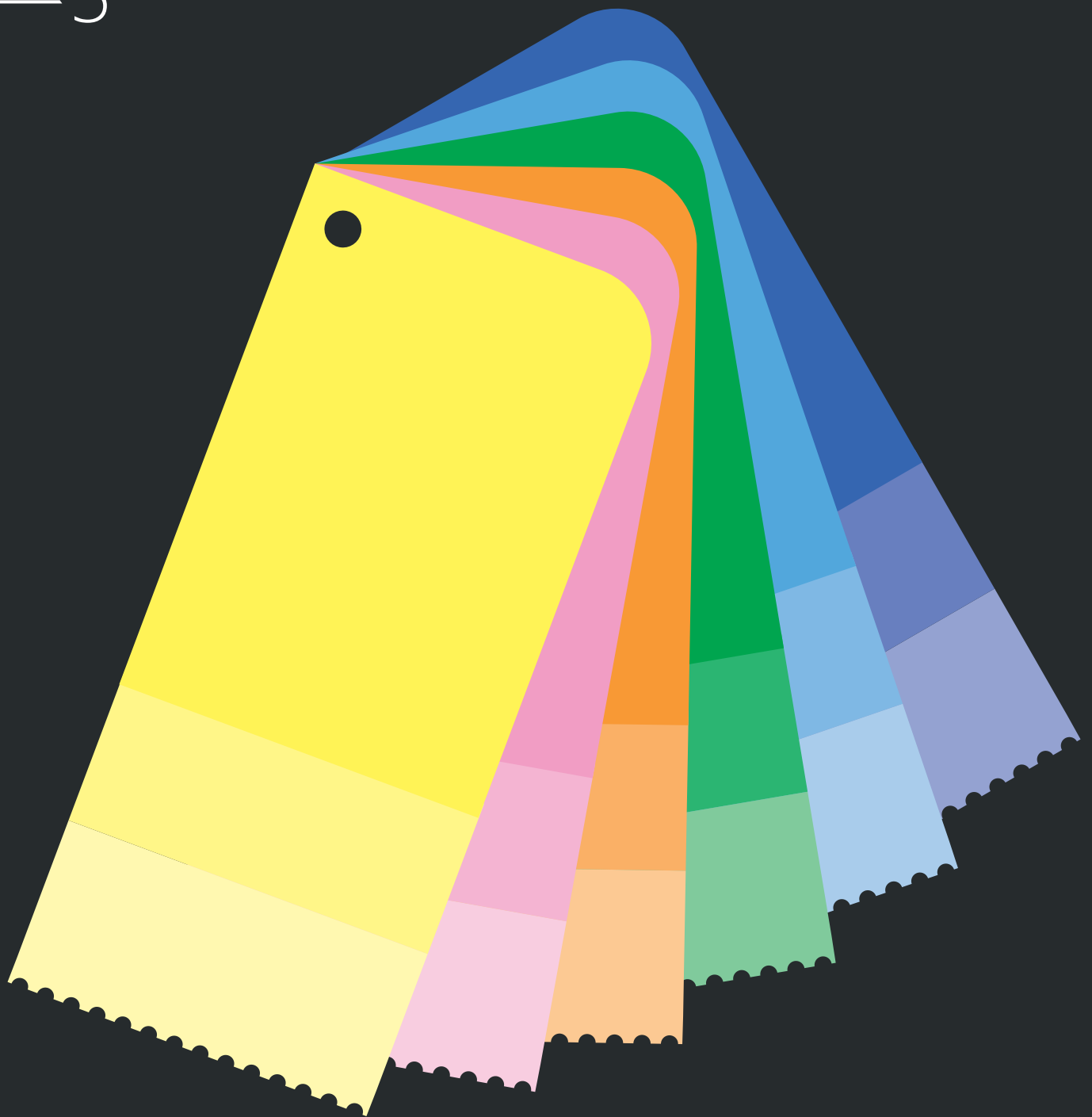


Design
Update
—5

VittrA



Colour +
the Senses

VitrA

Editors letter

As you may have guessed, this issue of VitrA's Design Update is all about colour. For many, colour is an ordering principle that helps us make sense of the world, permeating our lives from early childhood onwards. Colour may be perceived visually but it has a strong influence cognitively too. After all, colour words are among the first we learn and from then on colour looms large in lived experiences, not least in our language and everyday expressions like 'in the pink' or 'you brighten up my world'.

Colour is a subject at the intersection of a broad spectrum of disciplines, including neuroscience, philosophy, art theory and psychology to name but a few. But it's perhaps through design that colour exerts the greatest influence over our lives, being integral to the spaces we inhabit, the lighting we experience and the objects we interact with every day. As humans we perceive colour through biological and cultural lenses. I think nearly everyone would agree that colour influences our emotions and wellbeing too, even if we might disagree about exactly how and why.

2022 is the year of colour for VitrA London – our Clerkenwell-based showroom – with our cultural programme of events and talks centred around the subject. To signal the theme we've commissioned Colour Rush, a site-specific immersive artwork for our Clerkenwell hub from artist Lothar Götz, which will be casting coloured light in and around our showroom throughout Clerkenwell Design Week and beyond.

I hope you enjoy the mix of creative minds we've gathered together in this issue, and that our contributors' thoughts on colour and how it influences so many different aspects of our lives will spark design inspiration and new ideas.

— Margaret Talbot, VitrA Marketing Manager

PS: In case you were wondering, my favourite colour is blue.
What's yours?

“Colour provokes a psychic vibration. Colour hides a power still unknown but real, which acts on every part of the human body.” Wassily Kandinsky

“Light in nature creates the movement of colours.” Sir Isaac Newton

“I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way – things I had no words for.”

Georgia O’Keeffe

“Colour in certain places has the great value of making the outlines and structural planes seem more energetic.” Antonio Gaudi

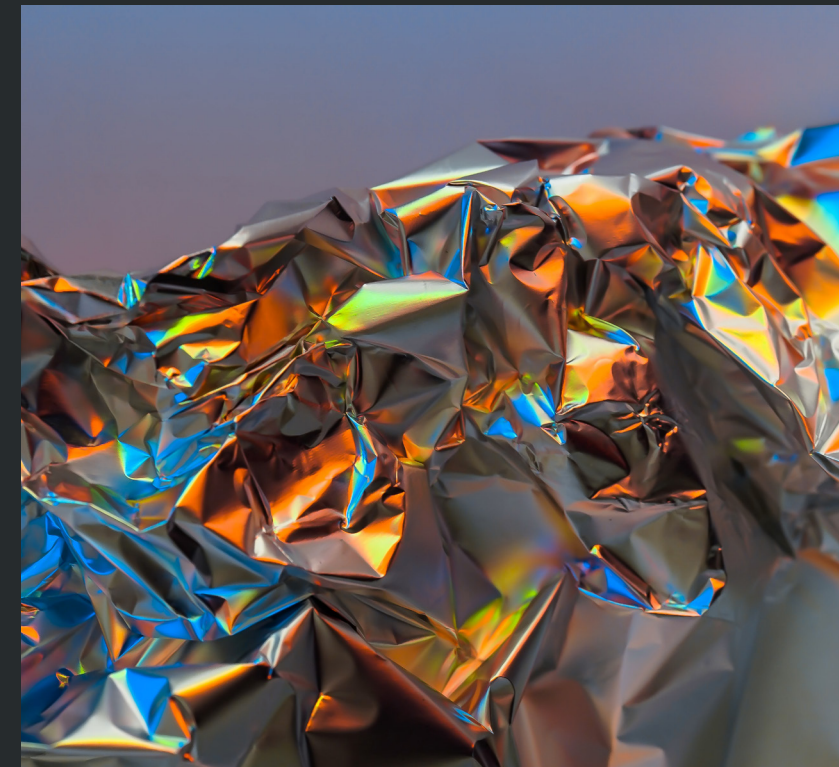


Image: Unsplash / Vinicius AmmX Amano

— WEIRD SENSATION FEELS GOOD:
The World of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response curator James Taylor-Foster talks to *Design Update* about ASMR’s impact on design and the role of colour in ASMR experiences (see p8)

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Colour

+ Me

— Product designer Terri Pecora and Vitra Design Director Erdem Akan chat to *Design Update* about working with colour

Design Update: Where do you turn to for inspiration on colour?

Erdem Akan: In general at Vitra we look towards nature for inspiration on colour. We try to work with a natural palette of colours and materials – referencing the earthy tones of sand, stone and clay. It's part of a strategy to challenge inflexible notions of bathroom as white-cube, laboratory-like spaces. We focus on natural forms and colour because we want bathrooms to be at the centre of wellbeing in homes and hospitality settings.

The way we work with colour is quite emotional initially, based on instinctive decisions on lots of samples. We may start with the heart but we clarify with the head, revisiting those decisions with a rational mindset and thinking across all elements in the ranges.

Terri Pecora: Museums and galleries are where I head for inspiration. In Los Angeles that might be the Museum of Contemporary Art, Hauser & Wirth or The Landing. In Milan it might be Massimo de Carlo, HangarBicocca and the Prada Foundation. My go-to artists in terms of colour are Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler and Annie Albers. I also just bought a mixed media piece with really beautiful colours by a young American artist called Amanda Valdez.

I've always been interested in the fashion world and might turn to some of the classic designers like Dries van Noten and Paul Smith for inspiration on colour. I employ a lot of neutrals in my own product design, adding highlights to a more muted background palette. Mid-century palettes are quite an influence – Cadmium orange paired with navy blue and beige is a good example.

DU: Do you apply any particular colour theories in your work, or is your approach more instinctive?

EA: I did learn about colour at university but was perhaps educated more by working in the automotive industry in the late 1990s. My responsibility initially was car interiors, including their colours, so my eyesight was tested to see how well I could differentiate between shades. I was given 20 different variants each of yellow, red and blue tones on coloured chips and had to pick the closest matches. It sounds easy but after 20 minutes or so it becomes much more difficult. I was pretty good actually – 98% in two colours and 94% in the third.

A big factor in working with colour is the scale of application – is it going to be part of a building façade or a detail in a product? Another is lighting context – is it daylight or fluorescent or tungsten? And of course, materiality and finish also affect colour, whether a surface is matt or gloss, smooth or textured. All of these things affect perception of colour, which is after all much more important than a colour reference number. Of course, there is a mathematics to colour but it doesn't take

into account that perception changes across environments. So, at Vitra's design studio we always assess colours in a wide range of different conditions.

TP: I'm instinctive rather than theoretical, and that goes for everything I do. But I do remember a particular colour class at ArtCenter in Pasadena that has followed me my whole life. It taught me to see colour and light. We'd paint 1000s of tiny colour swatches in different shades on watercolour paper that we'd stretched in our bathtubs. Then we'd apply them to a grid and work with opposites, so in one corner you'd have yellow chips and in the other blue, for instance, and you'd work slowly towards the centre in a blending effect. It was quite a laborious process, but it did teach me how to look at colour and how to observe the way light changes it, and to really notice what happens when one colour is juxtaposed with another. I think a colour class should be mandatory for every child in elementary school – just so they can appreciate the richness and beauty of colour in their world.

With *Plural*, the bathroom range I designed with Vitra, the concept was about gradually transfiguring the idea of the bathroom as a cold, clinical space into a warm, welcoming, domestic one – adding colour and expressions of personality with form and furniture as well as with personal touches like paintings. In some way I think those colour exercises at college may have influenced my approach – working on all those carefully considered transitions.

“The way we work with colour is quite emotional initially, based on instinctive decisions. Though we start with the heart we clarify with the head, revisiting decisions with a rational mindset.”

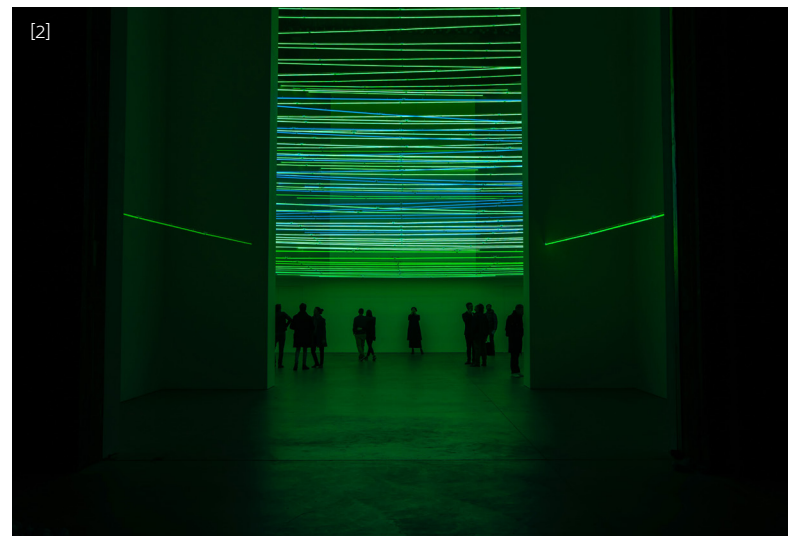
Erdem Akan

“Mid-century palettes are quite an influence – Cadmium orange paired with navy blue and beige is a good example.” Terri Pecora

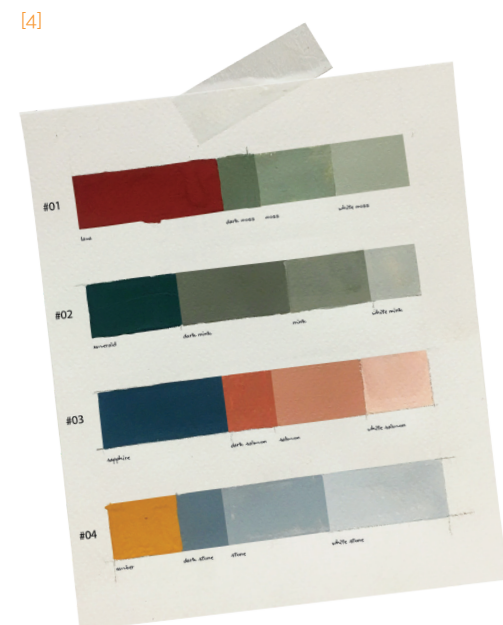
Clockwise from below:
[1] Dries Van Noten top SS22
[2] Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan
[3] Sento Kids range by Vitra
[4] Vitra colour swatches, Vitra



driesvannoten.com



Unsplash / Michel Catalisano



DU: Is colour subjective?

EA: I think there are probably at least three dimensions. One is very subjective, the other is social and the third is universal. Colour is very experience-based. We all have favourite colours. Some will be important because of memories, others through conditioning – like pale blue for a baby boy. But there’s also another layer, which is trend. This goes in cycles and relates to what’s happening in the world – what we’re all facing together, whether that’s war or climate change. I do think that political and economic and social changes influence mood around colour.

At the universal level are the colours of nature. When we visit the coast or a woodland, whatever the trends, whatever the global circumstances, the colours of nature look fantastic because they are elemental and they transcend time – though there’s an element of environmental conditioning in that too because it will depend on the environment and light you’re used to, whether you’re Scandinavian or Mediterranean, or used to watery or earthy environments.

TP: I definitely feel that colour is subjective. Yes, you can analyse the constituent parts of colour scientifically in some ways, but perception is so personal and it’s also so much based on light and contrasts with other colours and even the mood you’re in. Colour is very emotional, and I believe that our preferences are deeply rooted in our personalities. Another way of looking at this is thinking about colour vision deficiency, which is a spectrum rather than binary and may manifest across red-green or blue-yellow tones. How can colour be objective when people see it in so many different ways?

DU: Has there been an occasion when you’ve had a strong difference of opinion with a client or colleague about colour?

EA: We work with a lot of different territories and I’d say the culture around colour feels very familiar to me across the UK and America, Turkey and Mediterranean countries. But having said that I have been surprised by colour decisions in Russia and France. To understand more I visited both countries just to see their buildings and architecture and even the earth tones of the land. It helped a lot – I found the field of colour can be a ground for building empathy, for getting to know other philosophies and cultures.

TP: In general, no. Perhaps because my work isn’t centrally premised on colour and also because I tend to use neutral palettes – the core propositions in my work are more about concepts of use, or form. The other thing is that in my field, although there are trend waves around colour, it’s not like fashion where there might be a radical change every season. So, I find it pretty easy to be on the same page with my clients about colour.

Having said that, it’s interesting to observe the post-graduate students I teach at Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan. It’s a very international school; it’s not unusual for my class to have students from all over the world. In that context it’s very apparent that cultures have such different sensibilities around colour.

DU: What’s your favourite colour?

EA: Green.

TP: Red. 🍷



Monoblock basin from the *Plural* range, designed by Vitra and Terri Pecora. Sanitaryware in the *Plural* range is available in a number of colours including matt terra rossa, matt moss green and matt clay beige

“Colour is very emotional, and I believe that our preferences are deeply rooted in our personalities.”

Terri Pecora

Colour + ASMR

Adobe Stock

— ASMR is a feeling of wellbeing triggered by specific sensory experiences. *Design Update* talks to *WEIRD SENSATION FEELS GOOD: The World of ASMR* curator James Taylor-Foster about what happens when ASMR is lifted out of our screens and into real space and the role of colour in ASMR experiences.

James Taylor-Foster has described ASMR as design that mediates between mind and body. The term Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response may have been coined as recently as 2010, says the curator of contemporary architecture and design at ArkDes – Sweden's national centre for architecture and design – but the physical sensations of euphoria or deep calm triggered in many people by certain sounds, touch or movement like whispering or tapping are almost certainly primal human behaviours.

Taylor-Foster is talking to *Design Update* online from the Stockholm museum, where he's sitting in front of a rare, colourful fabric wall hanging by early modernist architect Josef Frank. The world's first exhibition on ASMR debuted at ArkDes in 2020, and this summer it transfers to London's Design Museum. 'ASMR is without doubt one of the most important movements to come out of the Internet, they say. It's a space of real creativity that also subverts everything the Internet was designed to do. It plays on interfaces with the design objects we've become so familiar with, whether that's our smartphone screens or types of wearables, like headphones.'

It's probably no coincidence that during the pandemic ASMR engagement snowballed. Although the data can be tricky to pin down, Taylor-Foster notes that Alphabet, owner of Google Search and YouTube, has recorded a monumental increase in related searches. 'Individuals and research communities are beginning to take notice, asking: "What's going on here – is it psychological, physiological or both?"'

ASMR plugs a gap in our hyperconnected, super-fast world, the curator observes, by carving out space for slowness and softness, for close listening and close feeling – a form of self-medication against loneliness or anxiety, for instance, through design. 'There's a certain precariousness to the way we live our lives today, a distance from the kind of experiences that were probably commonplace 50 years ago – like walking through a park listening not to a podcast but to the sound of a bumble bee close to your ear.'

Visitors to the exhibition in London will be greeted by a giant arena of padded upholstery, part of the exhibition scenography by ÉTER Architects in which kilometres of soft sausages fold and wrap around each other, resembling something between a brain and an intestinal tract. 'What I think ASMR can teach architecture and design,' says Taylor-Foster, 'is that the distance between how we experience things haptically and how we experience things visually and acoustically is not that wide'.

The exhibition gathers works from 28 contributors, ranging from sound art to motion design and immersive performances. Some works are by 'ASMRtists', others can be described as unintentional ASMR. Paintings and footage of 1970s TV artist Bob Ross, for instance, who's widely regarded as a godfather of the genre in the ASMR community, feature alongside work by Björk and designers Wang & Söderström. A new interactive experience for the UK exhibition is *Meridians Meet* by Julie Rose Bower, which provides a space where visitors can make their own ASMR and come close to the sounds that surround us.



Visitors experiencing ASMR at ArkDes, Stockholm.
Image: Elsa Solång

“Individuals and research communities are beginning to take notice, asking: ‘What’s going on here – is it psychological, physiological or both?’”

James Taylor-Foster

What happened in Stockholm when ASMR hit the public gallery for the first time? ‘Well, the first thing we found out is that it is possible to feel ASMR in public space, to create an environment where people feel safe enough to lean into the vulnerability of feeling,’ says Taylor-Foster. ‘I walked into the gallery one morning and saw a couple, who must have been in their 60s or 70s, asleep and holding hands in front of an episode of Bob Ross’s *The Joy of Painting*’ ArkDes, he notes, saw a significant increase in dwell time at the exhibition, way beyond the usual 30-minute mark.

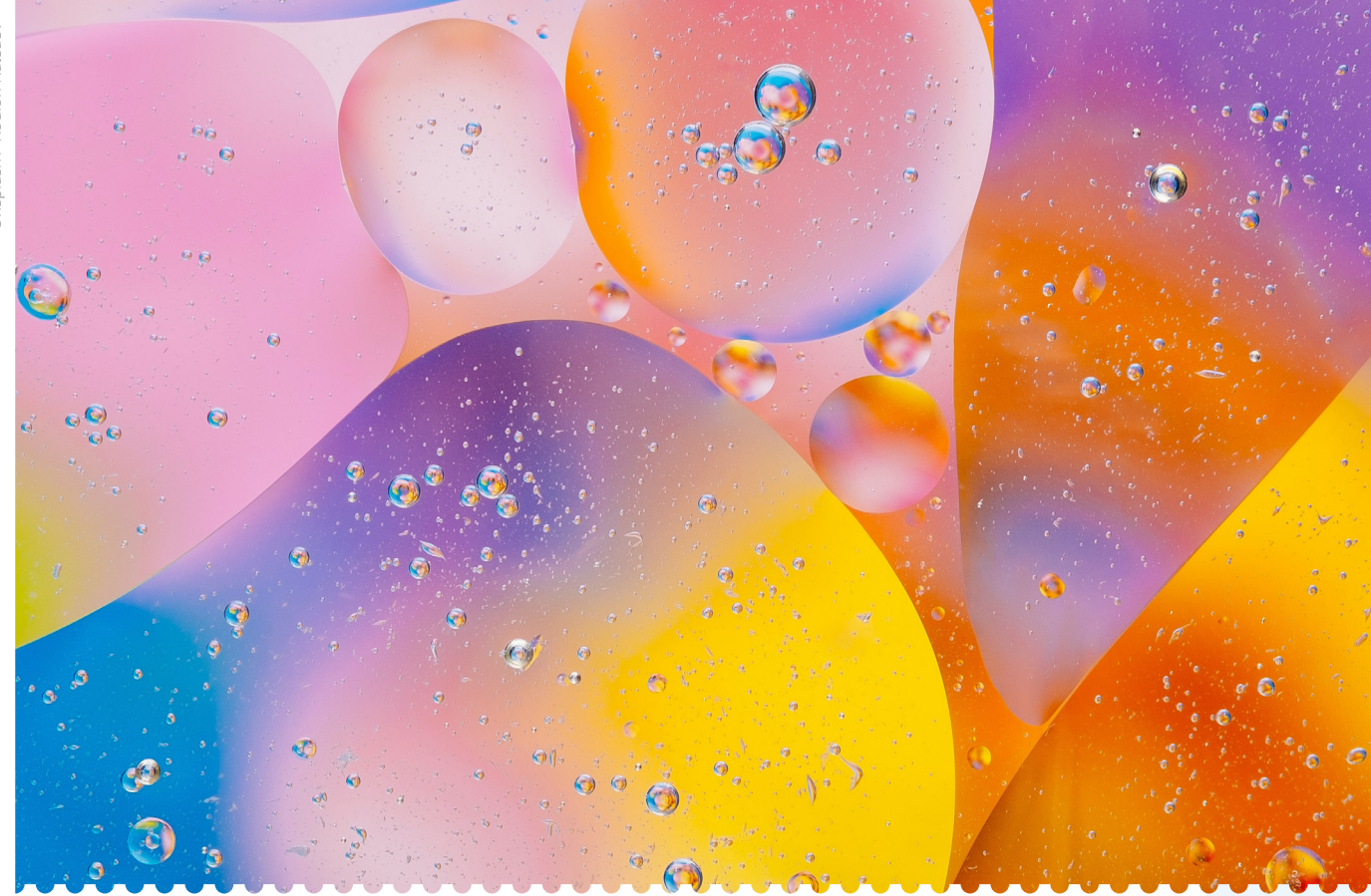
A new dimension to the exhibition as it transfers to the UK is a research project by Dr Giulia Poerio of the University of Essex, recording the first direct physiological evidence of the relaxing effects of ASMR. ‘Every visitor will be invited to respond to a questionnaire and that data will be collated to feed into Giulia’s and ASMRNet’s ongoing research,’ says Taylor-Foster. ‘One of the interesting things about ASMR is how it’s triggered by different things for different people. Some people seem to be more susceptible, others don’t feel it at all.’

The main recognised triggers are sound and touch, so how does colour fit into the picture? ‘Broadly I would say the language of colour around ASMR is about constructing something complementary to the experience. It tends to be pastel, with soft tones because colour has psychosomatic relationships to the way we navigate the world; red tends to mean danger, for instance,’ says Taylor-Foster. The exhibition itself is organised around two types of colour – one metallic and reflective and the other a warm beige. The exhibition identity by Agga Stage and Alexander Söder embraces internet culture colours, making use of hyperlink blue and the faded purple of a visited URL. ‘The way ASMRtists use colour in their work is often about negotiating between background and foreground. Backgrounds are often shadowy, in a different focal range. But the trigger itself, say an object, can be any colour. This is where what is in focus meets colour.’

Asked how ASMR might influence designers and architects, Taylor-Foster cites the example of exhibition architects ÉTER. ‘I’ve noticed a change in their work since they designed the first iteration of the exhibition in Stockholm. They’ve designed a school, for example, which resembles the expression in this space, embracing a new kind of softness in their practice. I think what ASMR reveals is our relationship to softness in a world of design that is too often hard-edged. I’m optimistic that ASMR has the potential to entwine with architectural practice in a deep way.’

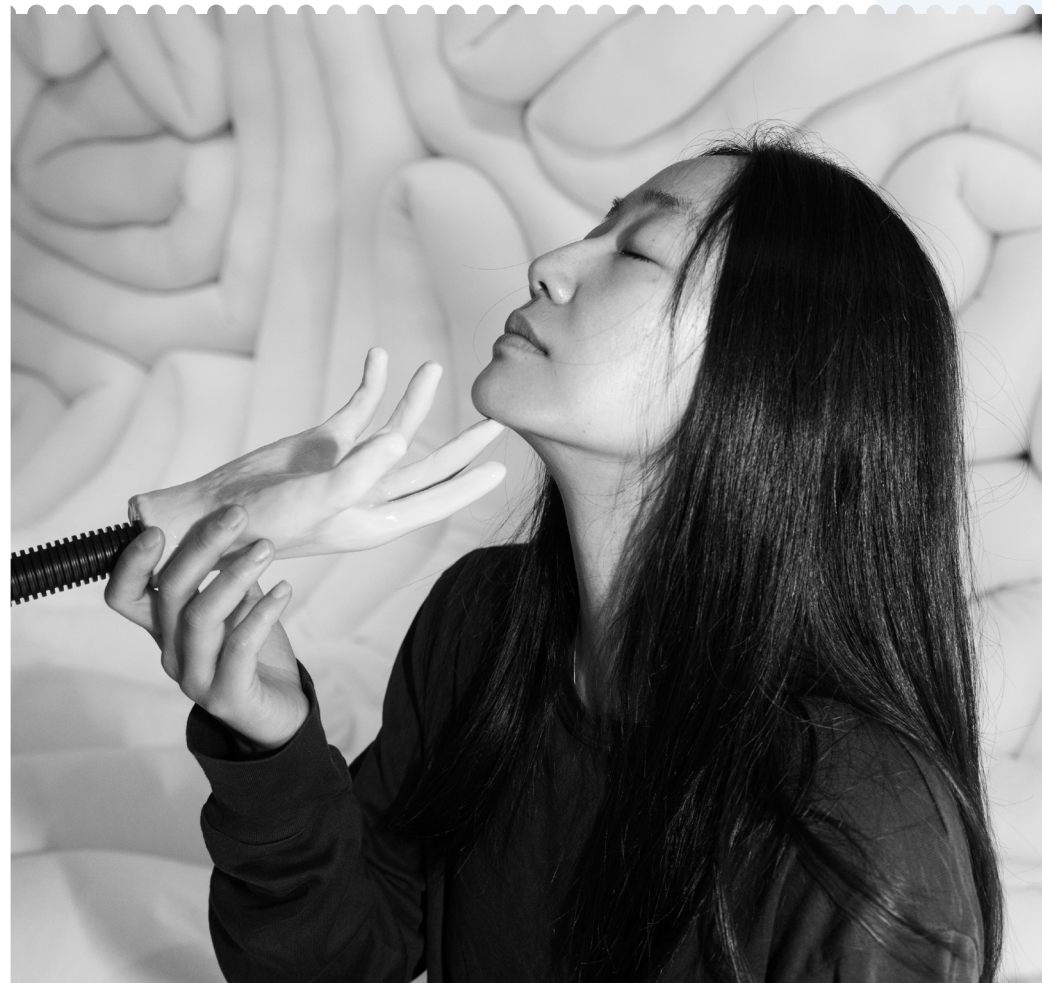
WEIRD SENSATION FEELS GOOD: The World of ASMR is on show at the Design Museum, London between 13 May–14 October 2022. It is presented in collaboration with ArkDes.

Unsplash / Rodion Kutsaev



[1]

ArkDes



[3]

“One of the interesting things about ASMR is how it’s triggered by different things for different people. Some people seem to be more susceptible, others don’t feel it at all.” James Taylor-Foster

©ÉTER



[2]

Clockwise from top:
[1] ASMR colours
[2] Exhibition installation by ÉTER architects at ArkDes
[3] An exhibition visitor experiences ASMR at ArkDes

Colour + Perception



Unsplash / Dragos Gontariu

— *Design Update* talks to Sussex Colour Group & Baby Lab researcher Alice Skelton about colour, perception, nature and nurture

Design Update: Can you describe the focus of the Sussex Colour Group?

AS: Our research area is colour perception and how it develops from infancy to adulthood. There are lots of angles to that, including how our perception and aesthetic preferences around colour are impacted by the environments we grow up in. My particular background is philosophy and psychology but there are around 15 of us in the lab here at the University of Sussex, which was set up by Professor Anna Franklin in 2011. You'll find us conducting our research in a light-tight black box.

DU: What does the world of colour look like to babies?

AS: A popular misconception is that new-borns can only see in black and white, but there have been around 50 years of studies showing that babies discriminate between red and white light, although they don't discriminate in the same way between blue and white. It appears that the red-green dimension of colour vision develops earlier than the blue-yellow, which comes at around 2-3 months. By that point the mechanisms are essentially the same as an adult's but with the saturation dial turned right down, so the world is very washed out. Babies need colours to be very intense. It's a shame when you think of all those pastel environments they arrive into...

DU: And how does colour perception develop from there, when does nurture take over from nature?

AS: It's difficult to know when the balance tips from nature to nurture. It might be when children are learning colour words around age 3 that they start tuning into culture more than sensation with their grouping of colour. But that's just one small part of colour perception and we're still learning how nature/nurture fits together. Colour categorisation is closely connected to language and different languages have different colour categories, which complicates things. English has 11 what we call basic colour terms – red, green, blue and so on – but Turkish has 12 with separate categories for light and dark blue, and some languages have only five. Broadly speaking colour sensitivity doubles with age, peaking in adolescence, so a 10-year old's will be twice as good as a five-year old's.

DU: What is the Group working on now?

AS: We've just completed a study that compared how long 30 babies looked at photos of cities versus photos of nature. Perhaps surprisingly, the babies looked for longer at the cities, which ties in with a similar recent study from another lab on toddlers and young children. People might presume that natural environments will be more visually appealing to babies, but it seems that's a learned response.

Younger children and babies are driven by what we call low-level sensory mechanisms. Very early colour preference seems to be defined by what grabs their attention most, like high contrasts. How that evolves into colour preferences expressed in terms of 'I like it' is an interesting question, and one we don't yet know the answer to. We've also recently done some consultation with a couple of theatre groups doing productions around the subject of infant colour perception – *First Light* at the Barbican and *Kaleidoscope* by Filskit Theatre.

DU: Are you just looking at colour in a UK context?

AS: No, we have two cross-cultural projects running at the moment. One with a team in Ecuador focusing on people who live in the rainforest versus people who live in the capital city of Quito. The other is looking at how colour perception changes across the year above the Arctic Circle, with 24 hours of daylight in summer and 24 hours of darkness in winter. Both these projects involve observations of adults doing tasks but also wearing headcams, so we can get an idea of their visual experience, and sensors so we can gauge their light exposure. The Ecuador project involves groups with shared genetic backgrounds but different developmental experiences. What's surprising so far is that although the city and rainforest are apparently very different, with one environment feeling very green and the other very grey, the essential colour experience of bluish-yellow natural light appears remarkably constant.

DU: Is colour subjective?

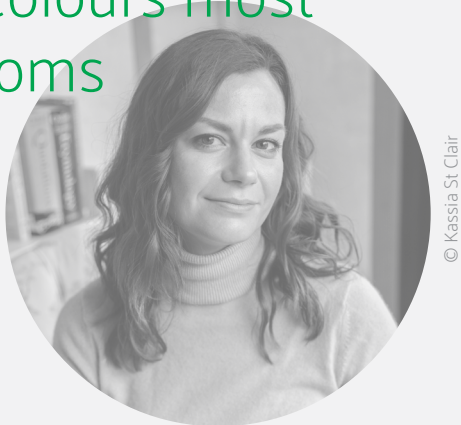
AS: It's a big question. In a fundamental way no, because most people have three functioning colour receptors and mine are very similar to yours. But it gets more complicated as you get further through the visual system. You may remember the Twitter sensation of 'the dress' a few years ago. People couldn't agree if an image showed a blue and black or a white and gold dress, and it turned out this depended on whether they thought the picture was taken in shade or sunlight. We might be getting the same visual input but because we all carry around expectations of what we're going to see without even realising it, we can come to some very different conclusions. Mostly, however, we agree on what red is, even if we might disagree around the boundaries of where red turns pink.

DU: Sometimes it seems there's lots of opinion around the psychology of colour but less in the way of evidence...

AS: Yes. I wouldn't advise wearing a particular colour to make you feel better, for instance. But if wearing that colour does make you feel better, that's likely to be down to associations rather than something inherent to the colour. Fortunately, associations are things that can be researched too. 🌈

The Secret Lives of Colour

— *Design Update* catches up with *The Secret Lives of Colour* author Kassia St Clair to discuss about some of the colours most frequently found in our bathrooms



© Kassia St Clair

From left:
[1] Kassia St Clair
[2] Avocado
[3] Lead
[4] YInMn Blue



Unsplash / Gabre Cameron



Adobe Stock



Adobe Stock

When Kassia St Clair set out to write a cultural history of 75 colours she had no idea that her book would end up being translated into 20 languages. Morphing out of her column for *Elle Decoration* magazine, *The Secret Lives of Colour* tapped into a widespread fascination with the social and scientific origins of colours, becoming Radio 4's book of the week and receiving rave reviews in publications as diverse as *Chemistry World* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

WHITE AND THE BATHROOM

White is a colour strongly associated with the bathroom – as well as a certain kind of modernist zeal in architecture – but where does it come from, chemically speaking, and is it even a colour? St Clair explains that the white pigment we use today is mostly Titanium-based but that before the twentieth century it tended to be either chalk- or lead-based. 'Use of lead white is probably where some of the mixed messages around the colour's associations come from,' she says. 'It was made by steeping strips of lead along with chemicals like vinegar for 30 days in double-bellied pots surrounded by animal dung. People used the resulting lead carbonate for all sorts of things including as a cosmetic. Unfortunately, it was very poisonous and could lead to a horrible death.'

St Clair points out that before Sir Isaac Newton's experiments with prisms in the 1660s, there was widespread belief in Christian societies that pure white light was indisputable evidence of divine power. 'Initially there was huge resistance to the idea that white light could be broken down into seven colours. Until then, white had been seen as the base unit, so it seemed almost heretical to say it was made up of yellows, blues, purples and so on. The reality is that most people simply don't think about the absence or presence of light when they're choosing the colours of their towels, for instance. But if you ask a physicist whether white is a colour they'll probably say, "No, it's an expression of light".'

AVOCADO

And what does St Clair think were the cultural mores behind the avocado bathroom suites of the 1970s? 'I think the influence there was the great intellectual and cultural movement around the earth being seen as fragile. You had people going up into space and taking photographs of our world for the first time, and it was also an era of big landmark cases against pollution and a lot of anxiety around the nuclear age. People were recognising the damage we're capable of doing to our environment. At the same time land artists were working on big sculptures that harnessed

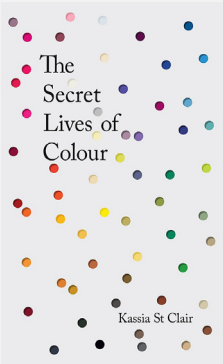
natural elements. The way people consumed products reflected all those ideas, and popular palettes for goods included earthy colours like Harvest Golds and burnt oranges as well as Avocado.' On whether Avocado is headed for a comeback in the bathroom, her take is that we've become more sophisticated consumers since the 1970s, less likely to think we can consume our way out of a problem. 'There's also the avocado toast association,' she adds. 'Avocado as a colour now signifies a shift, an inter-generational tension – the idea that if millennials would only give up avocado toast they'd be rolling in affordable housing.'

COLOUR AND LANGUAGE

An underlying thread across St Clair's stories of colour in art, industry and society is the relationship with language and colour, and whether words shape the shades we see. This can be a problematic area, she says, simply because a lot of the seminal studies around language and colour in the mid-twentieth century were undertaken by teams of usually white male professors travelling far afield to study "primitive" tribes. The assumption was that as a culture "developed" it would gain more words for colour. 'But Russian has more basic colour terms than English and I don't think anyone would say that makes Russian speakers necessarily more intellectually or culturally developed,' says St Clair. 'Beyond the basic colour terms, one of the reasons we have lots of words for colours is that we've been a consumer society for hundreds of years, and we're used to the idea of colour as a basis of choice.'

BEYOND COLOUR

St Clair's next book project, due to be published in 2023, moves away from colour to focus on one of the world's first long-distance motor races, a dash from Peking to Paris that took place in 1907 when motoring was a leisure pursuit of the elite. More widely, the book investigates an era that laid the groundwork for the world we know today, including the geopolitical dimension of oil and the existence of plastic, first developed in fully synthetic form in 1907 as Bakelite. But she isn't done with colour yet: 'Colour is always changing, and I still find it fascinating. New colours are being invented all the time. There's YInMn blue – the first new blue in 200 years – discovered by Professor Mas Subramanian in Oregon. The same chemist is now trying to find a commercial red and if he does it will be a billion-dollar project because the reds we already have are either not that bright or not that colourfast. Just as language and societies change, colour keeps changing too'.



The Secret Lives of Colour, Kassia St Clair, published by John Murray

Image: courtesy Kassia St Clair

An Artist's World of Colour

— Artist Lothar Götz chats to *Design Update* about creating his new commission for the Vitra London showroom and working with colour, space and light

From left:
Pool at the Holden Gallery,
Manchester, 2021.

Lothar Götz and *Colour Rush*
at Vitra London.



Foxall Studio



Harry Meadley

Design Update: Your work is often at the scale of buildings, creating artworks for historic galleries like the Holden in Manchester and the Hatton in Newcastle. You've also worked with architecture by The Smithsons, Frank Gehry, Rick Mather, Massimiliano Fuksas and now the Vitra London showroom, situated in the Turnmill building by Piercy & Co. Can you describe how you respond to buildings in your practice?

Lothar Götz: I'm thinking about the physical relationship between my body and the space, so the site visit is a crucial point. I find architecture fascinating but it's the abstract qualities in a building that interest me more than the function. I'm curious to escape into space and I want to feel first. I like to look out for things you might not notice immediately. I'm a big fan of the way Thomas Bernhard writes, describing a perfect building from the physical side.

Generally, I walk around inside and outside; it's more of a passive process at first. The space really dictates what I'm doing, so the artwork is unique to the building. The experience of being at a threshold, comprehending what's happening inside and the outside at the same time is a critical moment.

My work isn't about 'improving' a building or space with colour. But I do think that colours have their own three-dimensional space and that colour is something that was neglected for quite a long time in architecture.

DU: What were your responses to the Turnmill building and Vitra's showroom? What were you thinking about when you developed your artwork here?

LG: Outside, I noticed the distinctive geometry. I felt like I was in a drawing. You have all the verticals from the windows and then the horizontal lines from the brickwork; the size of the brick is very small in relation to the big windows and the whole building is sand coloured. The shapes in my artworks are not about adding but about connecting what's already there. What happens when we look at a façade, a window and then a door for instance, is that our eye makes its own shapes, creates its own abstract geometry in connecting certain things. I would say that my work requires quite active viewing; the artworks are not meant to be a standing-still experience from a fixed viewpoint. Here at the Vitra London showroom that means engaging in a very specific way with this building and also all the commuters as they walk past.

I was also thinking about experiences of coloured light in spaces in Morocco, where bathrooms especially often include tinted glass, and the ultra-violet glass at the Oriental eyrie of Schloß Schachen, King Ludwig II's hunting lodge. It's an amazing room of fantasy and colour that also influenced my artwork for The Economist Building. When you're working with glass and colour and light something happens, there's a new surreal reality to spaces and to the objects within them.

At Vitra London, the whole experience of space is changed by the artwork; it's not just confined to outside and the coloured shapes you see on the windows. From inside, the space is transformed in a different way, with what we see being filtered in unexpected ways by the stained-glass effect as light moves through the space. It changes reality a little bit and plays with perceptions of colour – is that a ceramic white basin by Tom Dixon or is it something else? At night of course the experience is completely different from outside – a bit like a glowing lantern.

DU: Your colour palettes are distinctive and unexpected, and they seem to evolve from project to project. What are some of the influences behind your colour choices?

LG: For me working with colour is a very instinctive process. It's true that you can find recipes if you want – all sorts of colour strategies exist but mostly I don't use them. I look at the work of other artists and some might have a very cool colour palette, for instance, and I think: 'Whatever I do it never ends up like that!'

I think a big influence were the wall paintings in two churches near where I grew up in Southern Germany. We went to church a lot and I think looking at those paintings saved me; I didn't realise their impact at the time. One was a Baroque church by Dominikus Zimmermann with a ceiling painting by Anton Enderle and the other was a church built 200 years later in 1973 where the colours of an abstract mural by Franz Nagel were quite strange – colourful but muted at the same time. In the same way I think my colour sequences tend to be a bit off-beat.

DU: Your work often extends beyond the boundaries of the frame and the gallery wall. Has this been a consistent aspect of your practice from the beginning?

LG: As a student I liked painting and I liked spaces and I tried to combine these interests. Then one day when I was painting on a wall I noticed that something quite important happened, and that was this connection with the whole space. It wasn't just about painting a 1m by 1m canvas say in the colour blue and hanging it on the wall – in that case it would always stay as a painting.

The first real wall painting I did was creating shadow lines on a wall. I painted two black lines and realised that the white in the middle suddenly stood out, it became three dimensional and was a complete contrast to the rest of the space, adding an abstract layer.

At Vitra the windows, to a certain extent, frame the artwork from the outside but when you go inside the experience is completely different – more like being in a 3D abstract space where changing coloured light interacts with everything on display.

DU: When I experience your site-specific work, there's a sense of being at the centre of a world of colour and geometry, often slightly contra to the architecture. Perspective is a big subject in both art and architecture, but it's perhaps not so usual for the two worlds to be combined...

LG: Yes, and I think it partly goes back to that Baroque church. As a young student I thought: 'I am a minimalist. Form follows function!'. Then someone said to me: 'You know, you're a real Baroque soul!'. It completely irritated me at the time. But funnily enough I went back to those spaces later because there was something there that interested me.

What I now find fascinating is balancing abstract colour spaces with built architecture to create a new spatial reality, which doesn't end with the ceiling or whatever. Your sense of dimensions gets completely puzzled and there's this funny relationship between the perspective of built space and the perspective of the artwork.



Dance Diagonal at the Towner in Eastbourne, 2019

“For me working with colour is a very instinctive process. It's true that you can find recipes if you want – all sorts of colour strategies exist but mostly I don't use them.”



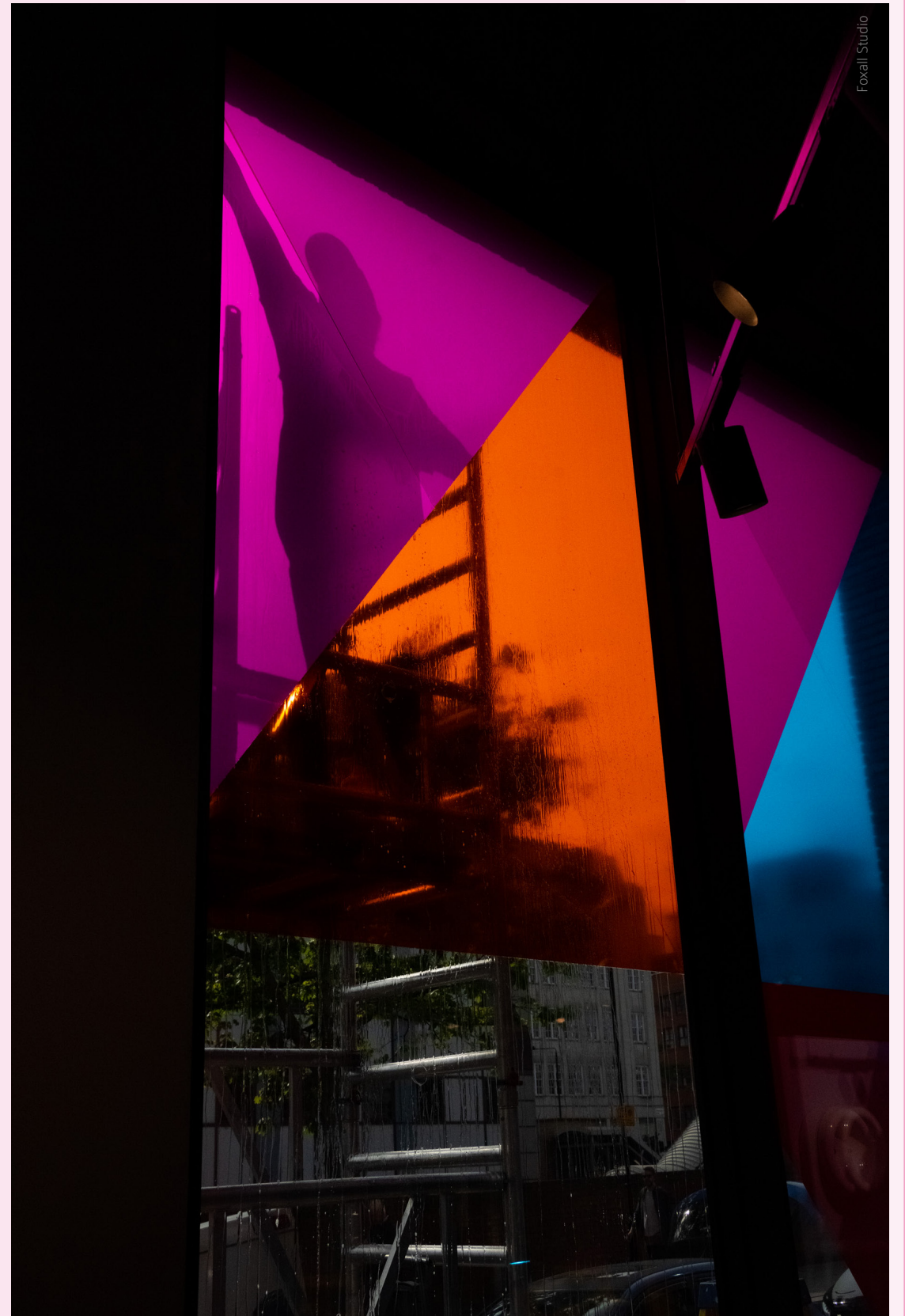
The materials used in *Colour Rush* will be re-used via The Children's S.C.R.A.P. Project. The initiative collects, stores and distributes clean, safe waste materials for play and creativity in schools, nurseries, colleges, special needs groups, churches, hospital wards, playgroups, community groups and charitable organisations involved in education.

Above: *Colour Rush* installation, as seen from Turnmill Street

Below: Interior view of *Colour Rush* with ceramics and brassware from the Vitra x Tom Dixon collaboration *Liquid*.

“At Vitra London the whole façade of the building is changed by the artwork and the relationship between the shape and the colours; it’s not just confined to the windows and what you see through them.”

Lothar Gotz' *Colour Rush* being installed at Vitra London in May 2022.





A Short History of Colour in the Bathroom

— Ewa Effiom surveys colour in the bathroom from the Victorian era to *Scarface* and beyond

In Brian de Palma's 1983 film *Scarface*, one of the most striking scenes is set in a bathroom. In it, the protagonist Tony Montana chats impulsively to Manolo and Elvira from his cream-hued circular bathtub. The bathroom is clad in faux marble, has pink carpets and is riddled with gold furnishings. It's the 1980s in all its splendour: loud, overindulgent and sumptuous. Here the bathroom is a veritable *chef-d'œuvre*, giving insight into trends at the time and unquestionably representative of Montana's tastes.

However, bathrooms haven't always been as ostentatious as Tony's; in fact the bathroom as we know it is a relatively recent development. The 19th century brought numerous advancements enabled by the preceding invention of the flushing toilet by Sir John Harrington in the 16th century and the all-important S-bend, that helped trap sewer smells, invented by Alexander Cummings in 1775. But it was only in the aftermath of a London cholera outbreak in 1854, leading to the implementation of Bazalgette's sewage network, that the modern bathroom emerged.

The early bathroom was a mainstay only of affluent homes and was often white – a feature that can be attributed to the Victoria-era belief that germs live in dirt and that untainted white was proof enough of the absence of germs. For most people it was still a matter of outdoor toilets and tin bathtubs in front of fireplaces. As the Industrial Revolution allowed for the mechanisation of the bathroom and hot water became readily available, private bathrooms became more common.

Regardless of the considerable bounds in technology, for the most part the bathroom remained a clinical space. It was in the modern era that it really flourished, along with interior design, manufacturing and consumerism. When Fordism took hold at the end of the 1920s, manufacturers started making matching sets of tubs, sinks and toilets. As Ellen Lupton and J Abbott Miller wrote in *The Bathroom, the Kitchen and the Aesthetics of Waste*, the bathroom had been 're-absorbed into the fabric of the house, subject to the same attention as other rooms'. With the bathroom's transformation from utilitarian to aesthetic space, the bathroom could now be decorated. Recognising potential in the idiom 'an Englishman's home is his castle', manufacturers including bathroom producers capitalised on the inclination of homeowners to adorn and embellish interiors with their disposable income.

Despite Hollywood ushering in Art Deco motifs to homewares such as wallpaper, it took a while for colour to be accepted in the bathroom. However, when it was accepted, nothing could stop the ubiquity of the colourful bathroom tile. Ceramics and the new space-age material of plastic made for a good marriage of hygiene and style. Manufacturers were now able to make a wider range of colours more consistently, a development that was more-or-less concurrent with the proliferation of colour in advertising.

A life in technicolour meant that mass marketing could entice an ambitious middle class with gaudy and lurid colour combinations. Hunter Greens, dark pinks, burgundies, blacks and dark blues – now mostly relegated to history books – were in vogue in the 1920s and 30s, with the popularity of lighter colours emerging later in the 1950s and 60s. Like the kitchen, the bathroom had become a source of pride and expression; colours were considered a bonus to any room, catering to the new luxuries of ritual, escapism and privacy – if you were that way inclined.

Private bathrooms remain a luxury today, with 60% of the global population still without access to one. In the West, bathroom design is now characterised

by whatever the user chooses, with current trends dictating subtler tones and more natural textures alongside digital technology. An abundance of choice has given people the opportunity to decide for themselves how to furnish their sanctuary. Whether your taste calls for pink carpets, Hunter Green tiles or Eggshell bathtubs – that decision is up to you. Choose wisely, as the ritual of washing oneself is both deeply personal and deeply spiritual. Like Tony Montana's, the bathroom is a space with the potential to cure a hundred woes, or at least delay them until the water gets cold and we have to face the world again. 🍷

Ewa Effiom is a London-based Belgo-Nigerian architect, writer and producer.



“An abundance of choice has given people the opportunity to decide for themselves how to furnish their sanctuary.”

Clockwise from top left:
[1] Vitra Voyage range, designed with Arik Levy
[2] Vitra Plural range, designed with Terri Pecora
[3] 'The bathroom of refinement' – advert in *Architect and Engineer*, 1920

It's 30 years since Vitra came to the UK and how times – and colours – have changed!

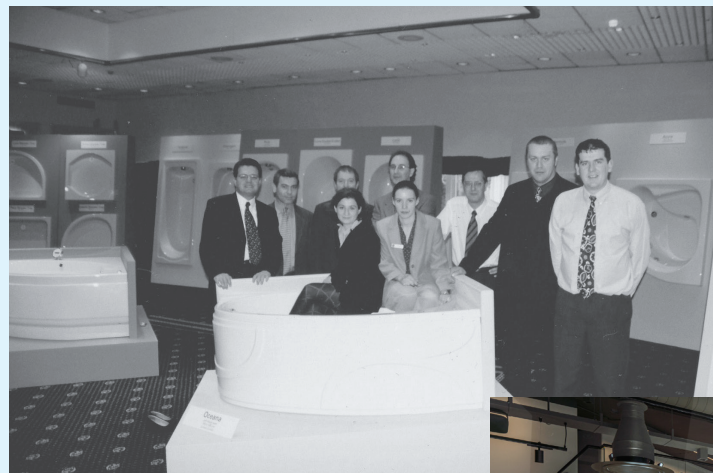
This year we're celebrating three decades of Vitra UK. Vitra brought its bathroom design to Britain back in 1992, establishing a headquarters at Didcot in Oxfordshire in the year of Queen Elizabeth II's Ruby Jubilee. 1992 was also the year of the Young British Artists exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery featuring Damian Hirst, and when compact discs usurped vinyl in many of our high street record shops. The world wide web had been around for a couple of years but wasn't yet in the public domain, so if you wanted to view any products you had to send off for a brochure or visit a store.



Vitra UK's Managing Director Levent Giray greets customers at Vitra's distribution centre in Didcot in 1992

A lot has changed in the intervening years – much of it for the ease of design professionals and consumers alike. Last year we were delighted to launch Vitra London – a hybrid cultural hub combining an online presence and physical showroom in the heart of London’s design district of Clerkenwell. It’s here that our UK customer base and collaborators get together for inspiration, ideas and knowledge exchange.

We hope you’ll join us at Vitra London in Clerkenwell soon – or you can catch up online with our calendar of cultural and professional events at london.vitra.co.uk/events.



Staff at Vitra UK's Oxfordshire HQ in the 1990s



Vitra London opened in 2022 on Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1



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