

Decor Score: Brown and white are classic go-togethers

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: My partner and I are beginning to collect antiques because we're doing over an 1890s Victorian with high ceilings and good architectural detailing, like hardwood doors and deep crown mouldings. The best of our antiques - a William and Mary chest and a 1920s camelback sofa - are going in the front room. The sofa is already upholstered in camel linen. Our question: how will it look to do the walls dark brown with white moldings in a period house like ours?

DOING IT UP BROWN - Set off by crisp white molding, brown damask wallpaper makes a sophisticated background for antiques. CNS Photo.

A: In a word, smashing! In two words, unusual and handsome. Brown and white have been classic go-togethers at least since the mid-20th century when the great New York decorator Billy Baldwin did up his own East Side apartment with glossy dark brown walls set off by white moldings.

It's not a combo you'd have found in 19th century Victoriana - they didn't know about "doing it up brown." But designers have been updating the idea since Baldwin, including the over-scaled damask wallpaper in the room we show here. (It's Marrekech from JB Wallcoverings.) Framed in wide mouldings painted a crisp, glossy white, it could also be an apt background for your antiques and camel-colored, camelback sofa

Q: In an earlier column, you suggested putting an area rug over wall-to-wall carpeting. I tried it in my living room, and the area rug practically walked into the dining room. How come?

A: Perhaps you didn't read the second paragraph of that column, the one in which I suggested using an underlayment between the area rug and carpet to keep the top rug from crawling. A thin, waffle-type rubbery pad should help you keep a grip on everything - except deep shag carpeting.

Q: The kitchen of our new house has dark oak cabinets (that we like) and (right now) a tile-look linoleum floor that's pretty worn. We want to replace the floor with hardwood, but don't want to make it as dark as the cabinets. Our contractor says that the woods should match, so we are thinking of going with cork floors, or maybe bamboo, so we don't have to worry about matching. What's your advice?

A: I'd advise you to deep-six your contractor's advice and seek out a savvy kitchen designer. He or she can guide you around cliched thinking, such as matching woods between floors and cabinets.

The fact is - and consider me shouting this from the rooftops - nothing in decorating has to match these days. And that goes for woods, as well as colors. Matching is out; the big "B" - for blending - is in. Therefore, feel free to choose any wood tone you like for your new hardwood floor.

Or, for that matter, for cork or bamboo, if you go in that direction. Cork floors have been around since early last century, but are coming back in a big way, thanks to tough new finishes that seal and protect the surfaces. Bamboo is a newcomer to the home floor scene, and quickly winning friends for its good looks, durability, and eco-smarts. It's a quick-growing, renewable resource with only one major drawback: the long, energy-demanding distances over which most bamboo must be transported to reach America's floors.

But then, nothing is simple these days. For a closer look before you decide, you may want to check out more facts at www.hardwoodinfo.com, and the World Floor Covering Association, www.wfca.org.

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