

Not Afraid of the Dark



Nesters decorate with deep hues for a warm, sophisticated feeling

When she moved into her Meridian Hill apartment in 2011, Alina Gonzalez, 27, knew she wouldn't leave it a bland, white box. "I wanted it to be both dramatic and cozy," says the 27-year-old government project manager and freelance writer. That's why she and boyfriend Alex White, an IT pro, decked their foyer in Benjamin Moore's rich, dark Old Navy Blue and covered a wall in their den with black chalkboard paint. "It's funny, people think that dark colors are scary and that they make things feel smaller, but I've found the opposite to be true," she says.

After years of pale blue and greige dens and white-on-white boutique hotel bedrooms, both nesters and designers seem to be craving interiors glossed with colors that are deeper, richer and, frankly, dark. The hot-off-the-press Ikea catalog boasts so many slate-walled spaces — and so much emerald and teal upholstery — it's as if the vampires of "True Blood" very fashionably redecorated a Swedish mansion.

"I think people are ready for dark, because they've been warming up to color for years, and now they're more confident," says Vanessa Holden, West Elm's senior vice president and creative director. "They're more willing to make a statement in their homes, and dark

DO:

"Think of dark colors as neutrals. Ever notice how everything seems to go with a dark pair of jeans? Some dark colors, such as gray or navy, can act like the perfect neutral to layer colors via throws or other accessories."

—REGAN BILLINGSLEY,
MARYLAND INTERIOR
DESIGNER



Interior designer Nicole Lanteri, above, of On My Agenda (onmyagenda.com), used Benjamin Moore's Black 2132-10 paint to give her Arlington condo's den, left, a plush, romantic vibe.

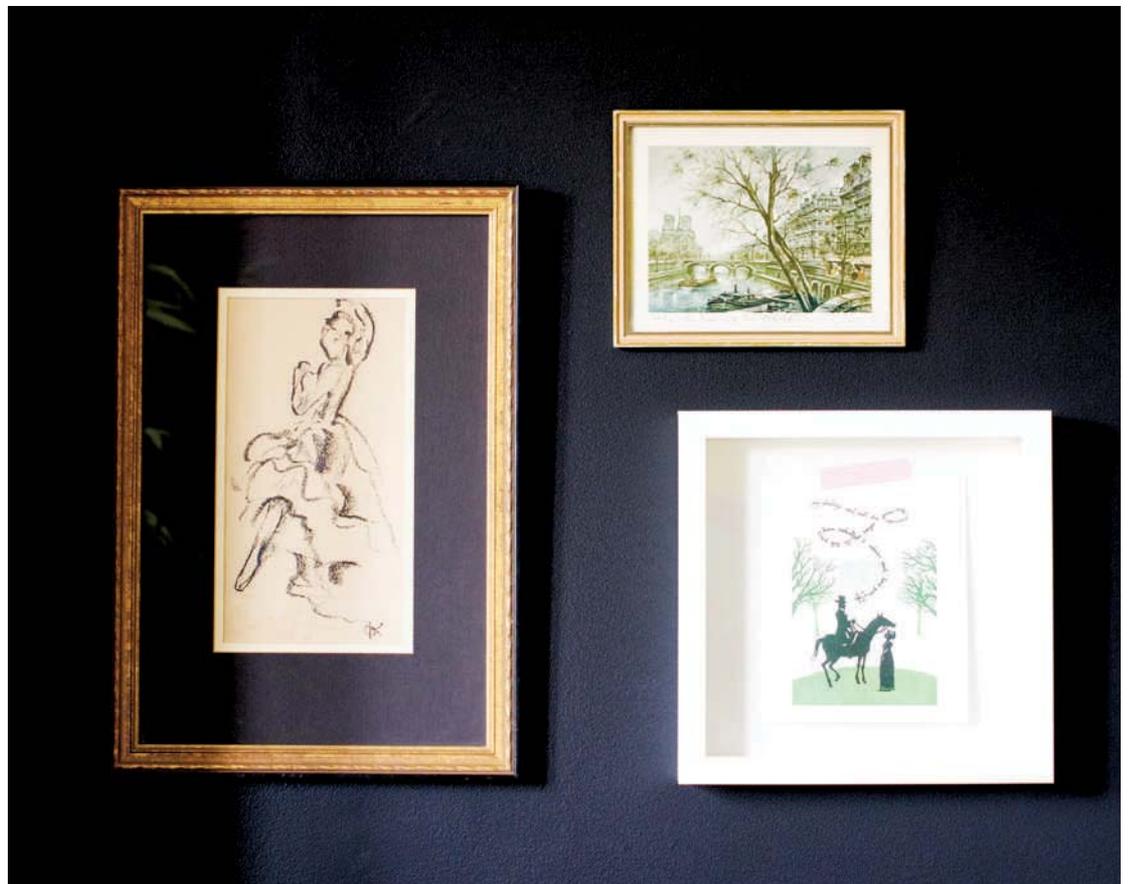
**DON'T:**

Don't go halfway when choosing a paint color. "I have clients who want a dark color, but then they'll try to use the middle shade on a paint strip, which could look murky."

—NICOLE LANTERI, DESIGNER, ON MY AGENDA

Don't use all dark furniture in a dark room. "Layer in lighter colors or reflective materials — pops of chartreuse green, a light textured rug — for balance."

—REGAN BILLINGSLEY



colors are a very explicit way to create a real sophistication."

"Look at Mount Vernon — George Washington liked these bold, saturated colors, and it looks so fun and stylish," says Arlington interior designer Nicole Lanteri, who recently coated the walls of her Rosslyn loft's den in Benjamin Moore's Black 2132-10 paint. The result? A moody-yet-far-from-depressing hideaway with rich green accents (sari-fabric pillows, an arm chair in a tropical print) that screams Parisian sophisticate. Plus, Lanteri says, "The flat-screen TV just disappears."

Saturated tones also headline on rugs, sofas and accent pieces from decor stores. They're a nice way to anchor a space or create a bold statement without committing to, say, deep purple walls. Think an overdyed, black-and-white riff on a traditional Persian rug (Crate & Barrel's new Anice, at right) or West Elm's popular, tufted Elton settee, rejiggered in a lush emerald green velvet.

"And what's nice is these rainforest-like colors — greens, deep blues — layer so well with warmer neutrals," Holden says.

Still, going over to the dark side isn't without risks, particularly when walls are involved. "You can't pull them off unless the other elements in the room are carefully considered," says Jean Molesworth Kee, a

D.C.-area color consultant (paintedroom.com). "You have to break those planes of darkness with art — maybe black-and-white prints — textures and perhaps wood floors. Don't veer toward 'The Addams Family.'"

Some colors don't lend themselves as easily to walls as others. "Purple can be bad, since it often looks too grapey," Lanteri says.

Counterintuitively, spaces with less light — windowless basement dens, powder rooms — benefit the most from dark paint. "It warms things up and can be used to reflect the most gorgeous shadows," says Anna Kahoe, co-owner of GoodWood (1428 U St. NW; 202-

986-3640), who used a dreamy deep-green floral wallpaper to summon an old-world feel in her Blagden Alley carriage house.

To use deep hues successfully, just think balance, whether that means going for contrasts or layering dark pieces. A bone-inlay white mirror provides a glamorous foil to an inky blue powder-room wall. Shiny brass lamps stand out — and create a romantic glow — against cranberry-on-black wallpaper.

"I love seeing chocolate with bronze accents and really rich greens," Holden says. "It all ties into the really eclectic way people are decorating now." JENNIFER BARGER (EXPRESS)

At Nicole Lanteri's Arlington loft, a dark carpet from West Elm, above left, anchors a white vintage table. Black walls, above, make her collection of travel-inspired artwork pop.



Deep Thoughts: From left: The **Anice Rug** puts a punky spin on a Persian classic (\$999-\$3,399); for a cool contrast, pull up a green **wooden chair** (\$120, Ikea stores) to a vintage wooden table; a **charcoal pillow** works well on a navy sofa (\$50, cb2.com and CB2, 3307 M St. NW; 202-333-6204); punch up a party space with a blue **lacquer table** (\$149, westelm.com and West Elm, 3333 M St. NW; 202-333-2928 or Tysons Corner Center, 1961 Chain Bridge Road, McLean, Va.; 571-633-0227); a gem-encrusted **black pillow** adds dark flash to a bedroom (\$25, hm.com/us).