

A Hare in the Powder Room

Principle: When Colors Compete

My granddaughter was visiting me for several days. We were bored and looking for "something to do." A dangerous state of mind. Voila! We had a great idea. For Christmas I had been given a light curtain — let's hang it. We settled on the powder room. Of course, there were problems: you knew going in there were going to be problems. One just didn't know how bad the problems were going to be. The most daunting came after we had the light curtain installed. With great drama we flipped the light switch, expecting to ooh and aah over the transformation. We were very disappointed. The color of the light was that halogen blue of headlights, not the warm, incandescent glow we were expecting. What to do? After much discussion, the decision was made to dilute the blue glow by painting the ceiling an intense orangey gold. It was the right decision.

You knew going in there were going to be problems. One just didn't know how bad the problems were going to be.



Sweet peas from the garden, a soap rose between visitors — three kinds of rose in one small room.

Now, the walls are covered with pinpoints of fairy light scattered in a riot of Colefax & Fowler pink roses and ivy. An old gold vintage chandelier hangs from a ceiling now painted antique gold. The walls are adorned with a trio of rare vintage Spanish botanical prints in carved gold frames. Hanging on another wall is a large antique mirror with gold carved detail and small bright pink marquee Broadway-style lights meandering around the frame. A small end table's top holds a menagerie of small animals. The marble floor cools my bare feet.

Hanging from the towel rack are vintage handmade linens. These linens, of course, are not meant to be used, but as you can see from the wrinkled towel, not everyone seems to know that.

The soap is a sculpted rose. You pluck a petal from the rose to get your own personal, one-use soap. Unfortunately, children can't resist depetaling it. Still, I continue with the soap rose as I, too, am charmed by its beauty and scent.

Tucked in among the roses and ivy, a metal wall sculpture of a long-eared hare hiding in field grass. Each new season finds him bedecked anew. In the fall, seed pods, dried flowers, and weeds are tucked in his long metal grass. Spring finds him hiding in a thicket of fresh flowers, and the holiday season, wearing a jaunty hat between his long ears and tiny ornaments nestled in snow-covered moss. Every party or guest visit finds him dressed anew and ready to say hello.



The hare, dressed for spring.

The menagerie of animals on the tabletop gets the most attention. It's like my powder room is a "changing room": a person walks in and changes into a different person — usually, it seems, a teenage boy. My guests, seemingly, cannot resist moving the animals around in amusing, often lascivious, ways, with copulation a favorite pose. The boy and girl soft-sculpture bunnies have found a new home elsewhere.

A favorite children's story: For a few years, I was captivated by artist-made, salesman's-sample furniture — especially chairs — and started a collection of them. Some of these chairs found their home in my powder room among the menagerie. I loved putting animals in the chairs, especially dogs with their inquisitive look of "who, me? of course I'm allowed to be on the chairs." As any one-of-a-kind thing is, they were not inexpensive. One day I had a realization: that no one, just looking at these little chairs, would have any idea that they were more than cheap imports. That if I died, my children would have a yard sale and sell the chairs for a dollar. So, I put a sticker under the seat of each chair with the cost of what I had paid for it. My children found this hilarious. On hindsight, I, too, find it hilarious! My children are grown, but the stickers are still there.

My powder room is more than a powder room. It is the smallest room in the house and the largest world in it — and my guests keep proving it is a changing room after all. You walk in one person. For one bright, gold-ceilinged minute, you walk out another.

A LITTLE SPELL

When two colors quarrel, invite a third.

Somewhere in your house, two colors are arguing — a cold light against a warm wall, a rug against a curtain. Don't referee. Don't banish either one. Find the third color that makes them a chord instead of a quarrel, and let all three sing.