

AS COLORS GO

Green doesn't have to be...just green.



BY KAJA GAM, PHOTOGRAPH BY KEN SKALSKI

When we say to ourselves, “It’s time to paint,” the itch comes not just from the look of a worn and dirty walls in the harsh winter light—we instinctively feel the colors themselves appear “old and faded” too. That’s when we go to the paint store for new ideas and inspiration. And, lo and behold, something has happened with color since...well, when *did* we last paint?

In the late '90s, inspired by organic cotton, hemp, and unbleached linen, we had a love affair with pastel hues of sage, taupe, cream, and celadon. And for the last seven years we have walloped in chocolate browns—a range of mochas worthy of a Starbucks menu—and clear sky blues with a shot of mature lime green for spice.

Now it looks like we are in for another change.

With the major color trends for 2008 emerging in everything from fabrics to paint, it is clear that interior colors for the home will continue to embrace a natural palette, but color combinations aspire to reach a new level of spiritual refinement. As the green movement has grown to embrace a larger segment of the population and the general perception of green has moved from activist pioneering with a cultish zeal to a concept of plain and simple common sense and necessity, we likewise anticipate a more sophisticated, grown-up take on color choices for the home.

According to Britt Bivens, director of Promostyl, a trend research agency, “Green is still there, but blues are now becoming more important.” She continues: “The two blue hues that we’re seeing in this palette are an ethnic-inspired peacock blue, and a sophisticated blue with gray undertones, which works as a neutral. The creams that we’ve been used to seeing will be replaced with sandy hues, cork-inspired colors and linen shades, which include a bit of gray.”

Nature has always been the inspiration for color, but world events inspire us too. With the Olympics taking place in Beijing this summer, predictions are that lots of reds and yellows will enter the stage. Accent walls in bright contrasting colors is part of this new mature look, and can transform an entire room by redirecting the focus of attention.

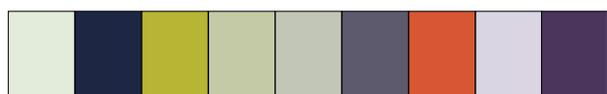
COLOR SCHEME: IMPERIAL CHILD



Color Forecasting is a science of prediction. Forecasters guess and gamble on what we are moving away from in life and society and where we are going; it is a subjective science involving equal amounts of socio-economic study and understanding of fads, fashion, and cycles.

Christine Chow, associate director of The Color Association, describes a rich, saturated palette for the year. “We will definitely be seeing a lot of bright colors, but not necessarily together anymore, because we’re not looking for design to feel too young. Many of the grays are taken from stones, so we have a lot of grayish taupes, soft grays and mineral tones. Colors like kabuki red, sky blue, and a very rich purple will be used as bright accents with this palette.”

COLOR SCHEME: EVENING CALM



Pantone, mainly known for its influence on the graphic and art world, recently introduced a paint series based on the same color mixing principles. It brings us palette names like Dark Shadows, Normalism, Natural Poetry, Integrated, Innocence, Chameleon, and

Unexpected for its 2008 color combinations. Many of these names indicate change and a level of surprise, suggesting that we are in a flux, moving away from the monochromatic safety of tone on tone colors towards a more daring, self-assured use of color. It is like saying, “I chose these colors in this combination because I can!”

So what the forecasters are telling us is that we have gained a lot of freedom in color choices, and what is considered good taste and acceptable palettes in this year’s colors is a very individual thing. They have, however, all agreed that a deep blue is the color of the year, and with Pantone’s “Blue Iris” hinging on purple, we are back to the jewel tones of aquamarine and lapis lazuli.

The neutral tones of dark and lighter grays based on blues and greens or the desert earth tones will be the binder or glue for any chosen palette of colors. On these backgrounds the boldness of a strong red or saturated blue or deep purple can make a room sing with new life. Add a mica or metallic effect, and you have done something quite astounding.

COLOR SCHEME: SANCTUARY



But there are a few more things to consider, now that you are on your way to the paint store to get your new bold colors. And that is light—natural and artificial alike. The same color will appear quite different depending on what direction the natural light is coming from. From that understanding we instinctually lean toward a color harmony based on the light in the room, and chose colors that fits that light best: North equals cool blues and blue-greens and invites pastels; east equals soft yellows, warm greens, or a pale peachy rose in light to mid tones; south equals bright and contrasting colors, the primaries and clean colors of red, yellow, and blue; west connotes deep warmth of orange, earth tones and purple.

And just to make our choices even more confusing, the time of day will change the appearance of any color. Paint manufacturer spent millions in the '70s and '80s to create colors that would appear uniform no matter the light conditions. In order to maintain this evenness, black or raw umber was added to “flatten” the colors. The result was, you might have guessed, a dulling effect.

Complex or full-spectrum color mixing gained speed in the late '80s and has reached a level of sophistication, both in chemical composition and pigment use, that enables us to have complex tones without the dulling effects of black and raw umber, and it is being acknowledged that colors shouldn’t necessarily look the same on two adjacent walls or in the morning and at night. As a matter of fact, many color specifiers, myself included, accentuate these subtle variations by painting walls in slightly different hues, which creates an almost cubist or faceted effect in a room.

Artificial lighting has an equally large impact on what colors we chose for the home. With the increase in use of fluorescent bulbs and LEDs, the light cast in a room is changed. Fluorescents can seem “sleepy” and give off a skim-milk like effect, and LEDs create very bright light with sharper contrast in a more focused area. This is a step away from the warmer diffused glow of incandescent light bulbs we have been used to. Green and yellow pastels fare badly in the cool glow of the energy savers, so it makes sense to lean toward warmer and more saturated tones in deeper color values to make up for the change in artificial lighting.

SOURCING PAINTS

Regardless of the trends, if you plan on re-doing some rooms in 2008, I encourage you to check out the many new environmentally friendly paints that are on the market today. These low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints perform like regular latex house paints but without the ammonia and/or formaldehyde that have been identified as significant irritants and allergens. Initially you may find these paints a little harder to work with than traditional latex paints, but once you get used to the work time and coating specifics, you will find they are worth the effort. Visit www.afmsafecoat.com, www.yolocolorhouse.com, www.myaurapaint.com, www.mythicpaint.com, and www.finepaintsofeurope.com to get a look at the features and colors offered by these products.

If you are preparing for an exterior historic restoration or would like to use truly organic materials, there are more options available to you today than in recent years. Scandinavian- and domestic-made traditional flaxseed or linseed oil paints used both on exterior and interior surfaces, as well as milk-, glue-, and wheat-based paints, are re-entering the market in droves: see www.solventfreepaint.com and www.vogelpaint.com. The modern versions of linseed oil-based paints are purified to avoid algae or mold growth and provide a chemical bond with wood and plaster that latex paints simply can’t match. Homes in my native Scandinavia have used the less high-tech versions of these products for centuries. Imagine the maintenance-free benefits of using the new versions of these tried-and-true classics, especially as exterior house paint. You won’t need to paint outside again for 40 years! ■