

Prints, Plaids and Patterns – Expert Tips on How to Mix Them

by (ARA)

Not since Austin Powers daringly paired a lilac and cobalt blue suit with a blue polka dotted shirt and red-and-white scarf in a 2002 hit movie have we seen such a profusion of prints, plaids and patterns in fashion. From the runways of New York to the showrooms of home products manufacturers across the country, designers and retailers are encouraging consumers to be bolder than ever when it comes to mixing and matching. At Olympus Fashion Show's Spring 2007 Collections, Tigi blended zebra stripes and vibrantly hued poppies in a colorful summer frock, while Diane Von Furstenberg layered a bold magenta, orange and white coat over a floral-patterned orange and white dress. In the home decorating arena, this trend is particularly hot. Yet it's also an area where many are cautious to tread, concerned that they'll make a wrong decision that may impact both their pocketbook and the aesthetic appeal of their home. Fortunately, there are countless resources to help the wary decorator – from magazines to home improvement shows to tips from some of the nation's top interior design specialists. "Most people love the look of layering patterns together," says Pamela Maffei-Toolan, vice president of design for Waverly, a manufacturer of coordinated fabrics, wallpapers and bedding since 1923. "Sometimes it just takes a bit of confidence to take that first step. One way to start is with a home furnishings line that offers a variety of products in colors and patterns that work both together and on their own. If you mix and match within the same color family, it's almost impossible to make a mistake." Here are some tips on how to "mix it up" successfully:

1. Begin with a print you love. Select a large-scale print with several colors, so you'll have many options for mixing and matching other patterns. Let this "signature print" dominate in the room. Use it on upholstery, window treatments and bed coverings. You can even mix in coordinating wallpaper.
2. Vary the scale of your patterns. Mix in two to three mid- and small-scale patterns that color-coordinate with your signature print. Some experts suggest a 60-30-10 ratio for your main, secondary and third patterns. Use the latter patterns on smaller upholstered pieces, pillows, table covers and accents such as ruffles, and contrast linings. Try to let one color from your signature print dominate throughout. One prominent Del Mar, Calif., resident uses a rich palette of coral, teal and mustard in her elegant-yet-comfortable beachfront home. Although the furnishings in her main living areas boast different patterns, they all blend together seamlessly due to the pleasing colors that she selected.
3. Balance patterns with areas of solid color or neutrals. The more patterns you use, the more your room needs some non-pattern visual relief.
4. Try different textures among your patterns for added interest. "We make a point to mix in every Waverly collection classical printed and woven fabrics that pair well with designs of a more modern twist," says Maffei-Toolan. "For example, a geometric can balance the femininity of a floral." Waverly's Garden Images, Ashton Peony and Lightfoot House bedding from their Images of Nature, Age of Exploration and Language of the Garden Williamsburg collections, respectively, work so well because they mix radiant florals and bold stripes within the same color palettes.
5. Explore different textures, and avoid repeating fabrics that feel too similar. Mix chintz with chambray, cotton with chenille, woven textures with soft silky fabrics. Waverly products are available at fine retailers such as JC Penney, Belk's, Target, Linens'n Things, Jo-Ann and Hancock Fabric. For more information on their collections, visit www.waverly.com.

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