

INTRODUCTION

The orange colour of a tangerine makes a brilliant impact against a background of cobalt blue; in intense sunlight brightly painted Mexican exteriors or Mauritian flame trees acquire additional strength of colour in their assertive reds and pinks; wild poppies in bloom in a field in Provence are a symbolic presence against the surrounding foliage; and in markets the world over the display of fruit, vegetables and, especially, flowers brings visual excitement to our lives. The power of such images in attracting attention suggests that of all the constituent elements of the world around us – forms, textures, sounds and colours – it is the latter which most directly affect our moods and general well-being. And especially in interior design, colour has the most powerful, the most affective, and perhaps the most mysterious influence.

In the fashion industry, there are consultants who can tell you what colour suits your skin tones, your hair, your personality, and so on. But it is in our own homes, where we express our lifestyle choices in decoration and furnishings, that colours have the most direct effect on our emotions – making us feel happy or sad, relaxed or energetic. Certain colours seem to create specific sensations: blue is good for bedrooms (calming); yellow for bathrooms (wake-up), red for kitchens, and an entire rainbow for children's rooms. And that is only the start – there are also shades of colour that soften or accelerate those reactions. There is a very big difference between a pale, creamy pink – and fuchsia. Even some of the terms used for colours say something about their emotional associations: sky blue, buttercup yellow, slate grey, arctic white, for instance.

The variegated colours of traditional cityscapes: the pastel shades of the colonial Mexican cities of Morelia, regional capital of Michoacan (*opposite*), and San Cristobal de las Casas (*overleaf right*) are again reflected in the painted villas of San Francisco, known affectionately in the city as 'painted ladies' (*overleaf left*).



Such names are often the creations of paint manufacturers in which we also participate. Then we may consider the results of using colours together: blue and white, orange and yellow, red and green, or perhaps that should be expressed as 'geranium and lime', or 'flame and leaf'. Colour has a powerful way of evoking whole ranges of associations – a favourite football team, perhaps, or a slice of Battenburg cake. It can also evoke historic periods and styles – Art Nouveau, Art Deco, wartime austerity, or the Sixties. Certain shades of cream and dark green in a kitchen can evoke pre-World War II gloom, while grey and white may feel sophisticated and modern.

As its series title implies, this book is mainly concerned with the intimate and personal use of colour, but it also recognizes the debt we owe to the natural world and to the random or deliberate effects of colours applied to urban or rural exteriors. The photographs in the chapters that follow are part of the remarkable archive of the late Gilles de Chabaneix, a photographer who travelled the world and spent over twenty-five years observing and capturing life. He was expert at snapping inspiration wherever he saw it; his eye for colour and composition was incomparable. From the street market to the rooftops, from the most humble house to the palace, from the tiniest detail to the broadest vista, he captured the colours of everyday life, both interior and exterior. Here, they are arranged in the form of an inspirational sourcebook.

Our selection of the photographs led us to identify five major groupings. First, the monochrome, in which white, black and neutral shades of grey are either used for their own distinctive qualities or as backgrounds for splashes of more assertive

colours. In the blues, we have an opportunity of observing how colour can be used to create a particular 'feel', and how, combined with white, it can express a whole culture – that of the Mediterranean. Reds and pinks appear as the colours of luxury and fine living. Yellows and greens bring the sun and natural light into the interior. And a final grouping looks at those colours which seem to be principally derived from natural materials.

The natural world is, indeed, a great teacher. Painting a room bright green can create a shock effect, but so can a green vase in an all-white room, or a bright pink bloom against a grey or a blue wall. Some of the pictures in these pages rely for their impact simply on the colour from a slice of watermelon or a single strawberry. It doesn't even have to be a bright colour; a whole room of beige, cream, tan and taupe can be as powerful a mood creator as a blue rollerblind or a red rug. Some people say they want a blue and white kitchen, or an all-grey living room, but others are less certain. 'I just want a change', or 'I only know when I see it', is a common response. So that's where this book comes to the rescue. Try painting just a patch of wall initially. Look at the colour in different light; at night, when it's raining. Good colour choices don't rely on sunlight. If it's fabric for curtains or blinds – pin up a swatch; if it's a sofa, consider a big bright cushion or a loose cover. Give yourself the flexibility to have fun. Finally, don't forget the contribution that people themselves make to a room: their clothes, their books, their toys. A successful colour scheme is one that makes people feel comfortable too. And that brings us back again to the question of colour and feeling – and that is entirely up to you.