN DHONG: We were trying to capture a particular emotional feel for each one, and each has its own color narrative. The entry is graphic black and white with an element of gold, which is dramatic. The gray living room is sexy and chic, like a 1930s London salon at nighttime. The family room is lively and welcoming, with all the white and the citrusy accents. The master bedroom is serene in taupe, beige, and white.

How do you orchestrate all the colors?

I use them sparingly. I never want people to suffer from color whiplash, where you go from a red room to a green room. There's continuity among the rooms because they each have an envelope—the walls, floors, and ceiling—that's 90 percent neutral. It allows for strong punches of color. I use images of the white guest room to teach clients about the benefits of keeping a room neutral until the end. The bedding and the throw are the only colors. And we could change the color accent tomorrow in a flash.

The dining room is an exception. What inspired you to wrap the whole room in strong color?

Problem-solving. This is a classic San Francisco row house—the dining room is basically a hallway between the kitchen and living room, and it doesn't get a lot of sun. The gilded wallpaper reflects a lot of light, making the room come alive. All the gold squares make it sumptuous without being flashy.

What does the striped rug do?

I pieced it together from carpet remnants and angled the stripes to create a sense of movement and vibrancy. I wanted a certain amount of fun energy because the client passes through the room every day.

Did you know that gray is fast becoming the favorite color for living rooms?

That means that everyone is developing incredibly good taste! I don't think gray is a fad. It's a classic. Gray gives things a Northern European sobriety and restraint, and it can be so soothing and rich, especially if you layer



tones and textures and finishes as we did in the living room. All the sensuous textures—velvet, silk, parchment, mohair—give the room an indulgent feeling. Gray is also remarkably versatile. I've used it in a French-style farmhouse in Napa—it looks gorgeous and highlights rustic furniture.

What do you imagine goes on in this living room?

I think it's geared to Champagne and cocktails, flirting and seduction, with a sound track you might hear at the Costes hotel in Paris, and a little Etta James. You're enveloped, floating inside the cloud with the silver lining. Beyond that, I invoke client confidentiality.

So who is the client?

A 40-year-old British man who said he wanted something über-über-modern. I always assess clients to see who they are, rather than just depending on what they say. He wears bespoke suits and drives an Aston Martin—he's definitely not über-modern. So we designed a house that reflects a cosmopolitan, collected,

ABOVE: Dhong channeled "the grandeur of English country houses" for the foyer. Fornasetti Nuvole paper by Cole and Son. Entwined dolphins mirror by Carvers' Guild. Vincent faux-bois table, Oly. Helmet Head table lamp, Ralph Lauren Home. Vase, West Elm. **OPPOSITE:** A vacation in Marrakech inspired Dhong to replace living room cabinets with "the relaxed elegance" of a custom banquette in velvet and antiqued mirrors. Inlaid mother-of-pearl Moroccan tables, E Kenoz. Swedish bergère, Tara Shaw. Zambia faux-fur throw, Z Gallerie.

European feel, with strong doses of modern to make it all feel fresh. I wanted it to be theatrical and fun, but not too flamboyant.

How do you explain that chinoiserie bed in the Asian room?

It's definitely over-the-top. People walk in the room and feel like they've discovered a faded stage set in the attic. We jokingly call it the 'opium den.' It's a nod to old Britannia, an homage to the Raj. We didn't want it to be too thematic, so we mixed in modern pieces like the brass side table.

You do have a thing for shiny metals.

I'm like a magpie. I really love gilt, but too much can look tacky. If you create layers of monochromatic tones, then gold or brass satisfies the thirst for contrast and color and sparkle. For so long, brass has been déclassé, but I love it. It's a way of introducing the effect of gold without going all the way. It's industrial and modern, and it's tarnished, so it looks antique.

In general, how would you describe your color sense?

I like my rooms to be light, airy, and ethereal. I don't like Crayola colors. But I do love orange. It's happy, perky. You don't need a lot to make a statement, and it looks really good with brass. A room that's all blue and white leaves me feeling a little flat. I like weird colors, like blue with a purple twist—colors that have complexity.

Do you consider these rooms complex?

If you listed on paper everything in the rooms, it's a cacophony. But it's like a symphony of different instruments that all harmonize. They feel calm because of the way I've balanced them. I love contrasts—nothing brings me more joy than mixing old and new, high and low pieces. I really dislike rooms where every single thing is expensive and things are just pretty to be pretty. I find it vulgar. I play a fun game with people in the family room. I tell them there's something in here from West Elm, Ikea, Restoration Hardware, and Marshalls, and I make them try to find each piece. It all proves that chic doesn't have to be expensive.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO





1. "There are so many different flavors in the living room," Dhong says, "but it's all carefully balanced." 2. A wooden urn is a classical counterpoint to the Jeff Koons Balloon Dog plate. 3. Just one big, glorious flower is all it takes to add a color burst to a neutral room. 4. French Empire meets the space age in the office: a Pictopia photo of the moon is a stark contrast to the antique fauteuil that Dhong paired with an Aviator Wing desk from Restoration Hardware. 5. Nobilis faux-bois wallpaper hung horizontally, and the sink's branch console base from Myra Hoefer Design, bring nature into the powder room. 6. Orange bedding accents brighten a white guest room. 7. A commode by Rose Tarlow and a Quinn Scheibal painting in the upstairs hall. **OPPOSITE:** In a guest room, a Ceylon et Cie chinoiserie daybed—inspired by Thomas Chippendale's designs—and de Gournay's Early Views of India wallpaper are a "theatrical nod to the Raj." Josephine chair, Restoration Hardware. Hans Barbell brass table by Jonathan Adler.





Two banquettes run the length of a 20-foot wall in the family room. "I like the ease of going from dining to lounging," Dhong says. "And the room has an expansive feel because it's not cut in half by a sofa." A William Curtis Rolf photograph "gives the space a garden-room vibe." Distressed Ionic Capital coffee table, Restoration Hardware. Rug from West Elm. Leather dining chairs, Design Within Reach. Pantton chair, Vitra.

Dhong created "a textured envelope" with monochromatic elegance in the master bedroom using a silk wall-covering—Murmur by Lori Weitzner. "In this sea of tans, beiges, and taupes, we inserted an

Eames La Chaise," he says. "Its white form is pure sculpture. It's also surprisingly comfortable!" Italian wall panel, Tara Shaw. Catella rug, the Rug Company. **OPPOSITE:** Dhong balanced the "masculine strength" of the custom bed with a vintage Curtis Jere brass porthole mirror and gold Murano glass lamps by Steve Jensen from William Switzer: "I like the geometry of clean, straight lines and hard angles, but it can be oppressive. Circular elements are compelling and very human." FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

