

# ELLE DECORATION





## THE PAINTS

*Indulge your orange crush  
with these warm shades*



'Barcelona', £42 for 2.5 litres,  
Graham & Brown  
(grahambrown.com)



'Jaipuri Spice', £60.61 for 2.5 litres,  
Francesca's Paints  
(francescaspaint.com)



'Marigold', £48.50 for 2.5 litres,  
Little Greene  
(littlegreene.com)



'Russet', £40 for 2.5 litres,  
Craig & Rose  
(craigandrose.com)



'Rufus', £51 for 2.5 litres,  
Paint & Paper Library  
(paintandpaperlibrary.com)



'Charlotte's Locks',  
£49.50 for 2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball  
(farrow-ball.com)



'Paprika', £30 for 1 litre,  
Bauwerk  
(bauwerkcolour.co.uk)

# Sophie Dahl

ON ECO PAINT



For me, September has always brought with it the feeling of a new chapter. Perhaps it's a hangover from school days, but the dawn of the ninth month heralds the optimism of a virgin pencil case, a mahogany conker, or an inviting plump sofa, before the party has squashed it. Out with the old, in with the technicolour Disney version.

I met the easing of lockdown with excessive levels of tidying and sorting. My office, which had always seemed (to this Virgo) relatively tidy, yielded some horrifying truths on detailed inspection. I am secretly chaotic; the military organisation for which I'm known is a construct. During the excavation, questions were addressed to me politely by passing family members. Why had I kept engagement cards from strangers? Why the file labelled 'Research', filled with those scrawled, torn-out pages from notebooks, along with brochures for tropical holidays and dried leaves? Why the file of dead people I've known, maps, scraps of fabric and receipts for lunches eaten 20 years ago? Why the myriad paint samples?

Aha, I said. I can tell you about the paint samples. They are a useful point of reference. I might need to paint something. And as I felt vindicated for having something potentially useful amid all the nostalgic detritus – that could breathe new, hopeful life into a tired room – I began to pore through those paint charts like novels.

Eco paint is what we should be painting with. According to architectural historian, designer and eco-paint creator Edward Bulmer, 'Modern paint relies on seemingly simple, water-based acrylics. In fact, these acrylic resins started life as useless monomers, the by-product of fuel refining. To be rendered "useful", they have to be cracked at extreme temperatures in a process called retort chemistry, before they can be rebuilt into polymers with a new raft of highly energy-intensive chemical processing. This is why modern paint has such embodied energy and, therefore, carbon burden. It is insulting to our intelligence to call them eco-friendly.'

What we need, Edward says, is 'gentle chemistry', to achieve the right sort of paint formulation: 'The same

sort of processes you might use in the kitchen: heating, pickling and emulsifying. Working with what nature can provide, by understanding the old knowledge – the characteristics of plant fibres, oils, saps and minerals.'

Edward's colours are the antithesis of this downplayed kitchen chemistry, each possessing such compelling depth they read like an Edith Wharton story. He's not alone in this paint literacy. In 2019, Battersea-based colour artisan Francesca Wezel of Francesca's Paints collaborated with novelist Raffaella Barker on a paint collection with a narrative and the result was enchanting. 'Madeleines' (in honour of Proust) is a sugar-pink, filled with hope; 'Pillow Talk', a mauve illicit afternoon. I have long used Francesca's Paints myself; hand-mixed lime washes and velvet-soft eco emulsions, with burnt or raw umber added to give extra depth.

In 2010, Farrow & Ball set an industry standard as early providers of entirely water-based paints. These contain minimal levels of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs (responsible for unpleasant paint fumes), and are cruelty free. Farrow & Ball colours have found their way into our collective decorating parlance with the same kind of recognition given to an iconic scent: 'Is that "Stiffkey Blue"/"Rectory Red"/"Dimity" you've used there?' Assent comes with a nod and slightly embarrassed smile because, oh lord, we've all pored over the same catalogue, and it has elicited the same response.

Which brings me back to the post-lockdown paint charts and what I did with them. First, I called my sister, Clover, who, on the other side of the Atlantic, was having the same impulse as me, and was looking to paint her wooden kitchen floor. I recommended Little Greene's intelligent floor paints in a range of whites, which are durable and soft, and come in great colours, too.

I set to renewing a utility room that had become a boot room, alighting on Edward Bulmer's 'Invisible Green', which works well with the pale terracotta flagstones. This met with Edward's approval: 'The earliest earth pigments go back 50,000 years, as we used them in caves. We begin with the earth, we go back to the earth.' And all the brightness of revised beginnings □