

Here are hot trends in interior materials

At times, all you need to do is switch the sofa's location around or reupholster a single chair.

Sometimes the interior redesign bug bites a tad harder. That's when you junk the stereo cabinet and go for built-ins.

If, however, you find yourself picking at the old wallpaper, ripping up the wall-to-wall carpeting or tearing down the draperies, you haven't got a bug but a full-blown virus!

Hold on there! Replacing your flooring, wallpaper or window coverings isn't a simple Saturday project. Your home's interior should be thought of as a whole. With each room — and the elements in it — tied with the next.

The flooring, wall covering and window treatments you can use can go a long way toward unifying your home, providing a backdrop for the furnishings.

Start with a theme — contemporary, country, Southwestern, eclectic, whatever. Then decide on your base color.

Visit a paint store with a wall full of color chips. Gather those that please you. Then try to narrow the selection down to the three or four that you'll take along when shopping for floors, walls and windows.

Following is a rundown on trends you'll be seeing in home design stores this season. What's new, you'll note, is very much a play on the old.

Hard floors — stone, tile, brick, wood — are getting the most attention this year. And the more natural the material the better, say designers.

But prices! Don't fret: Synthetic flooring manufacturers are close behind, creating sheet and tile vinyls that offer the same look, whether it's granite, oak or marble, for a lot less.

The newest material this year? Concrete! No kidding, brave home owners are installing colored cement in kitchens, hallways and bathrooms. Once you get used to the idea, it starts to make sense — what could be more durable, easy to clean? It's no chillier than tile, installation is inexpensive, cleaning is easy.

But it's certainly not for all of us. Among the other "hard" surfaces, you'll note that this year hardwood floors are going back to darker stains instead of the bleached, pickled looks. Wide oak planks are out, as are parquet styles.

CONSIDERING TILE? Not only are you going to find several quarried stone tiles in your supplier's showroom, but a number of surprisingly good fakes, as well.

Large Mexican-style pavers with a wider grout line is a popular look also, just be sure you are getting a top-quality product.

A warning on colored grouts: keeping the lighter colored ones clean is murder, even the new stain-resistant materials.

The hottest trend in interior flooring right now is rough-edged natural stone grouted together. Warm, peachy flagstone or cool slate from China, natural stone looks wonderful continued up a fireplace wall. Plus, it works with a country cottage as wonderfully as with a contemporary monolith.

Wall-to-wall carpeting is certainly not passe. What's warming up this market are borders, inlays and even accent dyeing.

For instance, if your gray carpet doesn't connect with the furnishings, a carpet craftsperson can pull a color or even a design from a fabric in the room and repeat it along the edge of the carpet by cutting to the shape and inlaying a contrasting shade.

There are craftspersons who, by using a shearing technique, can "shave" out a design in a plush carpet or bevel the edge of a border.

Dyeing is another way to accent an expanse of carpet. A stencil is laid down and a design in a contrasting color sprayed on. Most carpet experts agree that dyeing an entire carpet is risky, but that accent dyeing is a viable and exciting option in interior detailing.

A THROWBACK TO the past seems to be the thing in wallcoverings. Rich, traditional looks are important now, even if you haven't an inch of wallpaper in your home.

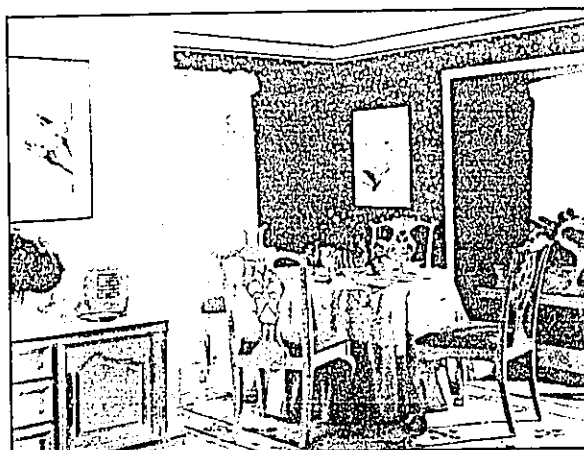
For painted surfaces, consider the elegant appeal of a slightly contrasting trim. For instance, walls are taupe, but crown molding, door casements, baseboard and windows are done in a creamy white. It's simple and very polished.

Designers are dipping their brushes into richer, deeper colors this year. The pastels of the Southwest have given way to forest green, deep gold, even coral. Remember, however, that a small room will appear smaller with dark paint.

Camouflaging and enhancing — designers know the power of the right wallcovering. Wallcovering designer Richard Felber of Design Directions, a New York-based manufacturer, offers the following tips.

- Choose a pattern with more intense colors and bold scale to give a large, cold room a more intimate cozy feeling. Two, even three patterns are often more effective than one in this situation.

- Opt for coordinating borders



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Creative wall coverings come in a wide variety of colors and styles, and can set the tone for an interior. Wall paper by Swan Hill Studios.

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