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COLOUR MY WORLD

Choosing the right paint for your home used to be a simple affair, with limited choice and not a thought given to the environment. But all that has changed. Now there are thousands of colours to choose from and the eco-friendly heritage paint industry is thriving.

Charlotte Beaudelaire reports →



There was a time when, if you decided you wanted to paint a room, you would either tell your decorator the approximate colour you were looking for or you would pop along to your local DIY shop and get them to mix something close to the shade of your choice.

Unless you have been living on a far-off planet, you will know things have changed somewhat. Now, there are almost as many paint brands as there are colours, with all promising to transform your home with superior quality coverings in a rainbow of hues. But how different is this paint to a standard trade emulsion?

Essentially, it is all down to the ingredients. The more you pay, the less water you will find in the can and the more natural the pigments used. Cheaper paints use a synthetic variety, along with less binder. On the other hand, designer options will be put together with carefully selected pigments to ensure better coverage and more complexity and depth of colour.

Traditional pigments include rocks, minerals, earth and clay, and high-end paints tend to be kinder to the environment as they are generally lower in VOCs (volatile organic compounds).

But is it just about their make up? Rob Whitaker, Design Director of Fired Earth, thinks not. He says: "Firstly it's the colours. People buy paint mainly because they like the colour.

However, they also feel attracted to paint brands that have established themselves as part of an interior design oeuvre.

"These companies, [of which Fired Earth is one] photograph their paint in rooms and homes which showcase particular styles and, in doing so, offer up design ideas.

"The roomsets are created to show just what is possible with paint. People like the colour and the context and think, 'this feels right for me; this brand understands me'. Cheaper or trade brands don't offer this contextualisation."

Next, according to Whitaker, comes the way the paints are made.

"Customers are increasingly interested in production and the manufacture of goods," he says, "including the constituent materials. This is particularly true of paint. They want something that looks great, but that is also made in the right way too."

Sarah Cole, Director of Farrow & Ball, agrees. She says: "Yes, people are much better informed about the products they use and can look at different factors before choosing their paint. People are interested in the environmental credentials of the paint they use, as well as the colours, ingredients and production methods."

The trend for these special paints has been around for some time. In a feature in *The Daily Telegraph* in 2006, Leslie Gillian talked of the "trend for so-called heritage paints" having been around so long it could be "deemed tired or even tiresome". But now, as then, we cannot seem to get enough of them.

How, then, do you ensure you are choosing the right paint for your home? When it comes to colour, it is really down to picking a shade you like and seeing how it works on the wall. It makes sense to test a large patch and look at it throughout the day as the light changes and also in the evening under artificial lighting.

Once a room is painted, the walls will reflect off one another and a rather brilliant trick is to paint the inside of a cardboard box with your chosen shade – it will give you more of an idea of how the entire room will look and a guide to the interplay between one surface and another.

Take a look, too, at the technical information on a company's website and see if they list any information about independent testing. Rob Whitaker of Fired Earth explains how this works:

"We have our paint independently tested," he says. "We score very highly for opacity, for example, which means a wall doesn't need multiple coats. Our paint also does well in scrub tests, which means it holds up well against day-to-day wear and tear."

It is, of course, not only the make up of the paint that is important; for some it is historical accuracy. Little Greene has collaborated with English Heritage to make things easy. Its Colours of England collection is made up of 128 hues, both contemporary and classic, and also includes a number of historic colours authenticated by English Heritage. Each of these has a symbol which allows one easily to see within which period it was originally used. →



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CUSTOMERS ARE INCREASINGLY INTERESTED IN PRODUCTION AND THE MANUFACTURE OF GOODS. THEY WANT SOMETHING THAT LOOKS GREAT, BUT THAT IS ALSO MADE IN THE RIGHT WAY TOO

Other companies have taken our love of all things historical a little further – into the realms of fiction. Mylands (Britain’s oldest paint manufacturer) is well known in the film and television industry for providing paints for programmes such as *Coronation Street* and *Downton Abbey* and films such as the Harry Potter series and the James Bond franchise.

Now, two of the shades used in *Downton Abbey* – Empire Grey and Amber Grey – are available for sale. These colours are made using the exact recipes that were used 100 years ago and feature earth-based pigments.

When it comes to creativity in paint, one name comes up again and again: Annie Sloan. An artist, Annie’s passion for paints culminated in her creating her own range, Chalk Paint. It is perfect for all surfaces and her website is full of information on transforming pieces of furniture with paint. She has also written 24 books on the subject, so if you are planning to do something different or are interested in paint techniques, then the site is well worth a look. All of Annie’s paints are low in VOCs and are also virtually odourless, which makes them a joy to use.

Francesca’s Paints is a company that sticks to its artisan principles. Every can is hand mixed, and while the company initially made only lime washes, it has now extended the range to include other finishes, including its much-lauded eco emulsion. The company also offers a colour-matching service and as well as hand-mixing the paint, it will keep the formula on file should you wish to order more.

Of course, one of the defining features of this kind of paint is the extraordinary names manufacturers come up

with for their colours. Sarah Cole of Farrow & Ball says: “One of the more fun distinguishing attributes of Farrow & Ball is the paint names. Always distinct and rooted in the past, the names create a lot of conversation.”

And with names such as Elephant’s Breath and Nancy’s Blushes, it’s easy to see why they bring a smile to those looking through a paint card. Dead Salmon, in fact, comes from a painting bill at the library at Kedleston of 1805.

Paint makes such a dramatic impact on a space, so it is really worth doing a lot of research before the brushes come out. It pays to think not only about the colours one likes, but also the impact they will have on a room. Paint alone can turn a cold, unloved room into the heart of the home. The great thing about paint, though, is that even if you do make a mistake, it doesn’t take months or huge amounts of money to put it right. ■

10 OF THE BEST



Farrow & Ball – perhaps the best known name in paint, its colours are consistently good. farrow-ball.com



Francesca’s Paints – perfect if you’re looking for a bespoke colour or great lime wash. francescapaint.com



Mylands – the oldest paint manufacturer in the country, brilliantly professional and you can choose colours that appear in your favourite films. mylands.co.uk



Fired Earth – every colour you could possibly want. Check out the new Country House Collection for gorgeous shades. firedearth.com



Paint Library – David Oliver has been described as “the rock star of colour” and his architectural shades are not to be missed. paint-library.co.uk



Annie Sloan – offering perfect paints for treasured pieces, Annie is a true artist and this is reflected perfectly in her paints. anniesloan.com



Albany – at the heart of paint since 1904, a host of finishes and colours are available from this brand in the contact book of all professional decorators. albanypaint.co.uk



Zoffany – with its extensive range of fabrics and papers, Zoffany is at the heart of interior design. Its new palette is made up of 128 gorgeous colours. zoffany.com



NaturePaint – 63 beautiful, contemporary, safe and non-toxic colours are on offer from this eco-aware company. naturepaint.com



Graham and Brown – collaborations with big names make this company an interesting choice for paint. From Kelly Hoppen through to Disney, as well as their own collections, there’s plenty to choose from. grahambrown.com

ANNIE SLOAN Chalk Paint™, English Yellow

