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A Dab of **YELLOW**

Close your eyes and summon up some easy, buttery yellows. Grandmother's kitchen and warm beach sands, banana B-B Bats, ruffled jonquils, and sweet ears of corn—all those smooth, gentled yellows that go down, decoratively speaking, like silken egg custards and vanilla creams. Now, tuck the nearest small dog under your arm,



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON WATSON
TEXT BY CAROL PRISANT

White Plus Yellow Like an hour's worth of sunlight on a gray, rainy day, the glint of yellow in neutral rooms delights. Here, working together to leaven ordinary whites and creams, is a chrome-yellow Chippendale-style mirror frame—its happy new coat of paint causing it to “jump off the wall”; some creamy yellows in the chair pillow's print; and the meltingly pale, new-minted gold of full-blown roses. **OPPOSITE:** Inspiring yellow details—including notions, fabrics, and trimmings in silk, cotton, and rayon.





grab those ruby slippers, and come for an exhilarating walk the whole length of the yellow-brick road. It's cobbled, in places, with saffrony daydreams, but also with startlingly brawny bulldozer yellows and screaming school-bus yellows—visible farther than any other color on earth.

Scientists say yellow is one of a child's first colors of preference. But as we age, they tell us, our tastes move from fresh-as-a-daisy cheer to steadfast, quiet blue. Yet are we ever really too mature for yellow?

Vincent van Gogh himself termed yellow "a color capable of charming God." The artist, of course, was very wise to its curious trick of reflecting only red, green, and other yellows. In a red light, for instance, yellow paint looks reddish, and in green light greenish. Which more than explains why *MARTHA STEWART LIVING* style editor Stephen Earle once had the following disconcerting experience:

One dreary winter, he decided to do a yellow room. After much agonizing over paint chips, he chose a satisfyingly creamy hue, and knowing that yellow is the hardest shade to imagine on the wall, painted generous samples on a sunlit wall and in a dim, interior corner. Next, he laid a swatch of the flooring-to-come beneath each sample, and checking in various lights for days, he was certain, at last, that this was the yellow his mind's eye longed for. So he painted—and loved it.

But a few months later, in spring, he got a shock. For the greenery outside his windows had somehow curdled his perfect shade to a sickly citron green. (Yellow reflects green, remember?) So it was back to the paint store—and on to another hard-won hard fact not usually found in decorating books: When you paint, pick your yellow carefully, for it's the most difficult color to hide. Two coats are a must.

Thus, if you're nervous, start really small. With some nice yellow napkins, perhaps, stashed most of the time in a dark drawer and only allowed out on rainy November evenings. Or hang diaphanous unlined curtains in a serious paneled den or dining room, and turn a somber space into the decorative equivalent of a giggling judge. You might

even try lending some serendipitous gleam to the shadowed corner of an otherwise cheerful room with one yellow chair. But don't expect it to be lamb-like, like white; yellow is amazingly look-at-me, especially in its chromier manifestations. A little goes a long way (particularly in sparkly bits, like picture frames, porcelains, and pillows).

Are you really brave, like van Gogh, who combined tones of chrome yellow in those famous sunflowers? (He was counting on them to fade, by the way.) Paint egg-yolk trim on a lemon chest of drawers, and back it with a butter-yellow wall. Or take a deep breath, like Stephen, and go for the gold—the all-yellow room. "Yellow is scary," he concedes, "and definitely, the harder road to go. But the payback is spectacular."

One last caveat: Hold that breath when you've finished your walls, and don't exhale until the furniture goes in, for yellow's hot or cool (or hollandaise saucy) depending on its neighbors; nothing's as qualmish as an empty yellow room. Black lacquer or rosewood furniture (a popular choice in Napoleon's era) can make a yellow room far more civilized and polished than ordinary white, or even good old blue. With wood, yellow is rich. With neutrals, unexpected. With cool sky blues, it's sunny—a farm girl in a pinafore. With orange and red (their heat applied judiciously)—a radiant, warming sunrise. Daffodil and turquoise are a spring sky on a dandelion day. With purple (yellow's opposite number on the color wheel), it's a paradox: Victorian Chic.

Really, it's about time. Give yellow a chance. Like bright, rambunctious puppies, yellows may be a little rowdy, but they are tamable and trainable as well. And like all well-trained pups, they will be really good in the house—if you'll only let them out of the kitchen.



Yellow Plus Yellow OPPOSITE: By itself, the citron yellow on this Victorian chest seemed pallid. But a rich, honeyed drawer trim—not an obvious choice—galvanized it. "The greater the chance you take with yellows," says Stephen Earle, "the greater the reward." ABOVE: Yellow paints, paint chips, and dry colors, in every hue, from cream to ochre.

Color Plus Yellow A butter-and-cream yellow bed skirt works best when warmed by an orange-yellow curtain stripe, and chilled, a bit, by breathy aqua walls. OPPOSITE: Dandelion-yellow walls and clean white woodwork pull this room's architecture together. Crisp black-and-white engravings—photos work, too—and the snap of several blues combine to make yellow (almost) a neutral background.





Wood Plus Yellow Luminous and dazzling, translucent yellow curtains bring this dark, paneled room to life. Goldenrod on the mantel, a few restrained yellow objects, and the touches of turquoise tile that spark a fireplace surround rejuvenate a "moody" space. OPPOSITE: Ceramic sunlight dapples the dark woods of an old chest of drawers, a Sheraton balloon-seat side chair, and paneled walls. (Careful: Those shiny porcelain surfaces are reflective. Against red or green, they'll mirror background hues.) SEE THE GUIDE FOR SOURCES



PRODUCED BY STEPHEN EARLE, JOELLE HOVERSON, AND SCOT SCHY

