

colour by compass

Why does the same colour look so different in different rooms of your home?

The trend to use one colour throughout a house as an 'anchor' neutral has been going strong for some years. But why does that one colour look so different in different rooms? It's all to do with which direction the room faces: north, south, east or west.

Colour is not equal, unchanging and well behaved. This is why colour responds to the axis of light and why it looks totally divine in some rooms... and horrible in others. It also explains why at certain times of the day the colour morphs into a monster and bears little resemblance to the colour we have carefully chosen. Natural light is not equal, unchanging and well behaved either. We can know intellectually that the walls, the ceiling and sometimes the floor have been painted in exactly the same colour. But late in the afternoon, the low westerly sun is throwing light and shade across the floor and washing the walls. Suddenly, the colour on the floor appears different from the ceiling, and from the window walls where the shadows are deeper. The far wall glows with reflected sunlight. The light has changed. The colour has changed. Colour is never, ever static.

In bright daylight, yellow (and any colour that has a larger amount of yellow in it) will be seen at its best, appearing to be brighter even than pure white. At twilight, blue-green colours come into their own, and at nightfall, orange



and red appear to be more intense. In south-facing rooms used during the day, use warm mid-toned colours. No amount of pale tints or white will make these rooms appealing because the natural light aspect is cool, grey or sour. Try Resene Biscotti.

Cooler, denser colours will always work best in north-facing rooms. Because of our propensity for huge windows and skylights that allow plentiful sun (and glare) any bright, red, orange or yellow colours will only accentuate the heat and appear far brighter. Try Resene Half Lemon Grass for a lovely restful ambiance or Resene Emerge, a grey-green sea foam hue. Complex neutrals work best in east-facing rooms illuminated by the white light of early morning. Because easterly light is so cool and clear, it may emphasise greens and blues. Green will be seen to be very green and blues may reflect more teal. The walls in east-facing rooms will be shadowy from mid-morning onwards. Try Resene

Half Spanish White which stays light even when the sun passes and doesn't develop too much green undertone. Or try Resene Half Tea.

West-facing rooms that receive the sun's low rays will suit mid-toned muted colours as the rosy natural light will enhance cream, beige and taupe until they turn peach or terracotta. Any deep reds will look far brighter and orangy. Blue walls may turn drab. Deeper colours will alter the least. Try Resene Chapta And Verse, a colour that warms up and gains a sunset glow. Or Resene Ming which flashes blue, green and warm grey.

Using one colour throughout

If you want to use the same neutral colour throughout your home, vary its strength to cater for the different light qualities of each room. This is very easy to do with a monochromatic colour palette from the Resene Whites & Neutrals range. South and north-facing rooms usually work better with deeper versions of a colour while east and west rooms are better with the lighter variants. Accenting with colourful accessories (and mirrors where rooms are not blessed with light) can change how a colour is seen and help it be 'forgiven' if it doesn't look as good as it does within another space.

If you want to use a true white on the walls, try soft furnishings in soft greys, charcoals and blacks, and metallic silver or pewter tones as this helps draw the eyes away from walls, keeping the scheme from looking too cold or lacking in personality.

Exceptions to the light rule

In rooms where natural light is filtered through trees growing close to the house, a green cast may appear in any colour you use. Light reflecting through opaque glass will diffuse/soften any colour. The same colour seen

in a room with floor to ceiling picture windows will intensify. In tropical countries, bright colours are doubly enhanced and appear well balanced. Colours often can't be transplanted to another climate successfully. Think of that bold-coloured shirt or dress that was fabulous on holiday but lurks sadly at the back of your wardrobe once you're back home. In cold countries, natural light is filtered through layers of mist and cloud. Natural colours in these countries are grey based. Bolder reds, oranges and yellows appear softer and less intense.

When we turn the lights on in the evening, our colour undergoes another change. At night, an incandescent light source will make a yellow or cream coloured wall glow, but will turn beautiful blues and lavender walls grey.

Extremely bright glary rooms may benefit from a flat (matt) paint finish, such as Resene SpaceCote Flat. Very dim rooms, and hallways, may benefit from low sheen or higher sheen paint finishes.

Test your colours

The best way to see how colours react in different rooms is to test them. Using Resene testpots, paint your chosen colour onto a piece of A2 card (available from Resene ColorShops) leaving an unpainted border around the edges so your eye focuses on the reality of the colour. Move the card from wall to wall and from room to room. Watch how it changes not only with the light but against other colours in the room. To see how one colour will look on all four walls, roll the A2 card so the colour is on the inside, then look down into the cone to see how the colour will intensify once it is on all walls.

