

# Neutral territory

Vanessa Webb explores the exciting possibilities of using neutral paint colours for decorating, with some inspirational results.

If you thought using neutral colours for interior decoration was about as interesting as watching paint dry, think again. Just because you may wish to opt for neutral tones, it doesn't mean your decoration has to be dull, uninteresting or without attitude. Many people prefer to use these tones as opposed to colour, and there are many paint ranges on the market which perfectly complement natural flooring such as slate and wood and textured fabrics such as silk, voile and linens.

I find the best way to use neutrals is by way of texture or a mixture of paint effects, flat-painted colour and stenciling. Texture makes walls more interesting as some of these colours can appear flat and cold. However, if you start with a painted emulsion base and sponge one or two tones on top, the whole wall takes on dimension and depth, giving an illusion of space. For sponging, dilute the paint with a little water in a paint tray and



always dampen the natural sponge with water before use. Fired Earth's *Perfect Neutrals* are a good range to try and they also supply some lovely linens and embroidered voiles.

### Don't forget your ceilings.

Ceilings and woodwork are often still painted white. I would recommend a soft ivory such as *Gardenia BS10B15* by Dulux, in matt emulsion for ceilings and eggshell or satinwood finish for woodwork. Eggshell is mid-sheen, much subtler than high gloss and is a finish as opposed to a colour. Many people get confused about this. Fired Earth *Perfect Neutrals Orchid* is

a very soft white and Farrow and Ball's *Pointing* is slightly warmer. Both can be used for ceilings and woodwork as a change from white. White never stays white for long. It can appear grey or yellow very quickly, especially if you have central heating and open fires. I often apply a colourwash on ceilings with *Pale Parchment* by Farrow & Ball which doesn't darken the room and makes the ceiling interesting to gaze up at.

**LEFT** A mix of neutral tones and textured fabrics has resulted in a calm and peaceful interior. (Taken from *Interior Transformations* by Ann Grafton published by Arum Press)

**ABOVE** A deep border of *In Love with Taupe* by Fired Earth adds interest to this scheme. The top colour is *Pebble* also by Fired Earth.

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| PAINT EFFECT |  |
| COMPANY      | Fired Earth £17.99 for a 2.5l tin<br>Wall based colour <i>Thai Beige</i><br>Sponged with <i>Insense</i> and <i>Orchid</i> .              |
| FABRIC       |  |
| COMPANY      | 1. Fired Earth <i>Wild Daisy</i> Linen<br>voile costs £44.96 per m.<br>2. Fired Earth <i>Feathers</i> Linen<br>voile costs £47.96 per m. |



Smoked Trout  
Farrow & Ball



Pointing  
Farrow & Ball



Bone  
Farrow & Ball



New White  
Farrow & Ball





The Perfect Taupe  
Fired Earth



Kelly's Taupe  
Fired Earth



Clotted Cream  
Fired Earth



Thai Beige  
Fired Earth



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| <b>PAINT EFFECT</b> | Craig and Rose Paints   |
| <b>COMPANY</b>      | £16.99 per 2.5l tin<br>The 1829 range, <i>Deep Sung Cream</i> .<br>Stencilled with <i>Pale Mortlake Cream</i><br><i>Jasmine</i> stencil from The Stencil<br>Store, £9.99. |
| <b>FABRIC</b>       |   |
| <b>COMPANY</b>      | 1. Malabar <i>Indian Silk - Gold BK</i><br>costs £35 (137cm width) per m.<br>2. Malabar <i>Natural Tala</i> - costs<br>£29.50, (137cm width).                             |

**BELOW** Sandcastle Softsand by Crown has lent this wall an interesting texture. Expect to pay 2.5l tin.

The *Off-Whites Collection* from Farrow and Ball has 20 neutral colours plus the existing F & B range, creating a comprehensive palette for use on walls, woodwork and ceilings. All can be used independently or they will work equally well together. The company has gone back to its archives not only to neutrals mixed for restoration projects, but whites more recently developed for designers and decorators. With intriguing names such as *Clunch* and *Dimity*, this range is useful for anyone wanting to go neutral.

**Organic paints** are produced from natural raw materials such as minerals and plant matter. I tried Auro Organic Paints for the first time recently and they have produced some amazing Wall Glaze Waxes which you brush onto a painted surface and polish with a cloth when dry. This produces a subtle effect similar to a polished plaster finish and is much easier to do. These products are water soluble and can be applied to plaster or on top of existing emulsion paint, however silk emulsion paint may need to be sanded first before the base emulsion is applied.



a traditional recipe from Mediterranean Europe. All contain high quality organic pigments and water-based acrylics to give durability of use. They have a chalky texture and, although most of the colours are bright, there are several in their range which pass for neutrals.

**Stencilling** is often thought of as rather twee and some designs are uninspiring. However, it can look stunning as a ghostly stencil in neutral tones on a natural background. Craig and Rose's 1829 paint range is inspired by colours gleaned from six historical periods. *Deep Sung Cream* has the appearance of putty and *Pale Mortlake Cream* would be useful for walls, ceilings and

woodwork. I used a small synthetic sponge rather than a brush to stencil with and used the emulsion paint straight from the tin. Craig and Rose supply generous sample pots and their *Feng Shui Crystal Pearl* paints such as *Diamond* and *Moonstone* would be a stunning addition to a neutral scheme.

The Bloomsbury Paint Co offer a range of paints developed with the British Museum. Using their exhibits as inspiration, a range of colours and textures have been produced. I chose their

Casa Paint supply water-based matt interior paint for walls to



*Fresco* as a base and stencilled with *Limestone* and *Marble* using their Celtic Band Motif which lent itself to the architectural colours.

*Crown Decorative Effects* supply a large range of paint effects which include natural textures and colours. *Crown Softsand* adds dimension and depth to surfaces and can be applied with a brush. It may be useful for rough walls. *Modern Rustic Farmhouse Effect* is also applied with a brush in two coats for a matt, uneven painted finish. This range has many paint effect products which enable you to achieve finishes which include dragging, clouding and linen effects. It is advisable to buy samples of these products so you can make sure you are getting the effect you want.

### Make a style board

Always invest in sample pots and test colours on the wall in the room to be decorated. Live with them for several days to experience the effect of natural and artificial light; colours can change quite dramatically when days are dull and electric lights are put on. Also the direction the room is facing makes a difference. Even natural colours can change in different light and when used together. If you wish to pull together fabrics, paint colours and flooring, make a styleboard from a piece of white card. Stick down samples of the paint colour, fabrics and carpeting you have selected. Put large samples on for areas such as walls and smaller ones for accessories. This will give you a more balanced idea of the overall look you are trying to achieve in your room. □



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| PAINT EFFECT |   |
| COMPANY      | Crown £17.99 per 2.5l tin.<br>Wall based colour <i>Palladian 7</i><br>Sponged with <i>Palladian 1 &amp; 6</i>   |
| FABRIC       |   |
| COMPANY      | 1. <b>Fired Earth</b> Linen embroidered<br><i>Rowantree</i> costs £54.95 per m.<br>2. <b>Fired Earth</b> Linen embroidered<br><i>Bee Fabric</i> costs £53.96 per m. |

**ABOVE LEFT** Craig & Rose paints from the *1829* range. Base paint *Regency Cream* and ragged with *Regency White* to break up the colour priced at £16.99 per 2.5l tin.

**ABOVE RIGHT** The base colour is *321 White* emulsion base and *370-10 Auro Wall Wax* applied with a brush buffed to a sheen with a soft cloth when dry all from Auro Organic Paint. Paints are £14.99 per 2.5l tin and the wax is around £16 for 500ml.

### USEFUL CONTACTS

**Dulux**, Tel: 01753 550555 [www.dulux.co.uk](http://www.dulux.co.uk)  
**Farrow and Ball**, Tel: 01202 876141.  
[farrow-ball@farrow-ball.com](mailto:farrow-ball@farrow-ball.com)  
**Fired Earth**, Tel: 01295 812088.  
**Crown Paints**, Tel: 01254 704951.  
[www.crownpaint.co.uk](http://www.crownpaint.co.uk)  
**Craig and Rose**, Tel: 01383 740066.  
**The Stencil store**, Tel: 01923 285577.  
**Bloomsbury Paint Co**, Tel: 01482 865092.  
[www.stencildesigns.co.uk](http://www.stencildesigns.co.uk)  
**Casa Paint Company**, Tel: 01296 483150.  
**Auro Organic Paints**, Tel: 01799 543077.  
[auroorganicpaintsuk@cwcom.net](mailto:auroorganicpaintsuk@cwcom.net)  
**Nutshell Earth and Mineral Pigments**,  
 Tel: 01736 360788.  
**La Tienda Mediterranean Earth and Mineral Pigments**, Tel: 01736 360788.  
**Vanessa Webb**, specialist paint effects and courses, Tel: 0117 949 6271.