



COLOUR COMBINATIONS

Vibrant interiors,
bold palettes

Marlous Snijder

Lannoo

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ON CHOOSING COLOUR

You don't fully realise the impact of colour choices until you're decorating a house and want to dip your toes into the world of colour. Even I, after having painted and decorated my own homes, still find it difficult to choose the right colour for a space or object.

That's because colours don't exist in isolation – they interact with and are influenced by the hues around them. Yet, many people still try to choose colours remotely (yes, me too!). But what looks great in one space (or under the harsh strip lights of a paint shop) can appear completely different – or even terrible – elsewhere. To make the right choice, it's crucial to test your selected palette in the actual space you plan to paint, observing it at different times of the day to see how natural and artificial light and other colours surrounding it affect its appearance.

Colour theory in interior design is the understanding and application of principles that govern how colours interact with each other. Colour harmony refers to the visually pleasing arrangement of colours in a way that is balanced, cohesive, and captivating.

This book will help you find your footing and joy in the endless world of colours, offering plenty of inspiration on colour harmony. So go and strike a balance – or don't... because that's the fun of it!

ON COLOUR THEORY

If you divide the rainbow into three parts, you get red, yellow, and blue. Primary colours are made up of three pigments: red, yellow, and blue. They cannot be mixed or formed by any combination of any colour. But all other colours come from mixing these colours. Secondary colours are green, orange, and purple. These are formed by mixing the primary colours. The significance of secondary colours lies in their role as intermediate hues in the colour spectrum. Tertiary colours are yellow-orange, red-orange, red-purple, blue-purple, blue-green, and yellow-green. They are formed by mixing a primary colour and a secondary colour. This blending process results in a more nuanced and complex range of colours, adding depth and subtlety to the overall colour spectrum.



HUE, TINT, TONE, SHADE

Hue forms the outer edge of the colour wheel and refers directly to the colour name, like blue, yellow, or green.

A hue is a colour in its purest form. And as they're pretty vivid (or saturated), they're often lightened, greyed, or darkened.

A tint is a colour that has been diluted by the addition of white – making it lighter. It remains exactly the same colour, only a paler version.

A tone (or value) is a colour to which grey has been added – neutralised or made greyer. It will tone down the intensity of any colour.

A shade is a hue to which black has been added – to darken the original colour. It remains the same hue, only a darker version.

COLOUR SCHEMES (OR COLOUR HARMONY)

There are several types of colour schemes, each creating a different visual effect and mood in a space. Here's an overview.

→ A **MONOCHROMATIC** palette uses different shades, tints, and tones of a single colour, and creates a cohesive and harmonious look with subtle variations. For example, use various shades of blue for a calm and unified aesthetic.

→ An **ANALOGOUS** colour scheme combines colours that are next to each other on the colour wheel (e.g., blue, blue-green, and green). It produces a natural and serene feel, often inspired by nature. The best approach is to pick one dominant colour and use the others as accents.

→ A **COMPLEMENTARY** colour scheme pairs colours that are directly opposite each other on the colour wheel (e.g., blue and orange, red and green). This high contrast creates a bold and energetic look. Best used in moderation to avoid visual strain (or not, because it's your party, after all).

→ A **SPLIT-COMPLEMENTARY** palette uses a base colour and two adjacent colours to its complementary (e.g., blue with yellow-orange and red-orange). This offers strong contrast while being slightly less intense than a direct complementary scheme. It's a balanced way to introduce vibrancy without overwhelming the space.

→ A **TRIADIC** colour arrangement involves three evenly spaced colours on the colour wheel (e.g., red, yellow, and blue) and creates a lively, high-contrast, dynamic statement. It works best when one colour dominates, and the others are used as accents.

→ A **TETRADIC** (double complementary) scheme uses two complementary colour pairs (e.g., blue and orange + red and green). It allows for a rich and varied palette but requires careful balancing. For optimal effect, pick one dominant colour with the others in supporting roles.

→ A **NEUTRAL** and **ACCENTED NEUTRAL** palette utilises neutral tones like white, grey, beige, or brown, often paired with a pop of colour. It provides a timeless and elegant base, while the accent colour adds interest. Versatile and adaptable across various styles.



MONOCHROMATIC



ANALOGOUS



COMPLEMENTARY



SPLIT COMPLEMENTARY



TRIAD



TETRAD

SATURATION VS MUTED

Muted colours are those with low saturation, appearing softer and less intense. In contrast, saturated colours are highly vivid. A space where every piece of furniture is bright, and all walls are painted in saturated colours can feel overwhelming and chaotic. To create a more harmonious and visually balanced design, it's beneficial to incorporate muted colours alongside bright ones.

Muted colours are created by mixing a colour with its complementary counterpart from the colour wheel, resulting in a more neutralised colour. Unlike tints or shades, muted colours maintain a balanced depth. Another way to achieve muted colours is by blending colours with earthy hues, adding warmth and subtlety to a palette.

UNDERSTANDING UNDERTONES IN PAINT COLOURS

An undertone is the sneaky hint of colour hiding within your so-called ‘neutral’ paint choice – often revealing itself only after you’ve spent an entire weekend painting. If you’ve ever looked around a freshly painted room and wondered why it doesn’t match your vision, mismatched undertones could be the culprit. By paying attention to undertones and lighting, you can avoid surprises and choose colours that look just as you envisioned.

WHAT ARE UNDERTONES?

Whenever a colour is created by mixing two or more colours, it has both a mass tone and an undertone. The mass tone is the first thing you see it tells you the colour is red, blue, green, and so on. The undertone, however, is what subtly influences how the colour appears. The closer the undertone is to the mass tone, the truer the colour will look. For example, a true red has a mass tone and undertone that are nearly identical. Magenta has a blue undertone. Poppy red has an orange undertone.

HOW TO SPOT AN UNDERTONE

Colours don’t exist in isolation. A white wall might just look white until you place it next to a pure white. Suddenly, hints of green, pink, or blue emerge. You can use this trick with any colour. Compare your chosen colour to a pure version of that colour (a colour wheel can help). Check the darker shades of a hue if you have a drawdown paint swatch undertones are much easier to detect in deeper hues than in pale ones.


WARM VS. COOL UNDERTONES

Understanding a colour’s temperature can help you choose the right shade for your space. Warm colours have undertones of orange, yellow, or red and create a cosy or energetic feel. Cool colours have undertones of green, blue, or purple and tend to feel fresh and soothing.

THE IMPACT OF LIGHTING

Natural and artificial light can dramatically shift how a colour appears. Northern light (cool, blue-toned) enhances blue undertones. Southern light (warm, golden) makes colours look creamier. Artificial lighting also plays a role incandescent bulbs (if you still have any) add warmth, while fluorescent lighting can bring out green or blue undertones. Energy-efficient dimmable LED lights allow you to adjust the intensity and colouring of your lighting and can also impact the way you experience a colour palette.

COLOUR THEORY

 COLOUR
SCHEME → COMPLEMENTARY

Yellow has long been a colour of contrasts, symbolising both decay and lawlessness as well as value and beauty. Yet, when used in the interior, whether as an accent or a dominant colour, it brings warmth and energy, making it an undeniably gorgeous and joyous choice. Yellow creates rooms that are rich and enveloping, like a warm embrace.





SUNNY SIDE UP

Nestled on a charming street in Paris's XVIIe Arrondissement, amidst early 20th-century architecture, lies the vibrant 70-square-metre apartment of creative partners Alice Gras and Anaïs Seguin. This colourful, joyful space radiates creativity and good humour while preserving a tranquil ambience.

Yellow, chosen for its uplifting qualities of joy, good humour, cheerfulness, and warmth, takes centre stage, perfectly complementing their

light-filled open space. The kitchen and bathroom underwent substantial renovations, resonating with memories of travels and family traditions. Inspired by the graphic allure of Southern France, Alice designed the boldly geometric and contemporary tiles of the kitchen floor herself.

Alice and Anaïs cleverly chose a lighter shade of yellow for the kitchen, combined with an overall monochrome palette for a more earthy aesthetic. This creates a subdued, cosy feel – always important for spaces where you spend a lot of time. That said, make sure you use natural light to select the right shade of yellow.

In north-facing rooms, you want to bounce light around, so stick to bright yellows and stay away from green or blue undertones. Light in south-facing rooms becomes

warmer, meaning deep yellows will be intensified. In that case, maybe try a warm sand or rich ochre for a more subtle effect. If you don't want to paint all your walls yellow, pair it with a muted colour, like white or grey. Or introduce a bold colour with a dash of blue.

In their purest, primary-colour forms, yellow and blue are often used to stand out, especially in creating memorable logos (the big blue Swedish brand comes to mind). However, these bold characteristics don't always translate into a harmonious home. Blue and yellow are opposites on the colour wheel, each bringing distinct qualities to a space. While blue exudes tranquillity and seriousness, yellow radiates joy and energy. Yet, the residents skilfully balance these contrasting hues, allowing blue to dominate in the separate dining room, where it's paired with calming white. The white walls are accented by colourful artwork, making the blue dining room a serene focal point that perfectly balances the vibrant yellow. The warm wooden tones of the floor blend seamlessly with both yellow and blue, tying the space together. For the bedroom, Alice and Anaïs drew inspiration from a hotel photo and wanted a distinctive, adaptable headboard. Some old sheets, once belonging to a great-grandmother, were perfect for the look they envisioned, so they carefully and painstakingly marked the pleats and created a beautiful headboard. The soothing sea blue, pale yellow, soft greens, and greys echo the palette of the rest of the apartment, creating an inviting, calm haven where the residents can unwind and relax.







COLOUR COMBINATIONS

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Injecting black hues into a yellow room brings balance into the space and elevates the level of sophistication.



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