



Liven Up A
Room With Wall
Coverings

BY KAREN POWELL -- Of all the ways to incorporate color and pattern in a room, wall coverings are among the most effective, yet also among the most underutilized. Why? Simply put, people are fearful of making what they see as a major commitment. One of the biggest myths in decorating is that if you use wallpaper, you are somehow stuck with it. But of course “stuck” is a relative term, and using a wall covering doesn't mean you're forever stuck with the way the room looks. You can alter the look by changing out some of the specific things in the room.

A benefit of a wall covering is that it lasts longer than paint, so when you look at the dollar investment, it's very cost effective. If the wall covering is put up properly and professionally, you're not going to need to redo it as frequently as you would paint. The initial outlay may be slightly more for the wall covering and installation, but considering the longevity of a wall covering, it more than pays for itself over time, as it will last three to four times as long as paint.

Modern wallpapers are mostly washable, and patterns can hide minor scuffs and fingermarks better than a painted wall can. And if you're concerned that you might get tired of the color or pattern you've chosen, the problem is more likely to be that you are not making the right choice to begin with. In terms of impact for your decorating dollars, a wall covering will give you far more ambience and style than anything else you can put in the room.

Wall covering has come a long way since its invention in Renaissance Europe as a lower-cost decorating alternative for the new gentry, who couldn't afford the tapestries adorning the walls of the elite. Today, patterns, textures, and materials exist to complement nearly any decorating style or theme. If you want to freshen things up down the line, it's easy to change the look of a room by changing out the window treatments, the area rug, the table linens, or pillows. In a dining room, the fabric of the chair seats and other upholstered pieces can easily be modified. In this way you can retain the wall covering, yet still create a new look and feel.

Using a wall covering doesn't mean you have to cover all four walls. In a bedroom it could just be on the wall behind the bed. A nice headboard can extend that look and make the entire wall a focal point, heightening the appeal. Or the covering could be on all four walls and the ceiling as well. (A great place to do that is in a powder room.) This adds a nice touch to the look and feel of a room. If you have a room with a vaulted or cathedral ceiling, having a wall covering going up the ceiling adds to the visual impact of the room. If a room has an architectural feature that you want to highlight, think about how wallpaper could complement it. Imagine pairing up a wall covering with lighting, such as a chandelier, in a master bath or powder room. This is the epitome of small indulgences.

Wall covering can also provide the inspiration for a room's decor. In my dining room the wallpaper was the inspiration for the rest of the room. In other scenarios the inspiration can be a fabric that becomes part of the furniture, pillows, or window treatments. You need to do this with care to make sure that everything blends and doesn't fight. But don't be afraid of wall covering; I think of it as hidden treasure!