



BLUE

Creative Combinations

Continuing our series focusing on colour and pattern, we explore how trends and historical influences have shaped British interiors, this time exploring the enduring appeal of blue

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE

Associated for centuries with art, architecture and interiors, blue is prized for a sense of rarity and prestige as well as its calming properties. Deeply intertwined with our perception of sky and sea, it is believed to be the first human-made pigment, dating back to the Egyptians, who are known to have used azurite decoratively.

Blue has long been associated with wealth and grandeur, having been a difficult colour to produce, as

well as transcendence, given its historical association with the colour of the Madonna's robe. The Middle Ages saw blue as a highly prized colour for clothing, while in the 18th century blue-and-white curtains, bed hangings and upholstery became de rigueur. Popular in Victorian interiors, it was often paired with red and gold to create an opulent look. In current interior schemes, blue can be both grounding or uplifting, fresh or cocooning, depending on its tone. ▶

THIS PAGE Pale blue joinery makes for a natural pairing with deep pink accents in this classic library scheme by Kate Guinness. OPPOSITE In this apartment renovation by Studio Beleta, original floor-to-ceiling doors have been picked out in striking powder blue.



LEFT Shaker-style cabinetry painted in Little Greene's Bone China Blue is contemporised by industrial-style bar stools and an over-scaled pendant light in this Roundhouse Studio Classic kitchen.

BELOW LEFT In this pretty bathroom scheme by interior designer Laura Stephens, classic pale blue panelling is contrasted with a softly modern floral wallpaper, incorporating yellow and pink accents.

BELOW RIGHT A country house sitting room by Kelling Designs features a deep blue sofa delineated by crisp white piping, for a smart, graphic look.

Calming and classic

With its sense of timelessness, blue is a failsafe option, whether as a painted backdrop or via wallpaper, furnishings or accessories. "Blue has an incredible spectrum of shades, making it one of the most versatile colours to use in design," says Liz Beal of Goddard Littlefair. "Lighter tones such as baby and powder blue create a feeling of calmness and relaxation, while deeper shades such as navy and royal blue add depth and sophistication."

Over the centuries, blue has transitioned from being symbolic to being a deeply adaptable colour within our homes, from kitchens and bathrooms to sitting rooms and studies. Once considered a formal colour, used for police and military uniforms as a means of conveying trust, deep blue has latterly shaken off its conservative reputation. "There is an extensive range of tones on offer, from rich, sultry blue, such as Farrow & Ball's Hague Blue, to the playful blue associated with Renaissance sculptor Luca della Robbia," says interior designer Kate Guinness. "It's an emotive colour that can prompt self-reflection and stillness. Its association with water means it is also used to great effect in bathrooms and kitchens." ▶



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Liz Beal, Goddard Littlefair

This drawing room by VSP Interiors uses pale blue as an anchoring backdrop to large-scale artworks, including Pippa Ridley's *A Day at the Beach*. It is offset by colour and pattern including a carpet by Robert Stephenson and lampshades by Susan Deliss.



Inspired by nature, blue can be an effective colour on walls and ceilings. "It's a good choice for larger furniture and window dressings too – especially darker tones like navy or smoky blue," says interior designer Pia Pelkonen. "For walls, I'm drawn to the softer, paler shades, especially when contrasted with deeper hues."

This is a tone that classically pairs with white too, especially on an architectural level. The cities of Jodhpur in India, Chefchaouen in Morocco and the island of Santorini are all prized for their striking blue facades. "For brighter, sunnier days or climates, ultramarines imitate shadow on brilliant white walls and make great colour features for outdoor walls or modern, eclectic spaces," says colour consultant Fiona de Lys. "Other prominent blues throughout interiors are the cobalt blue of Chinese porcelain, the Portland blue of Wedgwood, Delft blue and International Klein Blue, prized for its vivid qualities."

'If using a darker blue in a smaller library or study space, paint the architectural features in the same tone. It delivers a punchier effect'

Carina Raymond, Studio Raymond

RIGHT In this London utility room by Kate Guinness Design, joinery and a ladder painted in Blue Verditer by Papers and Paints are complemented by a pretty small-print under-counter curtain, and floor tiles in Honey/Ivory by Marrakech Design. **BELOW** Jewel-blue walls give a new dimension to abstract artwork in this drawing room by Laura Stephens.



Moody blues

The classic blue-and-white combination works just as well inside as out, especially when expressed through patterned fabrics including toiles de Jouy, stripes and botanicals. "I'm a fan of wallpaper and fabrics by Pomily," says Emma Deterding of Kelling Designs. "They bring effective accents of the colour, from zig-zags and checks to gentle floral repeats."

Deep blue for library and snug areas lends a cloak-like feeling of containment and security. Key is to consider a room's orientation and its architectural features – north or east-facing rooms that do not receive much natural light benefit from blues with warm undertones, while cooler notes can be used in south or west-facing schemes. Ceiling height, mouldings and the placement of windows will all impact how blue appears in a room. Higher ceilings will be able to handle darker shades without feeling too heavy. "I enjoy using moodier blues punctuated with bright artwork in cosy TV areas as they can make the space feel very intimate and relaxing," says interior designer Alice Leigh. "Dark blue grasscloth wallpaper can be light reflecting, especially at night, and gives a scheme a little more life."

Blue complements unexpected colours, such as green and burgundy, as well as more natural bedfellows including pink. "Pair it with darker or muted reds, greens – in much the same way as the English landscape harmonises with the sky – and yellows too," says de Lys. "These colours pop against each other."

Grey blues work well on cabinetry in south or west-facing kitchens. Mid-shade chalky blues complement antiques and terracotta flooring for boot rooms, ▶



ABOVE LEFT Glastonbury Stripe wallpaper in Pale Cerulean by Cole & Son provides a playful and fresh canvas in this elegant bedroom scheme by Studio Raymond.

ABOVE RIGHT Against a brilliant white backdrop, graphic blue-and-white stripes and patterns evoke a Mediterranean feel in John Lewis & Partners' three-seater Anyday collection Metal Garden Lounging Set.

LEFT In an understated sitting room scheme by Marina Byers for Dargie Lewis, walls and alcove joinery are given the same finish, Farrow & Ball's De Nimes, for a smart, cohesive feel.

pantries and downstairs loos, while paler blues that imitate a warm grey or sea colour can work for hallways and transitional spaces.

Consider woodwork too – using blue at the rear of bookshelves mimics depth and shadow. Trims such as architraves, skirting, windows and doors often benefit from a muted colour, such as an off-white, as a gentle contrast. This helps create a softer transition on the eye from wall to wood, particularly in vertical areas. “But if you’re using a darker blue in a smaller library or study space, then try painting the architectural features in the same tone,” says interior designer Carina Raymond. “It delivers a punchier effect.”

Fresh approach

To give this classic colour a bit of an edge, think inventively when it comes to application. “In a hallway, half-height panelling in blue tones paired with warm neutral hues above creates an atmospheric and sophisticated feel,” advises Marina Byers of Dargie Lewis Designs. “In sitting rooms, add surprise pops of colour as a treat to the eye, such as painting a door architrave a contrasting colour. Bring in raspberry pinks or yellows to lift a moody blue.”

Consider texture, too, to create a sense of movement. “I love blues on geometric fabrics, such as Christopher Farr’s Travelling Light, which is a fresh and modern pattern,” says interior designer Alice Leigh. Velvets, wool and chunky knits will also help soften moodiness by adding visual interest and tactile appeal.

Finish is key. Powder blue looks exceptionally striking on lacquered joinery, especially library or study bookshelves. “Add an extra level of detailing by lacquering the cornices and ceiling in the same colour,” says Carina Raymond of Studio Raymond. “It feels modern yet classic, luxurious and cocooning.” To lift the look, pay attention to fixtures and door furniture. Interior designer Laura Stephens favours gold and brass as brightening and softening foils.

Reds and browns offer a softly modern edge. “Pale blues with anything from crimson to burgundy look good because the warmer tones of the red balance out the coolness of the blue, creating an uplifting combination,” says interior designer Tiffany Duggan. “I would love to design a lacquered dark chocolate dining room with pale blue linen slip-covered chairs and plaster lighting.”

Nothing beats atmospheric light to add drama, one reason why midnight blue walls are engagingly accentuated by the mystery and glamour of candlelight. “For inspiration, two books, *The Anatomy of Colour* by Patrick Baty and Edward Bulmer’s *The Colourful Past*, are my go-tos,” says designer Henriette von Stockhausen. “There’s a reason why versatile blue was very prevalent in historic interiors such as those found in grand houses, and why it remains a beloved tone that is still used to great effect today.” ■



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Marina Byers, Dargie Lewis

ABOVE Understated joinery is given fresh appeal in a traditional bespoke mid-blue tone in deVOL’s The Classic English Kitchen.

LEFT Blue walls in Fired Earth’s Jeane act as the perfect foil to an art collection in this sitting room by Marina Byers for Dargie Lewis. They are given a playful edge with a door architrave painted in Madder Red by Fired Earth.

