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N O R D I C COLOURS

HOW TO CREATE INTERIOR MOODS

LANNOO

PREFACE

Katrine Martensen-Larsen



When I began my journey as an interior stylist over twenty years ago, I lacked skill in sketching by hand and navigating complex software. Relying on my rudimentary hand-drawn sketches, I could envision harmonious forms and colours, yet convincing others of my design choices proved challenging. Faced with complex renovations, I desperately needed a tool to provide cohesion throughout the project and keep track of the myriad decisions to be made.

If drawing is not an option, how can we test whether colours, patterns, materials, and textures complement each other, clash, or simply do not work together? How do we convey ideas and concepts to clients, partners, contractors, design advisers, or those selling us furniture, paint, wallpaper, and curtains?

The answer lies in mood boards, a simple and accessible tool for everyone. Mood boards are collages of colours, fabrics, wallpapers, wood, leather, stone, tiles, metals, and carpets—a mosaic of material samples that evoke a distinct feeling, ambience, and style. While you can create mood boards digitally using platforms like Houzz or Pinterest, I find physical mood boards to be far more effective. I cherish the tactile quality, the sensory experience, and particularly the creative process of juxtaposing different samples on a fabric-covered board. There's a unique magic that happens when everything suddenly falls into place.

In my previous book, *Nordic Moods – A Guide to Successful Interior Decoration*, published first in Denmark in 2018 and then globally by Lannoo, I introduced this practical tool. I guided readers in discovering their personal decorating style and provided step-by-step instructions on creating their own mood boards. I explained their applications, the materials needed, and how to work with them.

I also invited readers into nine Nordic homes, each reflecting the owner's ability to craft a beautiful and personalised environment. I firmly believe that a home is most intriguing when its design clearly reflects its inhabitants. It is less about what is considered beautiful or ugly, or which style is currently in vogue, and more about creating moods and achieving harmony.

Between each home feature, I addressed common design challenges. Themes such as the art of limitation, furniture placement and proportions, lighting, curtains, carpets, and the personal touches that come from art and crafts were explored.

In this book, I focus on how to integrate colour into your home. Colour has an incredible power to shape mood. In the Nordic region, monochromatic palettes—greys, whites, blacks, beige, and brown tones—have dominated for many years. While this palette is easy to work with and hard to get wrong, there's always a counter-reaction. Recently, colour has made a vibrant come-

back in interior design, encouraging bold experimentation, though results can vary.

Through my experience as an interior designer, I've learned that many people find choosing colours one of the most daunting tasks. How do you find the right comfortable, tasteful, lively, and harmonious palette? How can you avoid making your home resemble a play-school classroom? And how do you ensure aesthetics remain inviting rather than overwhelming? As you may have guessed, the solution lies in mood boards.

I will begin by briefly revisiting how to work with mood boards, then guide you to discover your own colour palette and highlight important aspects to consider when living with colour. Just like in *Nordic Moods*, you will be welcomed into nine personal homes where the common thread in this edition is colour. Each home's style is summarised on a mood board, and between each feature, I will delve into methods for infusing colour into your interior. Topics such as painting and wallpaper, soft furnishings, curtains, art, collectibles, books, rugs, plants and flowers, wood, and stone will be addressed.

In the world of interior design, colour is not merely a choice, but an expression of our identities, emotions, and aspirations. In this book, I aim to explore this vital element and enhance our living spaces through the artful use of colour. Colours are not a fixed or static choice; they shift depending on the materials to which they are applied, and the same colour can appear very different depending on the material or surface it is used on, whether it is plaster, clay, wood, stone, textile, or leather.

Colours also change significantly depending on the light in a given room. Whether a living room is bathed in sunlight or sits in the shade facing north will decisively influence the perception of a given colour. The rhythm of the day and the changing of the seasons also leave a clear mark on the colours we surround ourselves with.

Colours shift from hue to hue - reflected in the tones of walls and wood, the nuances of an artwork they stand against, and in ceramics, glass, pillows, rugs, and throws. And last but not least, colours change over time. They acquire patina, wear, fade, and bleach.

I celebrate all of it - the idea that a colour is not just a colour, but a complex and changing dimension. With this exploration of colour, I invite you to transform your living spaces into vibrant reflections of who you are, embracing the beauty of diversity and the art of harmonious design.

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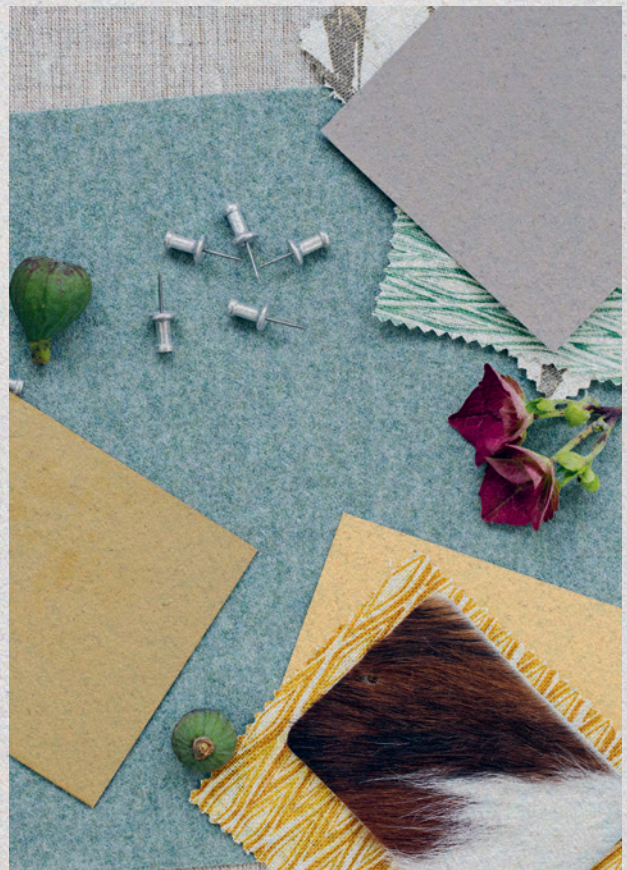
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NORDIC COLOURS

Nordic colours refer to a specific palette we often use in Scandinavia. Our design is characterised by simplicity, functionality, and a strong connection to nature. The colour scheme often includes soft, muted tones inspired by the natural landscapes in our latitudes.

Common Nordic colours include:

- **Whites and off-whites:** these create a clean and airy feel, often used as a base
- **Greys:** soft greys represent the stone and rocky areas of the landscape
- **Blues:** various shades of blue evoke the sea and sky, ranging from light pastels to deeper navy tones
- **Earthy tones:** browns, taupes, and muted greens reflect the forested and natural environments
- **Accent colours:** while the base is often neutral, brighter accents in colours like mustard yellows, deep reds, or soft pinks may be added to bring warmth and personality



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COASTAL CALMNESS

In 1912, my great-grandfather purchased a plot of land measuring about five acres along Nordstrand and the Kattegat at Nyrup Bay, the north-facing bay nestled between Klintebjerg and Rørvig in Odsherred. The farmer who subdivided the outer lots by the beach struggled to cultivate the sandy soil, and when the municipality allowed the division of land for summer houses back in the 1910s, several of the town's prominent citizens seized the opportunity.

My great-grandparents built a small bathing hut among the dunes on their newly acquired land and often rode their bikes out to enjoy afternoon coffee and a swim. City folk chuckled and shook their heads—what would one do with such a patch of sand? Anyone could just cycle down to the beach whenever they wanted. I find myself sending loving thoughts to my great-grandparents almost daily. If only they knew the joy this place has brought to me and my entire family throughout our lives.



MOOD BOARD

The watery aquamarine hues are perfectly suited for a coastal home, and in my summer house by Nordstrand, I've embraced these very shades. The vibrant floral fabric on the cushions and pouf contrasts beautifully with the solid-coloured textiles, capturing all the colours found in nature right outside our windows. The bright and faded greens, delicate aqua, sandy tones, and blues represent the old fir trees, meadows, the sea, the beach, and the sky—elements I absolutely adore. It was my mother who insisted on incorporating some colour into the house, and she was absolutely right.

The colours in the Carnival fabric from Christopher Farr provide a foundation for the home's overall colour palette. The sofa is upholstered in sand-coloured fabric, the cushions of the daybed are covered in a soft aqua linen, and the pillows are a mix of the patterned fabric and a solid light blue linen. I've also used the same fabric for curtains in front of the wardrobe. Various wool throws in sandy and aqua tones are scattered around, while an old woven rug with stripes in sea blue and beige adorns the floor. Above the dining table, blue sea-coloured pendants hang, and on the wall above the sofa is a piece created by my sister-in-law, Helene Blanche, painted by hand with ink on silk—a symbol for me of the view over the dunes towards the water during the blue hour.

The walls are painted nearly white, while the kitchen is a soft and very light blue. This is contrasted by black leather on the butterfly chair, a black table, black dining chairs, and the black cabinetry framing both the bay window and kitchen elements, including the large shelving unit for dinnerware above the kitchen counter. The tableware I've chosen consists of vibrant green and soft light green pieces—a newer set from Rosendahl and an older one from Aluminia that I collected and purchased at antique markets across the country.





THE CHERISHING OF AN IRREPLACEABLE SUMMER HOUSE

My great-grandparents had only one child, my grandmother. In 1928, my great-grandfather Vilhelm Stæhr died in a car accident. He collided with a man whose surname was Ravn, and the article about the accident in the newspaper was titled 'When Stæhr Met the Raven'.

My grandmother married my grandfather, Henning Martensen-Larsen, who was a forest ranger in Dyrehaven near Klampenborg. In 1950, my grandmother inherited the summer house, and around the same time, my grandfather got a job as a forest ranger for the royal forests around Graasten Castle in Sønderborg, where he moved with his wife and four children. My father was their youngest son. My grandparents spent many holidays at Nordstrand in Odsherred and gradually expanded the small bathing house into a larger summer house.

In the early 1960s, my grandmother passed away first, followed shortly by my grandfather. My father and his siblings inherited the land. The eldest sibling was bought out since she had moved to Norway, and the other three siblings divided the land into three equal parts. My parents built their own new summer house on their third. At the time, my mother was a recently graduated interior designer, and it was her dream to design and build it herself.

In 1967, the year I was born, the summer house was completed. The house was named Stærekassen after my great-grandfather. Throughout my upbringing, I visited this place during all holidays from Easter to autumn. I have the most amazing childhood memories of playing and swimming from morning until evening, my brother and I along with our many cousins. In the evenings, we shared meals with each other and fell asleep to the sound of the adults in the living room playing bridge—a game I also learned at a young age from my parents, and which has since become my great passion.

I have also had the opportunity to give my children the same wonderful childhood, as my mother began a generational shift many years ago. My father passed away in 1994, and my mother could no longer manage the house and land on her own. So I have now taken over the old summer house, and since the plot was fortunately large enough, it could be subdivided so that my brother and his family could also have their own summer house.



I often think about how fortunate our family is to still own this place. There have been many moments along the way where things could have turned out differently. It was, first of all, fortunate that my great-grandfather bought that sandy piece of land and didn't mind the other city dwellers laughing at him. It was fortunate that my great-grandparents only had one child. It was fortunate that my grandmother and grandfather did not sell the land during their lifetime because the distance between Sønderborg and Nykøbing Sjælland was too great; it would have been a day's journey back in the 1950s. And it was fortunate that my father and his siblings could agree to divide it into three parts, and that none of them have sold their share. Besides the beautiful location, it is the sense of community and togetherness that makes this place truly unique for our family.

No one in the family can imagine selling it. It is simply the last thing we would want to part with because it is completely irreplaceable. I see it as a place borrowed for as long as we live, but it should be passed down to our descendants. If my great-grandfather could see the truly unique gift he has passed down to his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, I know he would be immensely happy.







INTERMEZZO

Soft furnishings

When assessing people's interior design skills, the area of soft furnishings is revealing. While it may not be the most expensive aspect of decorating, it is a **crucial area** where you can make a significant impact and complete your aesthetic. If you lack cushions, throws, curtains, or upholstered furniture, your decor is incomplete, and your home will not **exude cosiness**.

I believe it's worth investing time in selecting some beautiful **cushions and throws**, preferably in luxurious materials like wool, cashmere, linen, or velvet—textures that feel lovely when you nestle in for a nap on the sofa, and that also enhance the overall decor.

Incorporating a **variety of textures** into your interior is delightful (unlike colours, there is no limit to the number of textures you can use—more is often better). Cushions and throws made from beautiful wool or soft linen complement materials like leather, fur, rattan, canvas, and cotton—common upholstery choices for many sofas and armchairs. They also soften the harder surfaces found in your home, like wood, stone, and glass.

If you have a calm environment, using cushions and throws in a few different, complementary colours and patterns can serve as a perfect **secondary colour input**. Conversely, if your walls are lively—with lots of art or bold wallpaper—or if your sofa features a large floral or striped pattern in vivid colours, it may be wiser to select calmer, solid, or nearly solid tone-on-tone cushions and throws.

Switching out cushions and throws is also an easy way to create a **sense of change** without embarking on a larger renovation that requires contractors. New cushions and throws in a different colour palette can instantly alter the ambience of a room, all while remaining **budget friendly**. If you find yourself at a loss when choosing colours for cushions and throws, pick one or two that echo a colour in a picture or poster you have hanging in the same space.

When it comes to **upholstery and curtains**, the costs can be higher, but they are essential for achieving a cohesive interior. Upholstering one or two pieces of furniture in a patterned fabric is a perfect way to add life and personality to your home, and the pattern might even provide you with an entire colour palette (as was the case for me with the Carnival fabric from Christopher Farr in my summer house—see Coastal Calmness, p.85).

If you choose to reupholster a piece of furniture, it should have a certain quality or at least a significant sentimental value to justify the expense. Reupholstering can be costly, so it's essential to choose a **high-quality textile** and ensure that the fabric's durability is suitable for the furniture you want to upholster.

Use the mood board tool if you struggle with choosing fabrics and remember you can borrow some fabric samples from the retailer, your upholsterer, or directly from the manufacturer to evaluate them in your own space.

When it comes to curtains, you can purchase ready-made lengths in various home goods stores for very little money, or you can consult experts to have them **custom-made**. There's a vast difference in price and quality between these two approaches—much like comparing ready-made clothing to tailored garments.

If your decor is high quality, I believe you should not skimp on curtains. Certain windows can indeed be outfitted with ready-made curtains with good results, but this depends greatly on how the window opens, the depth and shape of the windowsills, and more. The cheaper alternatives simply do not suffice.

If you have windows suitable for **Roman blinds**, I cannot recommend anything other than custom-made options. I have yet to see ready-made Roman blinds in standard sizes that fit properly.

When selecting curtain fabric, I always consider how the fabric will appear from the outside. **Woven fabrics** are generally better suited than printed ones, which may have unattractive backs. I also prefer fabrics that are not too tightly woven or dark, as I love it when light can filter through. If the curtain solution needs to block out light, you may need to line the fabric or opt for separate blackout roller shades.

Just as with cushions, throws, and upholstery fabrics, select curtains in a calm fabric if your interior is already vibrant. Conversely, it can also be the curtains that introduce colour into the room; a fabric with an elegant pattern or stylish stripes can look quite luxurious.

In general, when it comes to this entire topic, you can **mix several different patterns** within the same room—as long as the colours coordinate. However, try to limit yourself to two or three colours.