



COLOR

# THE POWER OF WHITE

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO BRIGHTEN UP A BUNGALOW, OR ANY DARK HOUSE FOR THAT MATTER: SLATHER ON WHITE. SAN FRANCISCO DESIGNER MONTY COLLINS SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON A VERSATILE NEUTRAL.

**P**aint a clapboard cottage white and no one will look twice. Do the same for a 1910 Craftsman bungalow painted standard gray with burgundy trim, and suddenly you've made a statement. That's what Monty Collins intended for his weekend home in the heart of California wine country. But Monty didn't stop his whitewash at the front door. Inside, his ethereal decorating scheme is a testament to the color's transforming power to brighten and expand spaces. Of course, it's not quite as simple as getting out a paintbrush. Here, Monty offers 10 easy lessons on lightening up.

BY CANDACE ORD MANROE PHOTOGRAPHS BILL HOLT PRODUCED BY CARLA BREER HOWARD

Repeating the home's white theme, a contemporary table with an urn-shape base blends with warmer antiques, including a French country clock that was a gift from a client. Monty Collins' creamware collection (*right*) began with pudding molds (*below*) he purchased for a showhouse; "then I actually became interested in collecting," he says.



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**LESSON 1:** Create layers. In the dining room, Monty used two different paint colors—a bright white for the walls and ceiling, and a warmer tone for the moldings—to create subtle contrast without drawing a sharp outline around architectural details. He adds another layer of dimension in the display case by turning antique pudding molds on their sides, so the intricate designs can catch the light and cast shadows. The result: "It's a layered effect that goes from the crispness of the white on the walls to the warmth of the moldings to the creamy patina of the pottery."

**LESSON 2:** Get grounded. Warm, medium-tone wood floors and furniture read as "neutral" but act as anchors to keep a white scheme from feeling chilly and insubstantial. Monty colored his fir floors with a combination of brown paint and stain for a "muddy look," masking the wood's natural orange tone. With no polyurethane coating, the floors quickly acquired scuffs and scratches that invest the wood with visual texture. Monty augmented snowy white furnishings, such as the dining table made from chalky concrete, with wood pieces, such as the tall honey-tone case clock and antique Louis XVI-style side chairs.

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The unframed face on the wall represents the final ingredient in Monty's design: artwork. Usually, art provides the only "shock of color" in his all-white rooms. The stone slab coffee table—made from a single piece of selenite, a type of mica mined in Utah—is sculptural. Set against white, the stone is a "true art object," Monty says.



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**LESSON 3:** Let in the light. Natural light warms and enriches an all-white scheme. Make the most of available daylight with window treatments that welcome—and play with—the sunshine. Monty uses white-finished wood shutters throughout the house. They not only create a sense of serenity but, unlike curtains, cast interesting shadows to fight monotony. Monty emphasizes choosing shutters that are the right scale. “Ours aren’t the big plantation shutters but are a size more appropriately scaled to our windows,” he says.

**LESSON 4:** Forgo the frills. For a chic design with a contemporary edge, Monty favors sophisticated fabrics and tailored upholstery in leather and linen. Though it may be fine for others, the romantic cottage look of sheers, lace, and ruffles is not for him. “Mine is more a gallery white,” he says. “It isn’t sweet.”

**LESSON 5:** Add a large dollop of cream. “None of the furniture or fabrics are a true white,” Monty says. “They’re creams, dropped into these white backgrounds.” And don’t worry about trying to match shades. In the living room, the leather sofas are one creamy hue; the coffee table and an armchair are comprised of several others. >> on 52



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**LESSON 6:** Highlight texture. In the bathroom, flattering daylight is amplified with a combination of cool subway tiles, beadboard wainscoting, and stuccoed upper walls, all in shades of white. Juxtaposing various textures adds depth and visual interest to any monochromatic decorating palette.

**LESSON 7:** Lighten up. Even a relatively strict, minimalist scheme need not always take itself seriously. Separate from the vanity/shower area, perched on top of the toilet tank (which modesty prevents us from showing), is a sign that once might have hung in a theater or train station—pointing the way to the loo.

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Remodeled in a contemporary style to let in more light, the bathroom lacked the old-fashioned architectural character found elsewhere in the house. Monty remedied the situation by adding a wainscot of beadboard. A white palette unifies the modern and traditional elements.

**LESSON 8:** Show your wrinkles. Age adds character, to people and furniture. It also steers you around a sterile or minimalistic feel—an inherent risk of a white design. The vintage French garden table Monty uses as a nightstand is a good example: Because the paint is chipped, it doesn't read as pure white. "It adds a subtle dimension that's not shocking," he says.

**LESSON 9:** Edit out clutter. A few carefully chosen pieces, such as the master bedroom's 1940s painted metal chest, speak with a quiet authority. "A design chock-full of things would sacrifice the crispness of the light palette," Monty explains. Even the objects he chooses to display are pared down and pale: Airy white mats and skinny, unobtrusive frames adorn works of art. Filled with a bouquet, a creamware pitcher injects life and warmth without detouring off the clean, white path.





Monty designed the upholstered headboard and the silk drum shade (*far left*) to fit his neutral scheme. The shade tops a lamp converted from a tall Indian candlestick.

One of Monty's design credos is that old pieces need not be fine to be effective. He found the mid-20th century modern chest (*left*) at Scott Antique Market, a monthly flea market in Atlanta. Its ivory color keeps the large scale from overpowering. The dark trim adds definition. He bought the antique prints in Rome.

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**LESSON 10:** Accentuate the negative. When decorating with white, Monty is convinced positive thinking isn't always an asset. Introduce the concept of negative space. Leave some areas bare of furniture, and include some pieces with open designs that let in the light. Contemporary metal patio furniture, with its lacy pattern, manages to appear both airy and substantial. ♪

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Reminiscent of old Southern wrought-iron garden furniture, this seating group (above) is a modern interpretation in lightweight aluminum. The deck opens up to the dining room through a pair of French doors, creating one large space for entertaining.