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How To Mix Patterns

Eight steps to help you become a pattern pro in your home, plus how some of the best designers mix it up a bit.



1. Find inspiration. This can be a color you really like, a piece of fabric you've found, a favorite chair, painting or even a piece of clothing. Mother Nature, who rarely goes wrong with her color and pattern combos, is another good source of inspiration.

2. Choose three or more patterns. Odd numbers, especially the number three, just seem to make things work, whether you're combining colors or planting shrubs. Three is the minimum number of patterns you should use, and the key to successful mixing is to vary the scale, from small to large, of the patterns.

Pattern 1: Pick this pattern carefully because it will make the strongest statement in your room, says designer Shari Hiller from [Room by Room](#). It should be a large-scale pattern.

Pattern 2: Select a very different pattern that's half the scale or size of the first pattern. If your first pattern is a large floral, the second pattern could be a plaid or geometric shape that has some of the same colors.

Pattern 3: The third pattern can be similar to either of the other patterns and use two or three of the colors in the other patterns. A smaller floral would work well, for instance, with a larger floral and a plaid.

Pattern 4 and more: Hiller suggests that a fourth pattern, such as a tiny check or a printed texture in a small scale, could be used as a complementary pattern.

3. Work with the same color intensity. Don't mix pastels with primary colors, or muted with vibrant jewel tones, says designer Jayne Pelosi of Renaissance ([www.renaissanceinteriordesign.com](#)). A large floral, a smaller floral, a stripe and a check will work together if they are made from the same set of dyes in the same hue.

4. Be careful with whites. When you choose whites, keep them in the same family, whether it's cream, off-white or bright white, says Hiller. "If your whites don't match, the fabric will stand out and take away from the lovely combination already developed," she says.

5. Watch your weight. Avoid putting all patterned pieces together on one side of a room. They'll throw the whole space off balance, says designer Rosemary Sadez Friedmann, author of *Mystery of Color*. "Distributing solids and patterns smoothly throughout the room will provide an aesthetically pleasant look," she says. Consider, too, that other elements of the room, from fireplace surrounds to paneling, contain patterns that should be considered part of the grand scheme.



A variety of patterns work in this room designed by [Bonnie Sachs](#) because the scale of the fabrics were chosen to work with the vintage quilts.

6. Consider fabric feel. Be aware that there's more to a fabric than simply its color, says designer Pelosi. "All fabrics have a personality or a feel, as we say in the trade. Most people would identify damask, for example, as a formal fabric, even if they didn't know its rightful name! Conversely, most people would agree that muslin or gingham plaid are examples of casual, informal fabrics. These levels of formality absolutely come into play when you're mixing patterns."

7. Think function. Pattern can have a big impact on how a room feels. If you're trying to pull a space together and create harmony, think larger patterns. Want to draw attention to one part of a room? Smaller patterns will do the trick. Also consider pattern personality. Busy patterns will up the energy level in a room while simple or pale patterns will promote calm.

8. Cheat with companion fabrics. Many fabric companies have made the pattern-mixing process easier for you by creating what they call companion fabrics, says Pelosi. "They've created two, three and four patterns all designed to exist harmoniously in one room. All you have to do is choose a color palette you like, and the patterns are already coordinated for you." This may give you the confidence you need to mix up more on your own.

How the Pros Mix It Up

"Don't let the fear of mixing three different patterns leave you perplexed. Just remember: large scale with many colors, medium scale with some colors, and small scale with just a few. Don't mix whites with off-whites, and you'll be well on your way!" --*designer Shari Hiller, co-host, Room by Room*



One inspiration piece, like beautifully bold patterned

"Patterns? We love to mix them up! Just a few things to keep in mind. Use patterns together. Choose obviously different patterns--like a wide stripe and a paisley in the same palette. That way it looks intentional."

bon-bon sheets from CB2 (www.cb2.com), can hold its own when combined with

Kitty and Jennifer O'Neil, authors, *Decorating With Funky Shui*.

complementary solids. You could also add another

"Ultimately, mixing patterns is pretty unpredictable. Just look at the wonderful African women in Native dress. Most important, new, young, hip designs use pattern mixes that shock or even obviously don't work. The wit and sass come from the audacious mix of patterns.

smaller pattern in the same color mix.

"What works for me is to mix like patterns in different scales or colorways." -- *Cy Winship, designer, Swank Interiors (www.swankinteriorsllc.com), Minneapolis*

"Mixing fabrics isn't that hard as long as you follow what you like, which sometimes starts with a favorite color. Choose the main fabric--often something out of the ordinary. This isn't necessarily going to be used the most but is the inspiration for the fabric choices to come." -- *interior designer Alexa Hampton, Mark Hampton, Inc.*



"Many novices play it safe by having one pattern and all solids in a given room. I urge you to experiment with mixing plaids and florals, or paisleys and stripes. If the thought of multiple patterns in a room gives you the willies, at least offset the solid fabrics with the use of texture. Tone-on-tones, jacquards and moires will offer great interest by virtue of their innate textural appeal, yet they are still considered solid, not patterned." Interior designer Jayne Pelosi, Renaissance Interiors (www.renaissanceinteriordesign.com), author of *Interior Divine: The Design Coach Walks You Through the Transformation of Your Home*

Designers Guild

(www.designersguild.com) offers a huge selection of fabrics, wallpapers, linens and furniture pieces that can be mixed and matched. The vibrancy of color and intensity

of pattern is what makes this funky living room match-up work.

[More Pattern Pizzazz>>](#)

Anne Krueger is the editor of HGTV.com's Decorating newsletter. She has written for In Style, This Old House, Martha Stewart Living and The New York Times.

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