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DESIGN & DECORATING

LIVING WELL: RITA KONIC

Dark Rooms Are a Bright Idea

IT MIGHT SEEM like a funny time of year to be considering dark paint colors, but it actually makes a lot of sense. Think of the Far East and those Indonesian and Vietnamese interiors of the early 20th century—dark walls with cane shades on the windows. Hotelier/designer Annamaria Hempel brought that look to London with Blakes Hotel and it remains terribly chic today.

I always love dark rooms when I am in them but it takes some courage to pull the trigger. It is worth it, though. A space painted a sultry shade is so much more interesting than yet another cream, beige or off-white room.

There are colors that work better than others. Dark red, for example, is tricky to get right. It can go very brown and, in bad cases, end up resembling a vital organ more than a really good Bordeaux. Dark green and shades of black and gray are all terrific. With green, there must be a lot of black in it. I love when the hue becomes a really kelpy-olive color—I can't stand hunter green, which lacks that necessary element of bronze. Another color I love is a very dark turquoise that I call Turkish blue. Fine Paints of Europe makes some good ones, such as 9213, 9217 and 9220. Interior designer Nate Berkus did a fabulous room in Chicago in high-gloss turquoise. Dark colors lend themselves to high gloss because the shine makes them appear even deeper and richer.

The thing about dark colors and why they are so rewarding is that whatever you put in front of them absolutely sings. Counterintuitively, one can end up with a far brighter room than when one opts for the safer, lighter palettes. I am currently working on a house in Marin County, Calif., and earlier

STUDY IN CONTRAST Art pops against high-gloss turquoise walls in this room decorated by Nate Berkus.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **6**

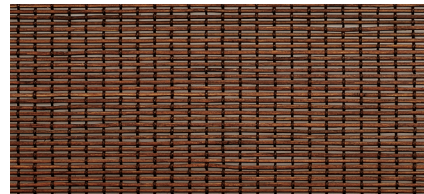
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4. this week we were back-and-forth on the dining-room wall color. It is set to be painted in a rather seaweed-y Emorie & Cie color, Vermont 6. The trim and bookcases are in Off-Black by Farrow & Ball. And we are lining the bookcases with a small-print wallpaper called French Tie, in Moss, from Michael S. Smith's Jasper line. If we had chosen a pale shade, all the joyful parts of the design would have faded to something barely noticeable. The wallpaper would have looked ordinary against white, whereas the black trim lends the bookcases some punch and a bit of glory. Decorator Steven Gambrel is always painting his window moldings black, which I adore; it gives the room beyond such a strong frame.

5. On a table between the bookcases I put a tall candlestick lamp with a lampshade in Robert Kime's very pretty Fox Pods fabric. A room painted a rather masculine color can take some feminine elements—it makes for a good contrast. Similarly, a pale room needs some anchoring items to stop it from floating off on a cloud of pastel marshmallows. Decorating is all about balance.

6. Pictures are crucial with dark walls—you really can't do dark unless you are going to add some art. In the dining room I am working on, I plan to hang a single fantastic picture on one wall and another the opposite wall with pictures—a mix of Hugo Guinness paintings, the odd flea-market oil painting, a vintage

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