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Painting a rather different picture

Step away from the classic colours. *Emily Brooks* dips a brush in the boutique brands trying something new

Guess the Paint Colour is a popular sport among the interiors-obsessed. Invite a knowing friend around to your newly done-up house and the first thing they'll say is "Pale Powder, is it? No, wait... Pearl Colour?"

If you want to keep them guessing, it's time to forget names such as Farrow & Ball and Little Greene. Boutique brands abound – if you know where to look for them – and there are many reasons why you might use them ahead of their better-known competitors.

Snob-factor aside, home owners are searching for the holy trinity of paint: durability, environmental credentials and, of course, the perfect colour. If performance is your priority, try Konig Colours, a paint range launched in 2015 by interior designers Konig Design.

"It's water based, very durable, quick drying and it has a high resin content so when you paint with it, it goes really far, and you need less," says co-founder Vanessa Galloway.

She branched out into paints after a commercial paint manufacturer asked whether she wanted to use their high-performance formula to create a product for the domestic market. "For years we had been mixing up our own colours, so we thought, OK, let's try it," she says. "And it was brilliant."

Konig Colours is sold via the London showrooms of decorating doyenne Nina Campbell, so the



Paint the town red: Francesca's Paints has 202 hand-mixed colours, above; Edward Bulmer's paints, below, start from £39.50 for 2.5l



implication is that fellow interior designers are its target market, but it's available online too, which means that anyone can get the look.

German Grey, a dark blue, and Wilcote, a warm grey, are among Galloway's most popular colours. "Old Pink, a soft shell-like pink, is our bestseller," she says. "It looks good in so many rooms – we've used it in dining rooms, drawing rooms, bathrooms, bedrooms... everywhere."

Konig Colours has admirable eco-credentials, but for a totally natural product, the experts turn to interior designer Edward Bulmer's paint range.

Bulmer is a heritage buildings specialist who has worked on Chequers and Hampton Court Palace – so he understands the importance of a product that lets old buildings breathe. Many modern emulsions contain plastics that can trap moisture and worsen damp in old buildings.

"Traditional paint-makers use plant oils, earth and minerals, and plant and tree resins – just as we've been using for literally thousands of years,"



GEORGIA VINEY

he says. He has followed suit with his own range. The 72 colours are mixed from 12 natural pigments, which gives the range a sense of unity even with colours at other ends of the spectrum. "They just work," Bulmer says.

His natural paints also have a subtlety and depth you won't find elsewhere – and they're not just for heritage buildings. Interior designer Natalia Miyar has painted the entrance to her apartment in Azurite, a mineral blue. The paints have "a deep and nuanced finish, the opposite of what flat acrylic produces," she says. "That they are non-toxic is an added bonus."

Choosing from a handful of colours can be a relief if you're befuddled by the thousands of shades on sale in big DIY shops. If the brains behind the paint range is a trusted interior

A thousand words: Francesca Wezel, above, creates bespoke colours



designer and colourist, they've done half the work for you. All you have to do is tap into their good taste. "We're a filter," says Bulmer. "If you like our eye, you should be able to trust us."



Rainbow: Tweety bath by Konig Colours, above; Edward Bulmer's Azurite, below

On the other hand, if you're that fussy who searches in vain for the perfect hue, boutique brands can also create something just for you. Francesca Wezel has marked 20 years in business with Francesca's Paints; she has a range of 202 hand-mixed colours, but custom-makes any shade, too. Her clients include the Prince of Wales and hip restaurants such as Morito in Hackney.

Wezel has an experimental outlook – she once used pig's blood as a pigment at the request of an artist – but she takes the quality of her products seriously. Her thick lime wash range has a brightness and richness that you wouldn't normally associate with this most traditional of paint types, thanks to top-quality ingredients and a lengthy curing process for the lime.

Concocting new colours doesn't have to take months of analysing lifestyles and forecasting trends. "My last collection was based on the colours found on the skirt of Waterhouse's painting, *The Lady of Shalott*," says Wezel. "I just love that painting and when I don't feel happy, I go to the Tate to look at it."

The cost of these boutique paints is only fractionally more than better-known high-end brands. Konig Colours starts at £36 for a 2.5-litre pot of flat emulsion paint, while Edward Bulmer's prices start from £39.50 for the same size container. A pot of Francesca's Paints falls between the two, and Wezel charges an additional £35 for a custom-made colour. Just imagine telling that know-it-all friend that your walls are an eco-friendly bespoke shade made just for you by one of the country's leading colourists. They'll be green with envy.