

Architectural colour consultant Ptolemy Mann gives her advice on brightening the workplace

> Why do you think colour has traditionally been neglected in office design?

Colour is most often associated with pleasure, decoration and emotion and therefore deemed unsuitable for the office environment. There has been a strong fashion for several decades now that interiors of a serious and intellectual nature are expressed through white, grey and black, a neutral colour palette. The opening chapter of David Batchelor's book Chromophobia is a fantastic analysis of our obsession with white. In the last 10 - 15 years our attitudes to the work environment have changed significantly and consequently so has the way we use colour within them.

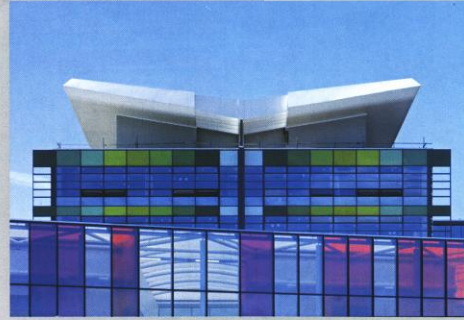
> What colours would you recommend for a 21st century office?

The first question I always ask my clients is whether they want a 'warm' or a 'cool' environment. I have discovered that more often it is the value (light or darkness) and saturation (strength and depth) of a colour that has more effect and impact than the actual colour choice itself. Traditionally cool colours, greens and blues for example, can be used in warmer tones of lime green and turquoise to create an inviting atmosphere. Some offices are more informal or intimate than others and potentially want a warm and inviting spectrum of colours. A more official or serious workspace can still have colour within it but possibly cooler colours. Depending on the nature of the business and the atmosphere required a unique colour profile can be developed for a specific workspace. It's hard to say one particular colour will work well in all offices, in fact I usually recommend that you avoid one colour everywhere and instead select several colours that work together. It's the interaction of colours together that create dynamic and interesting spaces to work in.

> How can colour effect mood and motivation in the workspace?

In my experience colour has a huge and positive impact on mood and motivation. This idea of a white box devoid of any colour promoting hard work and concentration appears to be totally unfounded. Humans become bored and agitated by neutral environments just introducing a few details of colour can stimulate and give the mind something to concentrate on. I don't feel it's necessary to saturate every surface

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Top and above King's Mill NHS hospital facade, Nottinghamshire

with bright colour but small areas of carefully placed colour can go a long way. I am also a firm believer in the simple use of colour in wayfinding. Staff and visitors to office buildings all need help to navigate around their workspaces and colour can aid this process.

> How much is our response to colour informed by experience?

What's fascinating about colour is that we all have our own perception of it. A personal history of colour experiences and associations stored

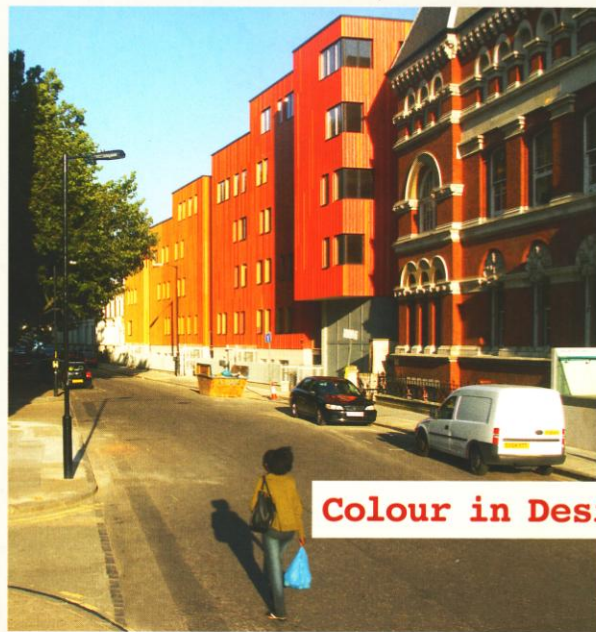
away that is unique to each of us. The colour theorist Josef Albers famously showed a hundred people the same shade of red and got a hundred different descriptions - as if it were a hundred different colours. That's what makes it so hard to quantify or justify, we each see colour differently. My solution to this is to engage several close tones and shades of a colour rather than relying on one. In corporate branding colour association is used constantly. We all know the shade of orange used by easyjet or Orange mobile phones and we now associate that colour with those brands, whether we want to or not.

> Is colour important on the outside of a building as well as the inside?

Extremely important. Again, not necessarily all over a building or bright primary colours but a little carefully used colour can give soul and identity to an otherwise generic office building. Strong colour doesn't suit all types of buildings and locations. Colour can also be introduced easily with different materials - wood, metal, glass, foliage, and so on - rather than applied. I recently worked on King's Mill NHS hospital in Nottinghamshire and I was able to transform the façade of the building into an artwork, a myriad of undulating colour across the large rural façade. It has given the hospital a unique and inviting appearance. The brief was to reduce 'threshold anxiety' and I think this idea can be applied to some types of office buildings too. If a company wants to make their office into a beacon and statement in itself colour is a good way to achieve this; inside and out.

> Where should people look to for inspiration in colour schemes?

Inspiration for colour can come from anywhere. I am an advocate of 'intelligent' colour; the use of colour in a meaningful way rather than random colour selection. The obvious starting point is to look at what your specific company does and develop a colour scheme that reflects something related to it. The other approach is to be completely personal or whimsical about it, the colour of your childhood bedroom, your



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favourite lipstick, whatever.

We can attach meaning to colour in many different ways and how we choose to share that meaning is up to us. The wonderful thing about colour is that there are no rules, despite what some people may think I believe this is true. Colour cannot be scientifically explained or justified; that's what makes it so interesting. Come to the **Aram gallery** and see the show **Significant Colour**, it will be a great source of colour inspiration, **7th May - 26th June**.

> What would be your tip to designers trying to give office spaces a new look and feel on a shoestring budget?

Paint; it's cheap, it comes in the widest selection of colours and if you make a mistake you can change it relatively easily and quickly. Also lighting; clever, interesting, coloured light is now more accessible and flexible with different filters and LED's available. Art; a simple, striking artwork, strategically placed can make a big difference. Doesn't have to be big or flashy but can bring interest and focus to reception space for example. It also gives a sense of arrival to visitors and something to look at while they wait.

Above Mansey Street Housing, London
by **DRM Architects**