Decor Score: Her heart set on toile de Jouy

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: I have always had my heart set on a blue-and-white toile de Jouy bedroom, and now my sister-in-law has gone and done theirs all in toile! I'm so disappointed. I shouldn't have procrastinated, etc., but obviously I can't be a copycat. Can you think of anything that would give the same feeling (of allover blue-and-white print) but still be different?

A: First, I have to know how often your sister-in-law is likely to come into your bedroom? And does it really, really matter, considering that there are so many different designs available in toile? Can you just smile when you show her your new room and say, "Don't you love how good taste, like great minds, runs in the same circles?"

ONE DECISION DECORATING - Coordinated wallcovering and fabrics prove you can't have too much of a good thing. CNS Photo.OK, if that's not going to satisfy you, there's another similar, but individualistic route to the decorative effect you love. Instead of the one-color provincial scenes that distinguish toile de Jouy, consider a pattern like this classic with stylized flowers and twining vines. Usually associated with the bright colors and crewel embroidery of Jacobean England, the design has recently been rethought in subtle solids. This blue-on-white version ("Jacobean Trail" from the Fairfax Collection by Thibaut; www.thibautdesign.com) comes in both wallpaper and fabric, so you can realize your all-over scheme at the windows and on the upholstery, too. Paired with white furniture and sheer white curtains, the overscaled pattern makes its own statement, despite its gentle color schemes. Besides, the inspired addition of spring-green grosgrain on the curtains and yellow pillows instantly kills off any hint of "copycatting" here.

Q: What to do in a tiny powder room to make it fun? The toilet and lavatory are both black.

A: Think black-and-white and red all over! If your definition of "fun" includes exciting color, think about slicking the wall in crimson red high-gloss paint (or patent wallpaper) and wallpapering the ceiling with leopard spots in black and white. A zebra-striped area rug would be the ne plus ultra touch.

Q: I can't believe I'm getting my decorating ideas from television, but could you tell me how to find out who makes the wallpapers in the house on "Mad Men"?

A: We could put in a call to the set decorator Amy Wells, who's practicing what she calls "presentism" on the hot "Mad Men" TV series about the hard-driving, heavy breathing and drinking world of a Madison Avenue ad agency in the 1960s. "Presentism is the act of interpreting the past through the present," explains Wells, whose interpretive tools include the vintage-look wallpapers that caught your eye. Colorful, dramatic, and often overscaled, the wallpaper patterns barely stay in the background as the drama unfolds in the protagonist's Colonial Revival home.

While we're waiting to hear from the set decorator, you might take a look at some of today's equally dramatic wallpapers at www.wallcovering.org.

Q: We're redoing our kitchen and have just installed an oak floor in a medium wood tone. Now I've fallen in love with cabinets that are painted with a distressed finish (soft green in color). Will it be OK not to match the woods in the same room?

A: Not just OK, highly desirable. Matching anything exactly - including colors and wood tones - is so yesterday. Today, blending is in. You have only to visualize yourself wearing, say, beige from shoes to skirt to shirt to see how dull total matching can be. Better to spice your decorative life with a little variety.

Can't visualize? Then send for a free booklet on the subject ("American Hardwoods By Design," from www.hardwoodinfo.com), in which a half-dozen top kitchen and interior designers explain why "matchy-matchy" decorating should be a federal crime.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas. Please send your questions to her at Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190, or by e-mail.

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