

# Wall Treatment

in the

# Livable Home

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Circular No. 338\*

WALL TREATMENT IN THE LIVABLE HOME

By IDA C. HAGMAN and VIVIAN CURNUTT

Page 4 The treatment of walls has a very important place in home dec-  
5 oration because the walls form the largest part of the background.  
9 As such, they are the setting against which the furnishings and occu-  
9 pants are seen. When thoughtfully chosen, the wall finish is "kind"  
11 to both, bringing out their best points. Fashion changes slowly in  
11 home furnishings, yet there are certain fashion trends each year of  
11 which the home decorator should be aware. As most homemakers  
11 seldom have the opportunity to completely redecorate a room with-  
11 out using some old furnishings, they must be able to adapt the new  
13 fashions to old furnishings to the best advantage of both. The  
13 color, pattern and texture of the wall covering contribute toward  
14 the decorative effect and influence the atmosphere of a room.

14 In determining the wall treatment of a room, consideration  
14 should be given the following factors:

15 The style of the house.

15 The style and kind of furniture, rugs, curtains and woodwork  
16 in the room.

16 The use of the room.

16 The size of the room.

16 The number and placing of openings and built-in features.

17 The amount of light in the room.

17 The treatment of adjoining rooms.

17 The personalities and preferences of the occupants.

18 Indirectly, the style of the house has an effect upon the choice  
19 of a wall finish. If the house is small and simple, wall treatments,  
19 too, should be of that same character. In homes of a traditional  
19 type of architecture, the wall treatments should conform to it in a  
19 general way but be adapted specifically to present living conditions.

Interiors of homes following a period style in construction or  
furnishings require characteristic treatments in keeping with them.  
However, one must remember that the authenticity of the repro-  
duction is not as important as the adaptability of the style to mod-

\* To supersede Circular No. 237, Walls as Backgrounds in the Livable Home.

ern living. Early Colonial furnishings have a charm of simplicity that makes them suitable for use in unassuming homes. With these furnishings, the background should repeat this same unpretentious effect. Plaids, stripes, small, all-over figures like dots, stars, lattice or chintz effects or plain tinted walls are appropriate.

Eighteenth Century furnishings have a fine, graceful, quality. The finish, coloring and patterns of the wall treatment should be in harmony with it. Either plain effects or patterns conforming to the particular period, yet suitable for modern living conditions, are in keeping with the furnishings.

The present revival of Victorian furnishings has brought with it reproductions of wallpapers used during that period. Many of these are too elaborate in design to make restful backgrounds. Simplified effects of these patterns in softer coloring or plain walls make suitable settings for furnishings of this period.

Contemporary furnishings are characterized by plain areas. Both color and texture are emphasized more than pattern. When pattern is used, it is likely to be unusual and effective in design.

Most American homes lack a predominant style of architecture or furniture. This makes it possible for the decorator to use a wider choice in the selection of wall treatments.

#### **COLOR OF WALLS**

The color of walls may create an atmosphere of cheerfulness, liveliness, repose, dignity, drabness or depression. A soft, light yellow, the sunniest of colors, has the power of bringing sunshine and brightness to a dark hall or room. It reflects light well and imparts warmth and coziness to the room. If yellow is selected for very small halls or rooms, the lighter values should be used.

Cream, buff, ivory, light, warm rose-gray and soft, light peach or apricot also have the happy quality of transforming dark, gloomy rooms into cheerful, pleasant places. They, too, are satisfactory in the room with an average amount of light. These light, warm, subdued hues tend to bring other colors together pleasantly.

Soft, light green and blue are becoming increasingly popular as background hues. They have a freshness and coolness that go well with white woodwork, crisp white curtains and gaily colored chintzes. However, this quality makes them clash with drab or mellow furnishings. Medium and dark blues and greens are cold and depressing when used upon walls.

Light colors, because of their power to reflect light, give a sense of airiness and space to a room which makes it seem larger. Dark colors absorb light and seem to draw the walls together, thus apparently decreasing the size of a room.

**Approximate Light Reflecting Power of Colors**

Color	Percentage of light reflected
Cream .....	62 - 80
Ivory .....	73 - 78
Yellow .....	61 - 75
Light green .....	48 - 75
Buff .....	49 - 66
Gray .....	17 - 63
Pink .....	36 - 61
Light blue .....	34 - 61
Light wood varnished .....	42 - 49
Dark tan .....	30 - 46
Dark red .....	13 - 30
Natural wood brown .....	17 - 29
Dark green .....	11 - 26

Medium-light warm colors make pleasing backgrounds for unattractive furniture and with darker woodwork, as they do not offer so strong contrast to them as do very light colors.

In some modern rooms, dark or pure-colored walls and ceilings are used. They are fads which are not practical for the average home. Bright, pure colors are far too stimulating to be used in large quantities on the walls of a room which is in daily use and for long periods of time. Intense colors attract too much attention to make satisfactory backgrounds. They have an advancing quality. If used on the walls of a small room, the walls seem closer, consequently making the room seem smaller.

As daylight striking various parts of the room and artificial light affect color differently, it is always advisable to experiment with lighting, under varying conditions. Pin generous samples of paper in position in various places in the room. Study the effect under different lighting conditions. If paint is to be used, mix the paint the desired color, paint a fairly large piece of cardboard with enough coats to show color properly and when dry, experiment with the effect in the same way as with the wallpaper.

**PATTERNS ON WALLS**

Whether plain or figured wall covering is selected for a room depends upon the condition of the walls, the size of the room, the

kind and condition of the furnishings, the number and placing of windows and doors, the amount and kind of pattern in floor coverings, draperies, upholstery or slip covers and the quality and number of pictures, accessories, etc. The use of the room and the



FIGURE 1. Plain walls display the furniture, pictures and accessories to the best advantage. Colorful patterns in the drapery relieve the monotony of plain walls and rug.

length of time spent there must also be taken into consideration, see figures 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Plain walls impart a very restful quality to a room and form particularly good backgrounds for the display of lovely furnishings.

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They make the small room seem larger because of the areas of unbroken wall space. This effect is further emphasized when the woodwork is finished in the same color as the walls. When much definite pattern is used elsewhere in the room, plain wall areas serve as a restful transition to it. Unless the walls are quite free from blemishes, smooth, plain finishes or coverings should be avoided. A textured or indefinitely patterned surface may render the defects in wall finish less apparent.

An inconspicuously patterned surface appears plain when on the wall. It often has a more softening and interesting effect than a perfectly plain one. Indefinitely patterned wall coverings are practical to use when furnishings are not especially attractive. Inconspicuous patterns have little contrast between the background and foreground areas. Two-tone effects in stripes, dots, plaids, diamonds and simple conventional patterns may provide the motifs.

Definite pattern in wallpaper has a marked decorative effect. It may be useful in providing "atmosphere" in period rooms, or serve for decoration in dining rooms and halls where other large surfaces are plain or indefinitely figured, where there are few, if any, pictures and the accessories appear plain. Large rooms, tall-ceilinged rooms and rooms in which the furnishings seem inadequate are often improved when the walls supply decoration, see figure 3.

The choice of definitely patterned wallpaper is a difficult procedure as the effect of it as seen in a small sample book may be quite different from that upon the wall. It is always advisable to get a roll or part of a roll of paper to try out in various parts of the room. Place beside the woodwork, in back of furniture, just above the floor covering, next to drapery and other fabrics with which it will be used. Study the general effect. Consider the following points when choosing patterned wall coverings, see figures 5, 6, 7, and 8:

1. The pattern should not appear too large or too small for the room. When inconspicuous coloring is used, one is not very conscious of the scale of the pattern but when definite pattern is used, the scale of the pattern is a more important factor.

2. Bold geometric patterns or those with considerable movement should not be used in rooms with wall spaces broken by many doors, windows and tall furniture or built-in features, as they emphasize unpleasantly the narrowness of the small wall spaces.

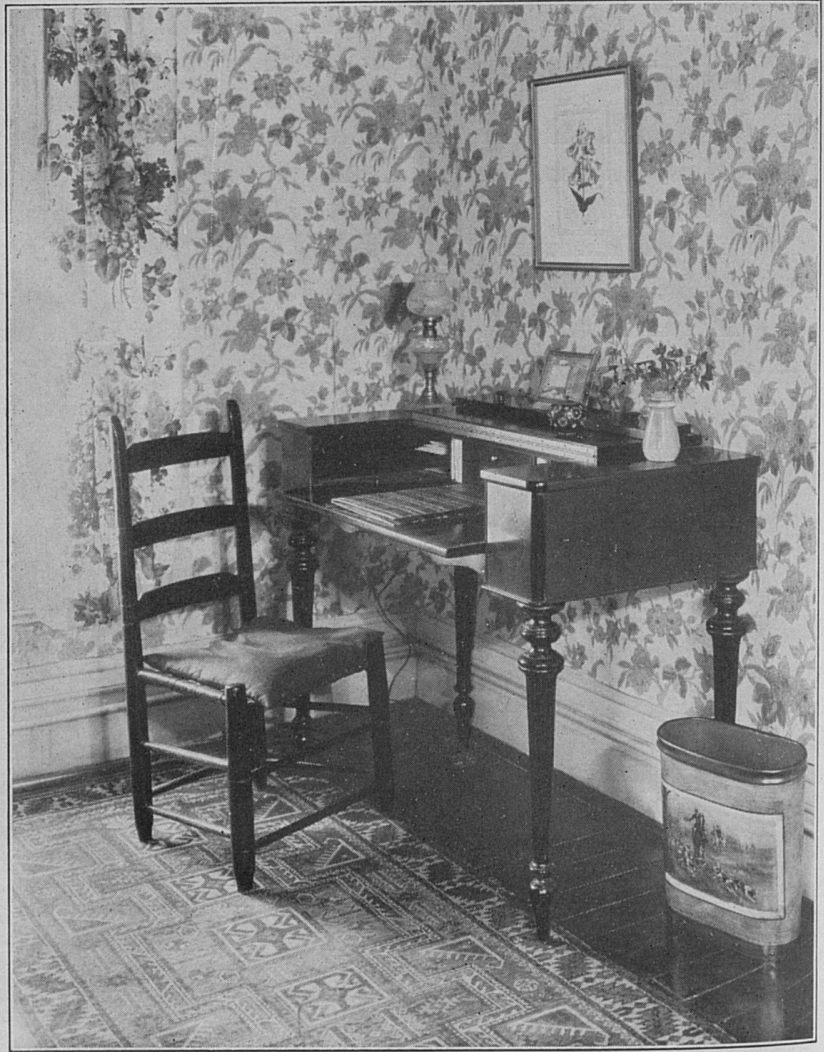


FIGURE 2. Definite patterns in wall paper, rug, upholstery and drapery produce a restless, confusing effect. The accessories do not show well against the figured background.

3. The movement in the pattern should conform to the structural lines of the room. Well chosen stripes, plaids, balanced intersecting diagonals forming nicely proportioned diamonds have this quality. Avoid strong diagonals as they distract from the restfulness of a room. Avoid patterns that appear "busy" or "quarrelsome" as their activity may prove tiresome.



4. The pattern should stay flat on the wall and not appear to be raised or show perspective.

5. The various parts of the pattern should appear connected as if they belonged together. Avoid patterns with a "spotty" effect. This is due to motifs which are not closely related to the background. Avoid patterns having mixed motifs such as delicate and bold ones or those too opposed in idea or shape.

6. Avoid naturalistic patterns with decorations of lifelike plants, flowers, fruit, birds, animals, people or houses, as they are lacking in design quality. When conventionalized or stylized, some of these forms make acceptable patterns and are the basis for many traditional styled papers.

7. Papers having occasional metallic glints and satin sheen are often unsatisfactory because they play queer tricks with light and shadow.

8. The character of the pattern should be in the same spirit as the room in which it is used. Formal patterns are appropriately used in formal, dignified rooms but are out of place in simple, informal surroundings. The degree of formality of the pattern should repeat that of the furnishings or spirit of the room in which it is used.

#### **TEXTURE OF WALL FINISHES**

Texture influences the effect of color and pattern. Pleasantly textured surfaces have a pleasing play of light and shadow which gives depth and vibration to colors applied upon them. A smooth-textured surface has a fine feeling that goes well with fine and delicate furnishings. It is a good choice for small rooms. Rougher finishes are suitable in large rooms and those in which the furniture is large or crudely finished. A too coarsely textured finish has a heavy prominence inappropriate for homes. A suede-like finish has a soft, mellow quality which is infinitely more pleasing than one that is harsh and glossy.

#### **CEILING TREATMENT**

Plain or inconspicuously patterned ceilings are preferable to those with distinct pattern, such as moire.

The color of the ceiling should blend well with the walls. Because of the greater light-reflecting property of light colors, it is

advisable to have the ceiling light. Either off-white, cream or ivory harmonizes with most colors used on walls. Occasionally in a girl's



FIGURE 3. One soon tires of such over-decorated walls. However, they are less objectionable when there are no pictures, or definite pattern in the rug, upholstery, or drapery material.

room, one may wish to use a tint of flesh, blue or green. The use of dark-colored ceilings in some modern interiors is impractical. Some decorators hang a plain lining paper on the ceiling and tint it with casein or other water paint which gives a lovely and practical finish.

### **BORDERS**

A narrow band of paper, picture molding or cornice harmonizing in color with the wall are appropriate finishes where ceiling and walls join. A wider border or molding can be used in the high-ceilinged room. Elaborate, highly decorated or cut-out borders are seldom good choices. Usually the less conspicuous the joining of ceiling to side walls the better.

### **WOODWORK TREATMENT**

The standing woodwork should not be conspicuously lighter or darker than the walls. It should usually appear as part of the walls, and in harmony with them. It is especially necessary that the woodwork should be subordinate when the room is small, when a room has many openings, and when the openings are not well placed nor well proportioned. Woodwork can be given a little more emphasis when the room is large if the windows and doors are well proportioned and well placed. However, decorative effects should be avoided, such as panels or moldings of contrasting color.

With papered walls have the woodwork the predominating color of the background. If the walls are painted, the woodwork may repeat the color of the walls or may be a shade lighter or darker. When stained or painted in darker values, select wall finishes darker in value than would ordinarily be selected so that there may not be too strong a contrast between the woodwork and walls. Avoid getting the effect too dark.

Waxed, natural woodwork fits in well with many backgrounds.

A satin finish is preferable to a flat or very glossy one.

The finish of standing woodwork in adjoining rooms should be alike if connected by doorways or arches.

### **WALL TREATMENT FOR VARIOUS ROOMS**

**THE HALL**, as entrance or means of connecting other rooms, should present an impersonal, restrained, dignified atmosphere, yet impart a feeling of warmth and welcome. Figured paper, repeating colors in rooms opening from the hall, serves as an excellent medium of color transition.

**THE LIVING ROOM**, serving as gathering place for the family and friends, should be restful, yet cheerful and inviting; cozy and livable, yet quietly dignified. The use of plain effects or softly

blended, neutral colors in indistinct patterns makes a fitting background for the people, their varied activities and for furniture, pictures and decorative objects.



FIGURE 4. When the rug furnishes the decoration, plain or nearly plain walls and drapery produce a more harmonious effect.

THE DINING ROOM should give an atmosphere of simple dignity, geniality and cheerfulness. Slightly more movement in the pattern for wall coverings is possible in dining rooms than in rooms more frequently used. Often the dining room opens from the liv-

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ing room and should repeat some of the colors found there. For instance, if a soft-colored, striped paper were used in the living room, the same colors repeated in a pleasing all-over pattern may be more interesting than when both rooms are treated alike, see figures 5 E and F.

THE BEDROOM usually has a lighter, airier atmosphere than the general living rooms. Softer tones and daintier effects impart the desired restful quality. Both the color and pattern of the wall finish should reflect the personality of the occupant of the room. Either plain or indefinitely figured wall finishes are suitable. If there is movement in the pattern it should not be too definite to give a restless effect. "Spotty" patterns may prove very irritating to one confined to the room for long periods. In sleeping rooms serving as sitting rooms the wall finish should be less like a bedroom and more like a living room, with neutral colors and abstract patterns.

THE KITCHEN should have an atmosphere of absolute cleanliness, freshness and cheerfulness and may be the gayest room in the house. Here the homemaker may lavish her flair for colors. The background, as in other rooms, should be in the lighter values and not too dominant. Bright colors used in small areas elsewhere in the room lend life and animation to it. When the breakfast room adjoins or is part of the kitchen, its decorative scheme should be related to that of the kitchen.

THE BATH ROOM should be refreshing and colorful, tho not too striking in character. When related to colors in the hall or adjoining rooms, the effect is more pleasing than when the contrast is great. Avoid bizarre treatments, and breaking of wall areas with contrasting colors and conspicuous patterns.

CONNECTING ROOMS may be treated exactly alike or one may use types of pattern to suit the particular rooms, uniting them with harmonious coloring or the same background color.

#### **OVERCOMING PROBLEMS IN PROPORTION OF ROOMS**

*To increase the apparent size of a room, use:*

Light blue, green or grayish tints for background.

Light, soft colors rather than brighter ones.

Plain hair stripes or patterns not too closely covering the back-

ground, eliminating all unnecessary detail and all sharp contrasts of hue and value.

*To decrease the apparent size of a room, use:*

Well-covered papers with large and more prominent pattern.

Darker values of color, if room is well lighted.

Medium tones of warm colors.

Finish with slightly rough surface.

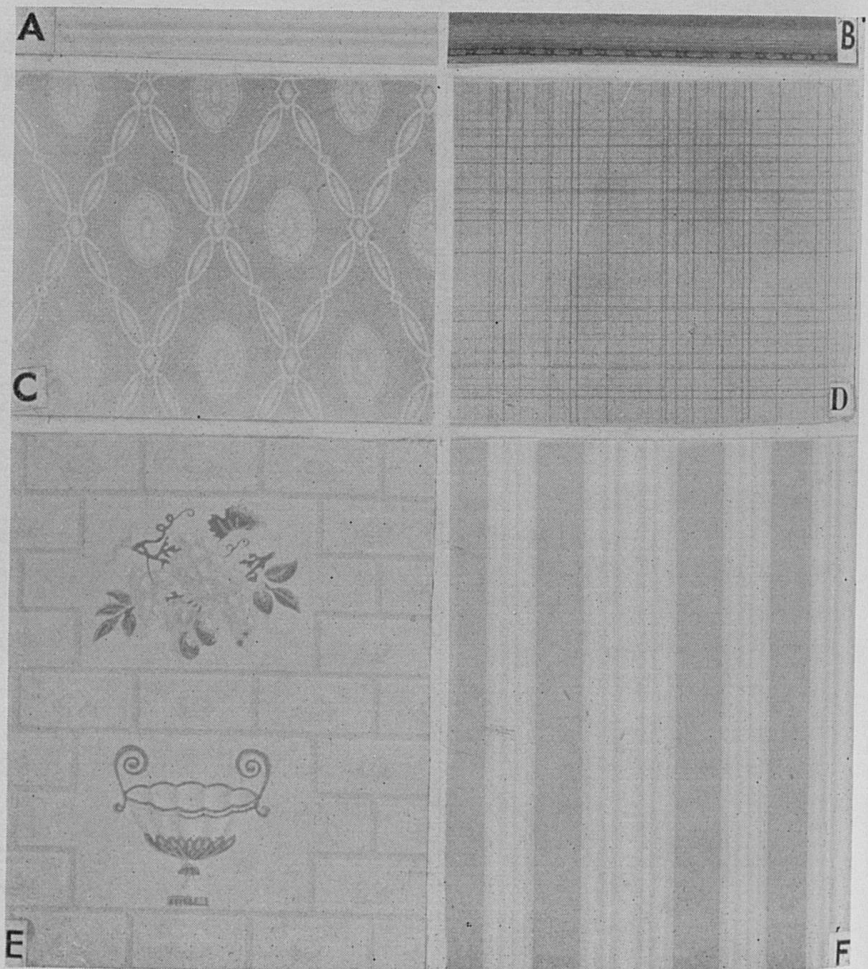


FIGURE 5. These well-chosen wallpapers make good background as the movement in the pattern conforms to the structural lines of the room. The pattern in E. is more decorative than the others and would be suitable in halls and dining rooms. F., repeating the same colors as those in E. could be used as a companion paper in the living room. A. and B. are appropriate borders for joining ceiling and side walls.

*To increase the apparent height of a room, use:*

Vertical emphasis, such as indefinite stripes, elongated diamonds and diagonal plaids.

A very narrow border or no border at all.

*To decrease the apparent height of a room:*

Drop the ceiling twelve to eighteen inches. Use an inconspicuous border or simple molding at the point where the ceiling and wallpaper join.

Have the ceiling tone warm and slightly darker than usual.

Use horizontal emphasis in pattern.

For a sloping ceiling, have the ceiling and walls alike, either in plain effects or inconspicuous pattern, with no up and down. Do not use border or molding.

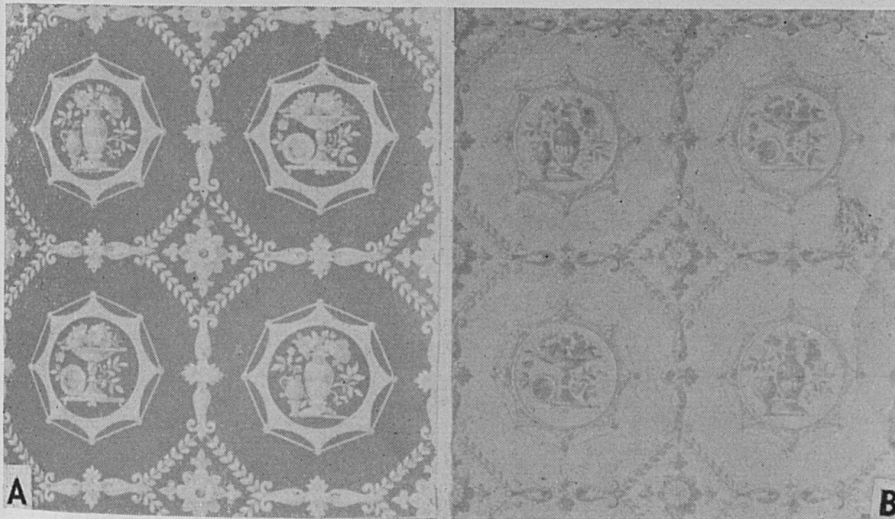


FIGURE 6. The contrasting tones in wallpaper A give the pattern a bold effect too decorative for most rooms. The closely related tones in wallpaper B make the pattern less conspicuous and more suitable for a wall covering.

### FINISHES FOR WALLS AND CEILINGS

A great many wall finishes are available and will be considered in the following groupings.

**PAINTS.** Oil paint is suitable for any room in the house. It provides lovely color effects, reflects light and lends itself to interesting variations in blending colors. Dull finishes have more pleasing texture than high gloss finishes. Semi-gloss provides both texture and an easy cleaning surface for kitchens and bathrooms. Use paints from a reliable manufacturer and follow directions on the container.

Calcimine, a water paint, is made in soft, interesting colors, adheres to many surfaces and is low in cost. It rubs off easily and



FIGURE 7. Transition from naturalistic to conventional patterns. The life-like effect of A lacks design quality. The slightly conventionalized form of B is too naturalistic for wall covering in any room except a large one furnished in the Victorian period. C is quite formal in feeling, and may be used in rooms with that same feeling. The simple geometric effect of D makes it a very acceptable pattern in unpretentious surroundings, as with Early American furnishings.

needs to be renewed frequently. It must be removed before applying any finish.

Casein is another paint mixed with water. It is washable and need not be removed before application of other finishes. It is easily applied to all surfaces and can be used over wallpaper which adheres well to the walls. It is lovely in coloring and has a smooth, suede-like texture.

WALLPAPER provides a wide variety of colors, patterns, textures and prices. It is suitable for all types of homes and can be readily applied. It makes a pleasing background if properly selected.

OILCLOTH AND SIMILAR PRODUCTS give a permanent finish if properly selected and applied. They have a waterproof finish and are easily cleaned and may be refinished when desired.

LIGHT-WEIGHT LINOLEUMS provide a permanent wall covering which is easily cleaned but requires expert handling to hang it properly.

WOOD PANELING offers a wall treatment that may be practical in unplastered homes, if there is plenty of light in the room and the finish is light enough to make a good reflect-



ing surface. Some decorators give the wood a coating of white paint which is wiped off the surface while wet. When dry, it is coated with wax. For an oil treatment, lemon oil should be used, as it will not darken the wood as others might.

**PREPARATION OF WALL SURFACES FOR FINISHES**

The surfaces of all walls should be smooth, clean, dry and free from cracks before applying any finish.

Many types of wall board are available for covering walls which are unsatisfactorily finished. They differ in price, construction, wearing and insulating properties and methods and ease of application. They come in large sheets or in blocks and strips with interlocking joints. It is important that directions furnished by the manufacturer be followed when putting this material on the wall and to make smooth, inconspicuous joints. These materials may be used over plastered or unplastered walls and give good body for paint or wallpaper. Some have a finish which is part of the construction of the material and requires no further finish. Others are unfinished and may be left in that condition or treated as plastered walls. Before papering or painting a wall, apply glue size on newly plastered ones, on wall boards and on painted and calcimined surfaces. The calcimine must first be removed. Glue sizing may be omitted when casein paint is used.

**TO REMOVE COLD-WATER PAINT**, wet the wall with warm water using a coarse sponge or calcimine brush. Wash off with a cloth or sponge. Change the water often. Dry thoroly before applying a new finish.

**TO REMOVE OLD WALLPAPER**, wet the paper in half of the room with warm water, using a whitewash brush. Continue brushing with the wet brush until the paper will scrape off. Test by scraping with the thumb nail. Remove with a broad knife, keeping it two-thirds under the paper. Be careful not to dig into the wall. Some paper hangers remove paper with a steaming device.

**TO PREPARE OIL PAINTED SURFACES** for renewal of the finish, wash with warm water and a mild soap. If greasy, wash with warm water to which washing soda has been added in the proportion of half a pound of soda to one pail of water. Rinse with clear water. Protect the woodwork and floors.

TO FILL HOLES AND CRACKS, cut out loose plaster with the edge of a broad knife. Thoroly wet the edges with warm water. Fill with prepared mending plaster or with plaster of Paris moistened to a paste. Mix only a small quantity at a time. To keep the mix-

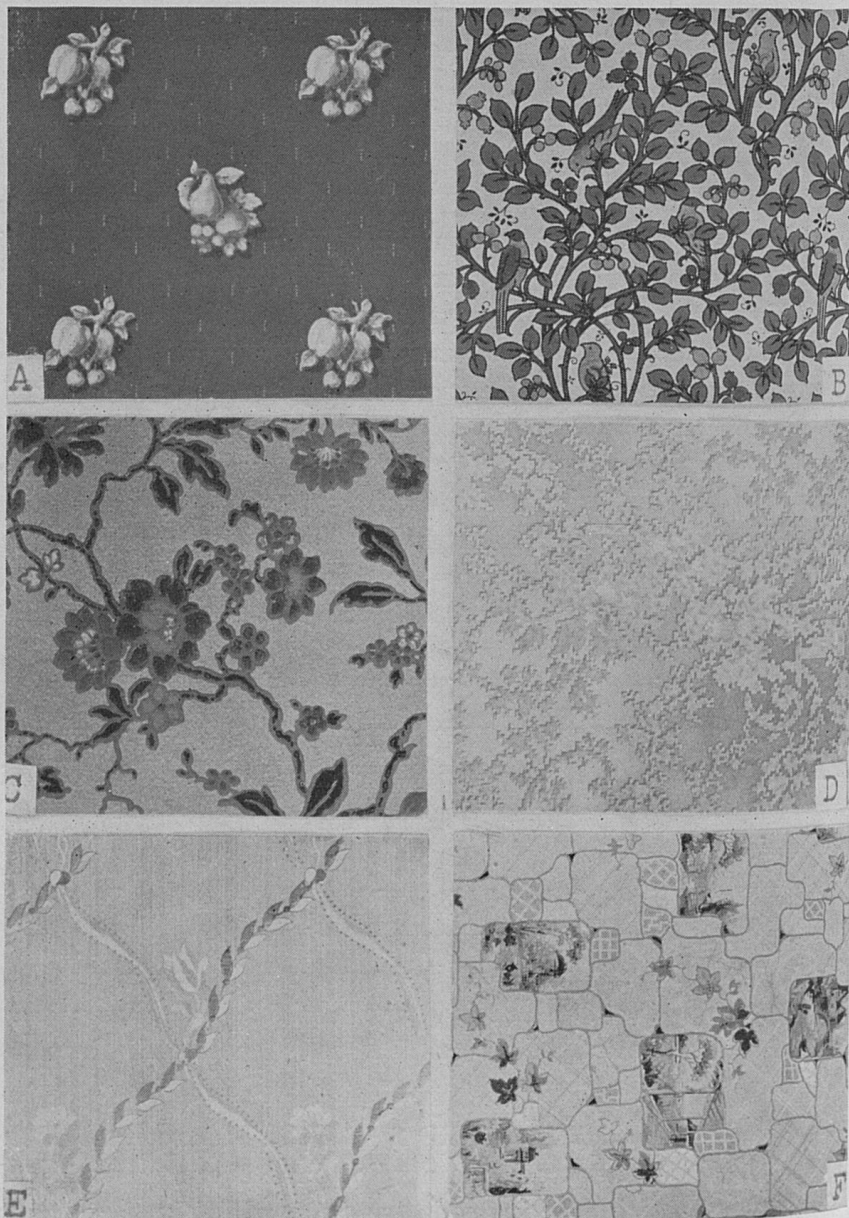


FIGURE 8. Avoid wallpaper patterns that detract from the restfulness of a room because of their unpleasant activity. A is "spotty," B, "busy," C, "crawly," D appears raised, E has a strong diagonal feeling and F has mixed, unrelated motifs.

ture soft add a small quantity of any of the following: glue size, glycerine, baking powder, or borax paste. Go over the cracks two or three times as the mixture shrinks. Sponge surfaces which have been washed with soda or newly plastered surfaces with a strong vinegar solution.

TO PREPARE CEILED SURFACES FOR PAPERING, use any of the following methods:

A. Cover walls with good quality wall board that will not warp or loosen. Make smooth, inconspicuous joints according to recommendations of manufacturer.

B. Paste felt paper to the surface. Allow it to dry thoroly before papering.

C. Cover walls with cheesecloth, muslin or canvas tacked to the wall two inches from the edge of the cloth. Paste the edges down. Brush strong glue size over the material (1 lb. glue to 2 qts. water).

D. Cover with sheeting or muslin sewed together to fit each wall and ceiling. Tack along one edge. Stretch taut to the opposite side and tack. Glue size.

E. Cover with burlap bags stretched and tacked two inches apart on the edges. Size with the following mixture:  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. glue to each gallon of wall paper paste. Apply hot. Dry 24 hours before papering.

#### WALLPAPER PASTE

A. A commercial paste made by the addition of water to the powder is available. Follow directions on container in making it.

B. A homemade paste may be made as follows:

3 pints flour

2 quarts cold water mixed with the flour to form a smooth paste.

8 quarts boiling water.

Cook slowly for ten minutes, stirring constantly. Strain. When cold add two tablespoons of powdered alum. Paper is not so apt to crack from fast drying if the papering is done on cool, damp days.

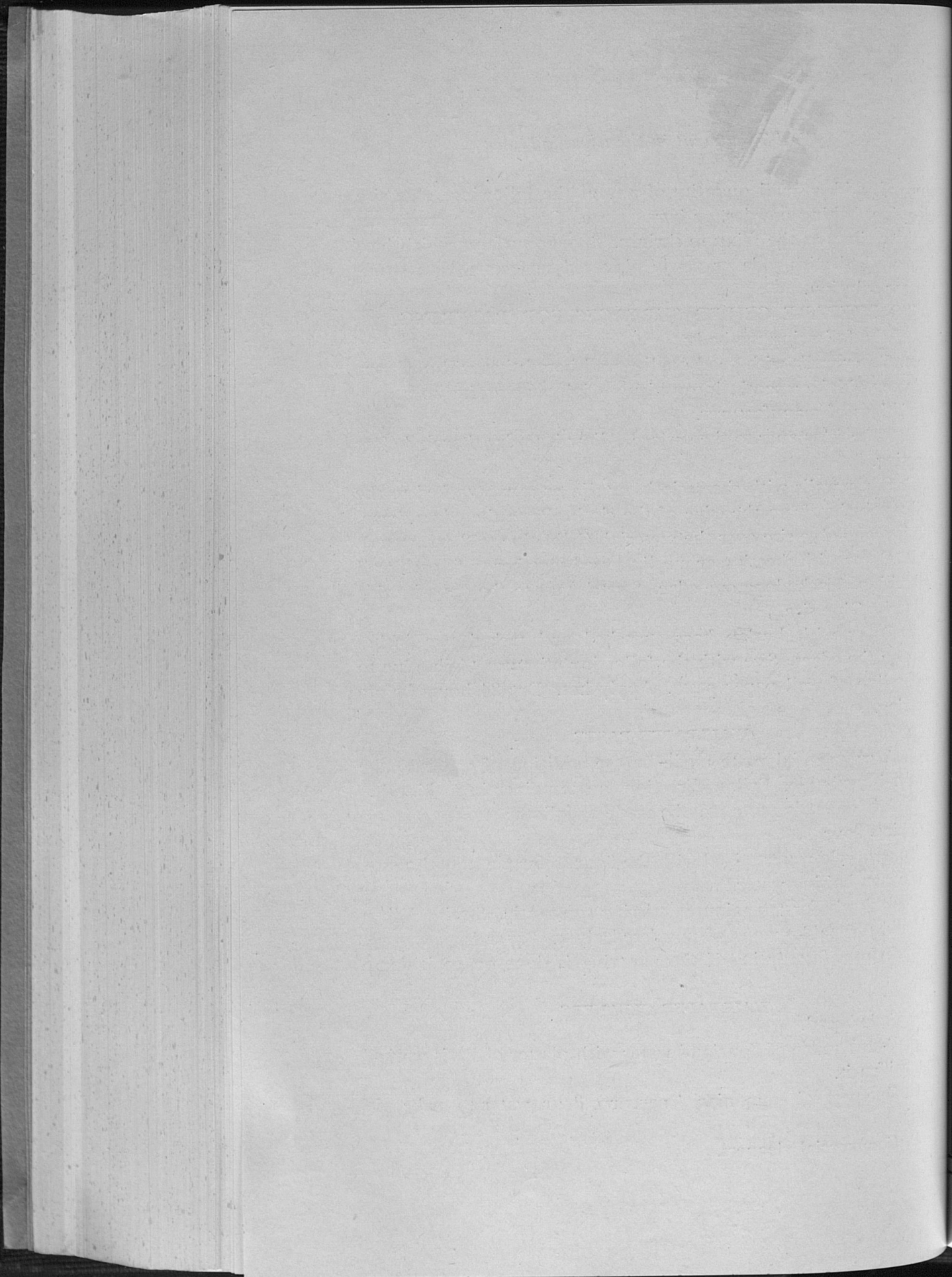
#### WALLPAPER CLEANERS

A. Stale bread.

B. Dough made of flour and water with plaster of Paris worked in to stiffen it.

C. One part sal ammoniac, 4 parts rye flour, water to make stiff dough.

D. Commercial cleaners.



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