the feel of colour

colour warm cool soft hard calm clear

How do colours make us feel? We know that they can affect our emotions – is there a link between colours and mental states? Can colours stimulate us by acting directly on some aspect of our bodies or brains? While colour symbols may differ between cultures we see a great deal of colour meanings are recognised around the world so it would appear some colour responses are universal.

Walk into a home decorated by a property developer and you will probably find the walls painted white, cream, beige or grey. It is easy to resort to colour minimalism rather than take a risk and we often have a tendency to choose colours based on prejudice and convention rather than how they will work together.

We have moved on from cream and beige in many industries – computers and cars, shoes and sports equipment – so why the reluctance to use more colour in home interiors?

Many of us have walked into a room and been pleasantly surprised to like a colour scheme using a hue that we would not choose for ourselves because of an aversion to a particular colour. Often our dislike of a colour is brought about by an association or experience of its misuse, and this can hold us back from taking advantage of the aesthetic and psychological benefits of colour.

colour hue saturation lightness dimension mood feel

Paint is the most economical and immediate way to change colour on appropriate surfaces. The home decorator today can purchase just about any coloured paint that the human eye can perceive. More colours, more choices to make may make some feel overwhelmed. However a very good place to start is to think about how you want the space to "feel".

Is the space to feel pretty or dynamic, romantic or formal, elegant or casual, natural or wild, classic or modern, cool or warm, open or intimate, energetic or restful, nostalgic or austere? There are just so many different moods that can be conveyed through colour. And this is where written information on the psychology of each colour can help us to convey the feel we want within a space.

The colour wheel will also help to achieve harmony and balance with our colour combinations but remember when working with three dimensional space colour fields can reflect light onto each other. For examples, if four walls are painted a single colour the colour will be reinforced, but complementary colours will mute each other.

Another important factor is the temperature of the colour, such as using a warm colour to make a room feel cosier, or a cool colour in a north-facing room.

And finally warm or dark colours tend to advance (come towards you) while cool or light colours tend to recede so you could open up a small room by using a light, cool colour, such as pale turquoise.

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Colours have psychological and physical properties and by having some understanding of these we can design colour schemes to reflect a particular "feel" within our home by the combination of colours with other elements like patterns, texture and materials.

Home is not necessarily where we spend the most time, but the old saying "the home is where the heart is" means we need to feel comfortable at home. Home should be a place where we enjoy being ourselves, where we welcome family and friends and a solid base from which we can venture out into the wider community.

First impressions are important – the colour of the front door, the entrance, hallway – each time you return home, or visitors arrive, a positive effect should welcome people into your home. Take your time and see how the colours appear at different times of the day or under artificial light conditions.

Establish the general "feel" or theme of the space and make selections of colour for one or two of the major large areas first, such as the floor or the walls and ceiling. Add colour selections for secondary items – furniture, window treatments, bed linen, benchtops and so on. Add selections of small areas of colour that will act as accents – these may be stronger values of colours already selected for larger areas or contrasting colours, and materials such as glass or metallic elements that will have an impact on the overall feel of the room. Lay out the colour samples onto a board and check their compatibility to each other before ordering paint and materials. Where possible it is best to select items with limited options first, such as the floor, as it will generally be easier to find a paint colour to go with the flooring you have selected than vice versa.

When evaluating the colour on site at the start of the painting, it is important not to be upset by the impression before all the related elements are in place and seen under the specified lighting conditions. It is quite common for one colour to look wrong until all the colours and furnishings are installed.

avoid common colour problems

The most common problem with colour schemes is caused by random acquisition of items and colour decisions, rather than working to a conceived colour plan to meet the requirements for the space. Restricted colour schemes are usually safe as schemes using too many hues run a greater risk of appearing chaotic and unbalanced – but don't be boring!

If very intense colours are used on large areas, such as floor or walls, they are likely to become tiring over a period of time. Also near-equal large areas of complementary colours may feel unpleasant – it is best for one colour to dominate in area or intensity, with small areas of high intensity contrast colour. Drabness and monotony are the result of overusing very restricted colour palettes, such as beige on beige. These colour schemes are usually relieved with the use of a strong accent colour somewhere in the room.

Successful colour schemes depend on the careful planning of all elements - viewing swatches and paint samples in relationship to one another and in proportional size to their application within the space. Use the a colour wheel to structure your colour selections.

casual comfortable easy-living informal

An open and honest image, this style stresses clear colours that do not dominate - cooler colours of green and blue work well. Patterns range from large checks and stripes to hand-drawn illustrations and decorating materials may include cotton, linen, rubber and plastic for easy maintenance.   Add visual texture by introducing shells, hemp, coconut mats and cane for a casual look, or stone, pebbles and pale timber for a slightly more streamlined look. Other colours that will work are ecru, rosehip, clay and taupe.

Comfortable and relaxed room with nautical theme...

Clean and open style of kitchen, easy to maintain surfaces...

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Resene
the paint the professionals use

modern urban cool functional

A cool, urbane and functional style, strong contrasts are popular, especially black and white with vivid accent colours. Patterns are basic stripes or geometrics and prime materials include steel, glass, granite and marble. Grey and charcoal have integrity and convey timeless modernity. Often surfaces are high tech and functional, if a little hard-edged at times.

romantic soft innocent delicate charming

The main colour combinations are light pastel tones and white – clear and fresh. Delicate floral patterns and high sheen textiles are combined with frosted glass and pale timber. Pink evokes romantic love and diffuses conflict so an ideal colour for such a space – from the palest blossom pink to the more passionate magenta shades. Peach pink is warmer and more physical while mauve pink is cooler and more spiritual. Creamy whites (lilies and rose petals) conjure images of a summer room where gauzy curtains flutter in the breeze and they work back with the more sensuous and darker red-mauve pinks.

natural tranquil intimate simple appealing

A generous and warm feel with shades of beige, ivory and yellow based neutrals. Botanical patterns are combined with natural linen, cotton and wool textiles, and wood

finishes include bamboo and rattan. Natural materials achieve an intimate and appealing effect when in combination with creamy whites and contrasting levels of gloss surface finishes.

elegant refined graceful fashionable

chic calm sophisticated serene sober

An atmosphere of serenity and calm, cooler than the elegant colours, subtle woven patterns with matt finishes are combined with simple materials such as pumice, stone and pale timber.   Leather and glass are also used in sophisticated schemes, especially as black or white accents.   Examples of blue-grey with black, and green-grey with white – both work well in this modern space.
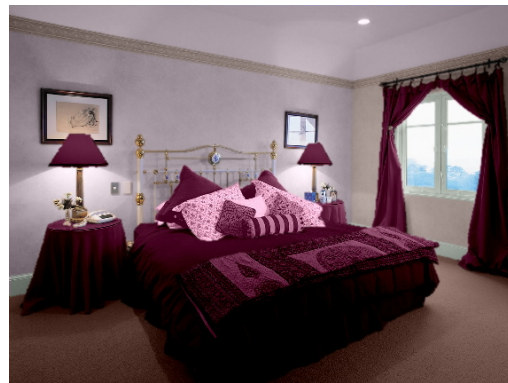
## classic traditional mature tasteful luxurious

This is a more formal and elaborate feel with an air of authenticity. Colours can be hard and deep with brown, black and olive green to create a feeling of tradition and maturity or gold and aubergine to create a feeling of richness. Traditional patterns, such as paisley motifs, and lustrous materials, such as silk and velvet, complement these colours.

Think of Harrods green or Cadbury purple or some of the precious jewel colours – ruby, dark sapphire blue, topaz gold - colours often seen in velvet florals and old tapestries. Team with aged metallics – old gold and bronze – to add maturity to a new building.

energetic stimulating lively social

For a room to stimulate and energise, choose reds, oranges and yellows. Red stimulates conversation and encourages activity, while yellow brings an optimistic feel to a room and is associated with mental activities so ideal for a study. Orange combines red and yellow and can boost enthusiasm and stimulate movement, so is ideal for areas where action or exercise is planned.
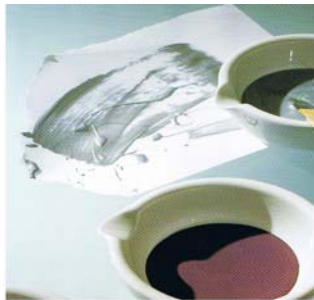
soothing relaxing balancing regenerating healing

Green promotes healing and harmony and blue can be used to introduce a soothing feel within a room such as a bedroom or bathroom. Blue is known as a stress-buster after a day's work and relaxes the muscles and mind. To inject some warmth consider aubergine – the comfort of brown and luxury of violet – for upholstery in a living room or some timber in a bathroom.

opulent luxurious dignified

The richness of violet and indigo, or deep burgundy, combined with gold and silver, provides a feel of opulence in any room. Patterns are extravagant and textiles velvety or silky, with metallic threads or accents. Violet combines feelings of luxury and spiritual mystery.

Resene
the paint the professionals use

Although the colours of these two rooms are quite strong, the feel is different. The sitting room with the red wall is energetic and lively, while the yellow room is quite mellow and cosy.
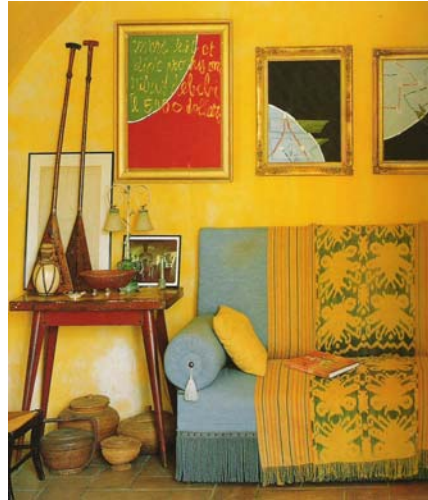
Here is an example of the same room in two colourways which has been achieved using Resene EzyPaint. This is an excellent tool to see how your room is going to look before you finalise the colours. The room with the violet tones has quite moody feel, while the green room feels secure and cocooning.