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Sunday



Men's Style

Doused in denim

The all-jean look has returned.
(But there are some rules.)



The two-day shadow
How to avoid armpit stains
Learn to tie a bow tie

Family

How to know if you're
dating The One

Photo Essay

The many faces
of tax season



PHOTOS BY ERIC PIASECKI

Blue and white done right

10 designer secrets that make everyone's favorite color scheme look fresh and new

Bold details — black accents, crisp navy trim on curtains and contrast piping on armchairs — give classic blues a modern look in this room by Steven Gambrel.

By Lisa Cregan
SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

White clouds floating on azure April skies. Bluebirds flitting past fast fading snow. When Mother Nature's color palette changes, maybe yours should too. And what better way to shake off winter than a dose of fresh blue and white. Sound good? We've sought out how-to advice from rock star New York designer Steven Gambrel, who's single-handedly changing the decorating world's definition of modern with his broad swaths of color, strong masculine furniture, and lots and lots of blue and white.

"Blue and white is my favorite color palette," admits Gambrel. "I think most of my projects utilize it somewhere. It has a soothing water quality." But that water can be treacherous for inexperienced navigators, so here are Gambrel's tips for skirting the shoals:

1 Avoid dangerous liaisons.

Gambrel says he loves the look of white trim against intense blue walls, just not too intense. "I think of color like a weapon; you have to be careful how you use it," he warns. "If the blue is too strong it can look fake, like a car color. For example, I never use cobalt blue. It's a terrible color; good for a piece of jewelry but terrible for a home."

2 Enlist navy.

"I'm a fan of Benjamin Moore's Hale Navy (#HC-154) because it's grayed out with a little brown, not ever electric, and it looks great against crisp white trim," Gambrel says. He says he'll often use it in high gloss, forgo the white trim altogether and sheath a whole room — such as a library — in dark blue. "Then I would deepen the mood with dark furniture, a very restricted use of white, and like-minded colors like maybe a deep sapphire sofa."

3 Quiet bedroom blues.

"Almost every bedroom I do that's shared by two people is pale blue and white. It's soothing, and it's a combination that looks good on everybody, the way a pale blue shirt looks great on everybody," explains Gambrel. He says Benjamin Moore's Iceberg is his "classic color" choice because it won't turn bilious green or become too sad and gray. "Against white trim like Benjamin Moore 10L, it's beautiful," he says. "I can't tell you how many bedrooms and backgrounds we've done like that."

4 Black and blue and white too.

"With pale blue walls and white trim, dark black doors or floors are really beautiful and dramatic. You could even trim the windows in black," says Gambrel. He says he likes to carry a thread of black into the furnishings as well. "When you use that pale blue and white palette, then dark, dark furniture like ebonized pieces really feels right."

5 Keep it sleek.

Resist the sentimental tug of sweet and ornate in a blue and white room says Gambrel (emphatically). "I definitely think the lines of the furniture need to be simple." He likes to select furnishings without too much detail to avoid the grandma look. "When you start to get ornament on furniture, then you need to pull back to a more calm Swedish palette, like chalky white and pale gray."

6 And simple.

Gambrel thinks sofas should be upholstered in solid fabrics. "I think when you keep your large upholstered pieces solid blue and do the trims in white you have more graphic contrast. It feels modern because it's cleaner. The bigger pieces should be plain," he says. Big expanses of plain blue upholstery remind him of "the feeling of big open water or the size of the sky. Easy and open and casual."

7 Take a shine to your fabrics.

"Blue and white requires a bit of a sheen to the textiles, a nice shimmer against matte walls," Gambrel says. For him that translates to lots of blue velvets and cottons in shades that are "just a little deeper version of the walls, but in the same tone."

8 Add a stripe or a welt.

"Solid blue upholstered furniture, like the solid blue leather chairs I have in my own living room, looks great with a welt in white — or you could do it vice versa. It's like the piping you'd see on a naval uniform, a crisp way to bring blue and white into a room," Gambrel says. He also loves stripes. "A lot of my blue rooms will have a single stripe fabric. I did a room with pale blue and ivory stripe curtains with a ½-inch band of black; it just slams it with great contrast."



Gambrel adds a blue note by painting the back of these clean white bookshelves pale blue, one of his favorite ways to use blue and white.



Reserve the calmest blue hues for your bedroom, says Gambrel. Here, quiet blues create a serene, airy vibe.

9 Paint your bookshelves blue (on the inside).

Anywhere there's a shelf or cabinet, Gambrel can find an opportunity for a blue and white moment. "I like to use pale blue against white cabinets, and then inside the cabinets I might do a darker blue, like robin's egg," he says. Gambrel often uses sheets of glistening blue tile in bathrooms too. "Blue walls against white cabinets is a favorite of mine."

10 Create the unexpected.

Working with such a much-loved, much-used combination means thinking outside the blue and white box to make it fresh, says Gambrel. "In my guest house, I did white walls and dark blue trim; it's still the traditional blue and white palette but with an unexpected twist. Walls in that color might have been too intense, but the trim gives it a nice nautical feel."

Talking blues

Gambrel can't do all the talking. So we asked high-profile designers from around the country if they'd chime in with their bluest, whitest thoughts:

"Make sure you select the whitest shade of white (Benjamin Moore Super White). Most strong, crisp blues look best with a true white. Add a jolt of color from across the color wheel instead of something expected. I love midnight blue, cream and gold. Turquoise and cream with celadon."
— **Celeria Kemble** of *Kemble Interiors, Palm Beach and New York*

"For me, the colors blue and white immediately evoke images of the beach. I love to accent a blue and white scheme with a natural shade, like khaki or flax linen — that way you can freely layer blue and white patterns on your upholstery, pillows and curtains."
— **Suzanne Kasler** of *Suzanne Kasler Interiors, Atlanta*

"If the color palette were ice blue or robin's egg blue, and white, I would warm it up with texture: mohair, velvet, nubby silk in pale hues of ivory, gold and grey or some beautiful fabric with gold and silver threads that shimmer in the light. I could also imagine a Wedgewood blue dining room with lots of oversized moldings in white. Here I would keep colors chalky and matte, and save the polish and lacquer for the wood sideboards and the silver. You could do a print on the dining chairs and/or the window treatments. An English-looking hand block print would come to mind."
— **Alexandra Loew** of *From The Desk Of Lola, Los Angeles*

"Blue and white has great potential to be stodgy, so when I think of doing it right, it's all about the type of pattern used. Pattern is a must! Word of caution: no toile! Use an updated pattern to make it interesting. Lulu DK is a fantastic choice. I also think that using interesting accent pieces in white such as coral, marble or laminate Saarinen side tables adds great flair to a room. I have found my favorite (blue) and it's definitely Farrow & Ball's Hague Blue. It's a gorgeous neutral color that works well with nearly anything."
— **Melanie Elston** of *Melanie Elston Interiors, Chicago*