

The

ENGLISH HOME

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SPECIAL

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February 2024 | Issue 228 | £5.50 | UK Edition

BRIGHT START

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DESIGNS ON 2024

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UPCOMING TRENDS
WITH ENDURING APPEAL

WARM NEUTRALS

*Tones that bring
calm to interiors*

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GREAT REINVENTIONS

Homes transformed, from a Georgian terrace to a new build





BROWN

Creative Combinations

Continuing our series charting the evolution of colour and pattern, we explore how trends and historical influences have shaped British interiors, this time exploring the potential of brown

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE

Reminiscent of the earth and therefore conjuring a sense of solidity, brown, in its many guises, from tobacco to terracotta, is a grounding neutral that has anchored interiors through the ages. One of the first colours to be used in art, thanks to natural pigments found in umber, sienna and ochre, it dates back to Ancient Egyptian and Greek culture. This is also one of the most prevalent colours in architecture, thanks to materials such as timber, brick and stone. However, the tone also garnered associations with drabness throughout the Middle Ages, when brown clothes were

associated with the mundane and the ordinary. Rich browns found favour again in the 1960s and 1970s, especially when paired with vibrant pops of purple and orange, before falling on hard times. Now, brown is having a resurgence, thanks to its renewed associations with earthiness and elegance.

New neutral

Few colours encompass as many tones as brown, whether lightest beige, rich russet and burgundy or darkest chocolate. And few have as many verbal associations with food, from caramel and toffee to ▶

THIS PAGE Designed by Alblon Nord, this study has walls in Rose Uniacke Paint's Hickory, adding warmth and earthiness while bringing out the tones of the marble fire surround and the fumed oak and leather desk. **OPPOSITE** In this relaxed déVOL Haberdasher's Kitchen, designed by Leanne Kilroy of Good Bones, texture prevails with tambour-style joinery offset by chequerboard flooring, marble counters and aged-brass elements.





'Brown brings warmth to interiors and provides a strong anchor to rich colour palettes'

Sarah Henry, managing director, La Manufacture Cogolin

ABOVE LEFT Soft taupe, including walls and woodwork in Mylands' Egerton Place and a contemporary chandelier, add a touch of old-school glamour to this principal bedroom.

ABOVE RIGHT Earthy notes prevail in this bathroom, with walls in Whitall Brown and ceiling in Swiss Coffee, both by Benjamin Moore.

LEFT In this soothing bedroom scheme designed by Kit Kemp for Ham Yard hotel, espresso walls provide an anchoring backdrop for statement artwork and timber elements.

hazelnut, mushroom and cocoa, perhaps indicating that this is a colour that appeals to the senses. Of course, this is a hue found in a wealth of natural materials too, including timber, grasses, terracotta and marble, reinforcing its connection to the elements. Perhaps in part due to our renewed appreciation of organic materials, brown is once again in focus, prized for its restful yet grounding qualities. "For me, brown evokes paintings by Rembrandt or Vermeer, leather club chairs, libraries, smoking rooms and hunting lodges," says La Manufacture Cogolin's Sarah Henry. "It brings warmth to interiors and provides a strong anchor to rich colour palettes."

Modern treatments of this earthy colour avoid overload and instead focus on texture. "Unlike the 1960s and 70s, this isn't about an abundance of dark wood or heavy materials," says colour consultant and stylist Emily Brooks. "A contemporary application of brown feels fresher and more handmade and artisanal, with the addition of linens, plants, ceramics and other tones from nature's colour palette to lift the look. The aim is to avoid a flat finish and instead create a wonderfully tactile experience with wools, ▶

In a Regency apartment renovated by Elcayon, this layered, textural living room combines curved and sculptural shapes in a tonal palette of browns for timeless appeal.





LEFT A raw plaster finish, oak bar stools and accessories from Cuisinart's Neutral Collection create a rustic, back-to-nature feel in this pared-back kitchen.

BELOW In this playful bedroom scheme designed by Martin Brudnizki for Le Grand Mazarin hotel in Paris, earthy browns, such as a velvet headboard and painted cabinetry, provide a springboard for an energetic palette of yellows, greens and blues.



woven wall hangings, cossetting throws and ceramics or earthy metals."

Rich chocolatey browns add depth and gravitas. "I enjoy how it is a softer and prettier alternative to black and grey," says interior designer Louise Robinson. "I find the right shade of brown will go with almost anything and I enjoy how it can bring an unexpected warmth and softness, both when used in its natural form such as dark wooden furniture, but also in other finishes, including patterns, paints and floor tiles." This is a colour that can act as an effective textural base, from oak parquet to sisal flooring, or as a canvas, such as an exposed brick or micro-cement wall. As a painted finish, it comes alive when paired with other earthy tones. "As a rule of thumb, colours that work in nature also work well in the home," says Benjamin Moore's Helen Shaw. "So, combinations such as brown and green feel nourishing and soothing, while dusky pink and pale-mid blue contrasts lend an airy, harmonious atmosphere."

Drab to dramatic

These days, brown has shaken off its utilitarian, paper bag image. "We probably need a complete change of language as we explore the full-colour range," says TH2 Design's Sheila El Hadery. "Cacao, espresso, cappuccino, toffee, peat, tobacco, tan, bronze: the right tones have no dreary connotations. Dark chocolate velvets are inviting on sofas, caramel and almond linens conjure a feeling of quiet luxury and peaty timbers provide depth and warmth. At the other end of the spectrum, when paired with ivory and used as a glossy lacquer finish in combination with bronze metals, brown can inject a deeply luxurious and glamorous feel."

Dark furniture too has fallen out of favour in recent years, but reframed in a new context, it has a reassuring, noble quality. "It is slowly making its way back into the spotlight," believes Neptune's Simon Temprell. "Unlike the wenge wood of the 1990s, today's furnishings are lighter and warmer, introducing a sense of heritage and history. Try allowing natural timbers to speak for themselves, without getting too hung-up on everything in the room matching. Textural fabrics like velvet and tweed, plus black-bronze hardware and finishes on cabinetry and lighting are all good foils."

If mid-century or 1970s pieces are appealing, introduce these elements with a light touch. "Lean into selecting vintage furniture with timber frames, ▶



ABOVE RIGHT A lower wall in terracotta, Benjamin Moore's Topaz, and upper walls in its White Dove, echo the oak treads and white risers in this elegant hallway.

RIGHT Cabinetry painted in Neptune's rich Walnut provides a grounding canvas to a bold pop of mustard yellow, thanks to its Dominic armchair.



ABOVE To create an inviting living room that transitions easily from day to evening, Kinder Design's Leo Wood has opted for walls and skirtings painted in Little Greene's Middle Buff.

LEFT Muted fabrics, including Trellis in Natural and a cushion in Athena in Ocean from Isabella Worsley Collection, are offset by sandy tones and dark wood in this elegant period setting.

but vary your furniture finishes and styles to create a more timeless approach," suggests Eliyoni's Holly Beasley. "For example, pair a 1970s timber chair with a contemporary lacquer table in a pop of colour to vary styles and finishes. In a recent project, we used high gloss cherry red timber chairs piped in yellow and upholstered in a blue and white patterned fabric. They brought a touch of the unexpected into an otherwise formal dining space."

This is a tone that can be smart and sophisticated or natural and earthy. "It acts as a fabulous foil to orange and yellow," says Otta Designs' Alexandra Keith. "Artwork also pops against a backdrop of warm mid-tone browns. We have recently used Edward Bulmer's Clove in a country house project to great effect."

Perfect pairings

When it comes to decorating, the formality of classic wood can be instantly counterpointed by the right colour combinations. In kitchens, walnut cabinetry partners beautifully with raspberry or plaster pink, sky blue or mustard yellow, while dark wood joinery paired with burgundy accents lends a cosy feeling to snugs. Introducing texture in brown joinery brings energy and verve, whether a fluted finish on cabinets, bars and room dividers or scalloped wooden shelving.

Painting with brown can produce either dramatic or subtle effects depending on context. "The best paint ▶

DESIGN INSIGHT

The richness of sleek, handleless walnut joinery is brought out by aubergine-painted cabinetry in this contemporary scheme by Naked Kitchens.





'A powdery blue is like a breath of fresh air against a steady ground of brown'

Emily Brooks, colour consultant and stylist

colours to pair with it depends on the light in the room, the effect you want to achieve and your personal style," advises Mylands' Dominic Myland. "Contrasting brown with black tones can create a striking modern interior, while combining it with a warm off-white or pastels will give it a much lighter appearance. Pay attention to a brown paint's undertones: most will have hints of red, amber or yellow, and so pair better with warmer shades of white with a hint of yellow, rather than cooler-based tones."

For timeless appeal, Emily Brooks suggests pairing a golden brown like Paint & Paper Library's Caddie with a Dorset-inspired hue like Farrow & Ball's Lulworth Blue. "A powdery blue is like a breath of fresh air against the steady ground of brown," she says. "This is a perfect pairing in rooms filled with daylight, generating both a grounding and calm atmosphere. Introduce pattern with a checked tile, veiny marble or striped fabric. Choose brass fixtures and something floaty to freshen the look - I always add a linen cafe curtain or tablecloth to soften a brown kitchen or scullery."

ABOVE LEFT This classic combination of natural wood and panelling in pale blue makes for an elegant-rustic feel in this kitchen by HAM Interiors.

ABOVE RIGHT In this library scheme by Otta Design, an earthy terracotta introduces depth and warmth, working both as a cocoon and an effective foil for books, artwork and mid-century cane furniture

Living rooms in a soft tobacco finish have subtly sophisticated appeal. Tones like this have a lived-in, almost 1940s feel, lending a scheme warmth and atmosphere, particularly in period properties with gracious architectural features. "I'd pair brown walls with yellow ochre, burnt orange, olive green or aubergine-plum via curtains, furnishings or other accents," suggests Brooks. "The effect is an analogous scheme that is both opulent and anchoring."

Interior designer Paolo Moschino uses several shades of brown as a failsafe option. "I often turn to this colour in my schemes because I associate it with warmth, comfort, and stability," he says. "It has a classic and timeless quality because it doesn't go in and out of fashion as quickly as some other colours. In both decoration and my personal wardrobe, brown and blue is a go-to combination."

Often underestimated for its power and longevity, brown is slowly inching towards the spotlight again. "Thanks to its subtle, warming, and luxurious qualities, I predict that we will be seeing much more of this hue across design, interiors, and even fashion over the upcoming seasons," says Studio Loda's Blandine de Navacelle. There is no doubt that in periods of uncertainty, hues of earthy bronze and rich mahogany hint at the consistency of the elements, of wood and of nature - and all the reassurance that they offer.

PHOTOGRAPHS: KIM JACOB; KITCHEN: HANSEN; LIBRARY: OTTA DESIGN; LULWORTH BLUE: FARROW & BALL; CAMPSITE SIGN: CAMPSITE; CAMPSITE SIGN: CAMPSITE



GROUNDING TONES

Brown has many facets – in its lighter expressions, cappuccino prints add intrigue to neutrals, while classic chocolate finishes are of-the-moment

1 Astrid light pendant in Aubergine, £204, David Hunt Lighting 2 Blenheim coffee table, £499, Sidonia corner sofa, £2,999; Bolster cushion, £39.50; cushion, £35; throw, £39.50; vase, £39.50, all M&S x Fired Earth 3 From top: Freckle, Little Rascal and Muddy Boots, all £57.50 for 2.5l Claypail, Earthborn 4 Nut Brown Wicker lampshade, 14-inch oval, £240, Fermole 5 Brown ceramic ramen spoons, £5.60 for a set of two, Marquis & Dawe 6 Chocolate Ditsy ruffle napkins, £30 for a set of four, Sarah K 7 Ashbury fabric, Soft Sage, £139 a metre, GP & J Baker 8 Leaf Impression vase, £31.49 (large), Gisela Graham 9 Brown armchair, £1,899, plus 7m fabric, Violet & George 10 Rattan rectangular storage basket, Brown, £96, Rebecca Udall 11 Eichholtz Aristide dining chair, £950, Sweetpea & Willow ■