

Sky's The Limit

Don't forget your room's 'fifth wall'

By Heather Bruno-Sears
Contributing writer

A recent painting adventure in Marrakech, Morocco, left me awestruck by the elaborately detailed ceilings found in nearly every residential, commercial and historical site I explored. Gazing upwards at the kaleidoscopic color combinations and intricate layering of geometric design elements was a visual feast.

A common and splendid aspect of Moroccan architecture for centuries, the hand-painted cedar wood ceilings were highly sophisticated and obviously labor intensive to create. I returned to work for my patrons in Central New York brimming with inspiration, clever ideas and a quest to celebrate the design potential of

this interior surface.

An elegantly painted ceiling provides the crowning touch for a well-decorated room. Too often overlooked or painted plain white, ceilings have tremendous potential to accommodate ornate pattern and color accents that will further enhance your decor.

Every client is unique, and ceilings provide a wonderful option for one-of-a-kind artistic treatments. As a decorative artist specializing in hand-wrought interior surface design, I consider ceilings to be the fifth wall. They're the perfect canvas to create a unique perspective and point of interest in any interior space.

When it comes to ceiling craftsmanship, the sky is the limit. Elevate ambiance in any room by simply painting the ceiling a lovely shade of color, or use a metallic paint. If you care to be a little more daring, or yearn for something dramatic and expressive, consider a combination of faux finishes and custom hand-painted ornamental motifs. Decorative elements can be configured and combined to create an interesting blend of color, scale and pattern.

Add a touch of class and elegance with a hand-painted border around the perimeter of a ceiling. In lieu of or in addition to crown-molding, strong, simple lines of colored banding can be created with ease using safe-release painter's tape. Distance from the walls can be varied to

create depth, a frame or tray ceiling effect. Incorporate a sophisticated stenciled border for a unique look.

I often pull inspiration from design motifs found in existing upholstery and window treatment fabric. Dozens of companies sell a wide range of stencils, tools and how-to tips online, including www.royaldesignstudio.com, www.wallovers.com and www.cuttingedgestencils.com.

Painted ceiling medallions around light fixtures, decorative corners and borders may be used individually or pulled together to create an overall ornamental effect. Bold interpretations of this approach can simulate an oriental carpet design overhead, rather than the traditional woven version found underfoot. Imagine the impact of an such an exquisite ceiling in your dining room, with a well-appointed chandelier and heirloom china table setting.

My personal favorite "fifth wall" technique to create a stunning look is the custom decorated, coffered ceiling finish. Medallion stencils work well to achieve an inlaid tile look within the coffered grid, and border motifs can be used to create ornamental beams for layered interest. A limited palette of subdued colors creates a unified look when working with multiple patterns. In addition, faux glazes such as Ralph Lauren Tea-Stain medium are a wonderful product to use for an antique, timeless feel.

Aside from using a select palette of your favorite paint, there are a wide range of material options to consider. Several retail sources in Central New York offer an interesting array of metallic paints, faux glazes, plaster and texture-effect mediums, colored wood stains, and gold, silver, copper or patinated leaf for gilding. Faux-plaster medallions, carved wood ornamental applique, trim molding, and even Swarovski crystals can be used as eye-catching details on painted ceiling projects.

Now more than ever, in this age of mass production, marketing and communication, we need to create a home environment that is our personal sanctuary. Artistically pleasing surroundings inspire us in positive ways, and reflect our individual tastes and personalities.

Heather Bruno-Sears, of Skaneateles, is a decorative artist. To see



BRUNO-SEARS



THIS COFFERED CEILING, painted by Bruno-Sears, is the artist's favorite type of "fifth wall." Stencils and paint can be used to achieve the look.

IN & OUT



THIS PAINTED CEILING, created by Heather Bruno-Sears, adds a whimsical look to the space and texture with the tassels. Bruno-Sears says to think of the ceiling as the perfect canvas to add perspective to the room.