

Whiter shade *of* pale

Choosing a neutral palette can be simple and beautiful.
Charlotte Starling shows you how to get the balance right



A simply elegant porch. Wall: All White, metalwork: Pitch Black, pots: Plummett, Manor House Grey & Railings, door: Pitch Black, bucket: Blazer. All by Farrow & Ball

Right: *'Birds Eggs and Freesias'*, oil on canvas, £1,700 by Dorset artist Vanessa Bowman (vanessabowman.co.uk)



A beautifully-balanced scheme of whites, greys, taupes, chocolates and charcoals is the epitome of soothing elegance. Think white cathedral ceilings, natural wood, a classic Eames rocker - it's a look that embraces restraint and calm rather than quirky and clutter. A palette of pale shades stays quietly in the background and is perfect for a bedroom or indeed any room requiring a sense of serenity.

To imbue a room with character and mood without any strong sense of a particular colour, your first port of call should be variations on a white or cream scheme. Look at your room as if it were a black and white photograph. To pull off an effortlessly elegant neutral look you need to make sure you have a harmonious balance of light and shade - pale paintwork being the light and textures being the shade.

Walls should be light, but to avoid

looking too clinical stick to a palette of warm off-whites (vanilla or antique white), or if your room is sunny and south-facing, choose one of the cooler shades like dove or chalk. Avoid brilliant white as this will dilute the subtle effect and make the room feel murky.

Stick to natural textures and highlight their understated beauty

A clever trick is to take one colour and paint the ceiling in the lightest shade, the walls the next shade darker and the woodwork in the darkest. The subtle graduations in tone will alleviate any potential blandness. However for a small space, painting out the ceiling, walls and woodwork in the same colour will create the illusion of space, as there will be no visual breaks to disturb the eye.

Nothing if not versatile, neutrals

will make any strong architectural features such as cornicing or a fireplace really come to the fore. Give a feature like a fireplace plenty of 'negative space' to help it stand out. By which I mean, don't cover it with clutter.

Neutral rooms can easily feel bland, dull and rather unfriendly if not properly considered; the interplay of patterns and textures will enliven the space. You can use several different types of pattern if you opt for similar shades. For example a wide stripe juxtaposed with a small floral design.

My preferred method is to layer different textures and combine natural materials such as wood, linen or metal to bring life to the space and create a soothing, timeless feel. The 'colour' then comes from say a honey-toned wood floor or a hide rug. Bring in subtle lustre with soft metallics - silk and damask, chrome and glass. As long as you keep the colours pared back, you can really go quite OTT on glamour. A crystal >



Framed seedhead collection by Charmouth artist Caroline Barnes (cbceramics.co.uk)

chandelier, a giant pair of antlers, will still appear tasteful if done right.

A combination of matt and shiny surfaces will also boost a totally neutral room. Dark matt-stained wood floor and leather chairs work well with soft-sheen fabrics and glass accents. Go for beautiful wood grains and heavily woven wool or slubby linens combined with soft velvets. The key is to stick to natural textures and highlight their understated beauty by not introducing too many accessories or a bright colour.

If this all feels too restrained, then chocolate and cocoa brown are perfect neutrals to introduce to make it feel more cosy and inviting. Another way to bring your room to life is with lots of plants. Greenery adds colour. Frothy Boston ferns, antique glass terrariums filled with plants with sculptural leaves both make perfect finishing touches. ■

Neutrals will make any strong architectural features such as cornicing or a fireplace really come to the fore



Hedgerow ceramics, £28.50 each
Decorator's Notebook (Wiltshire)

Neutrals Masterclass with Farrow & Ball

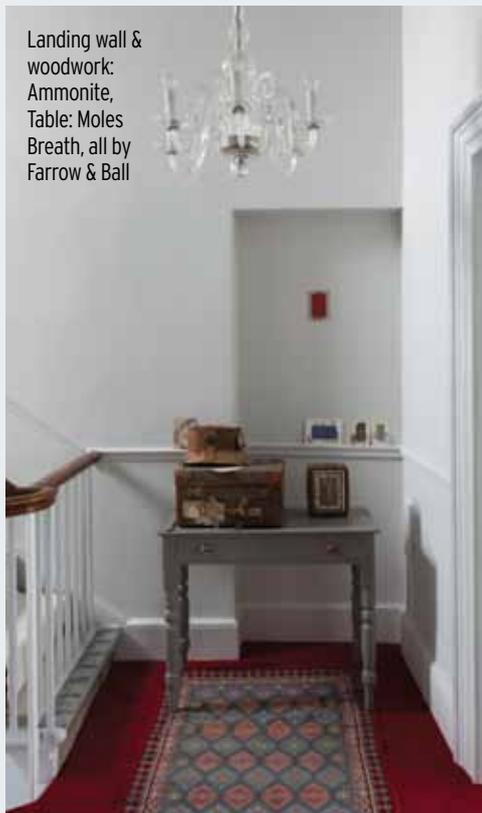
Back in September 2013 we introduced nine new colours to our colour card. Three of which - Purbeck Stone, Ammonite and Wevet, along with Cornforth White created a new Farrow & Ball neutral family - the Easy Greys.

These neutrals have a gossamer appearance that is ideal for people who prefer understated decoration. Neither too cool nor too warm, many people interpret them as the hugely popular tones of the Gustavian period. They are also really easy to use. For a relaxed and versatile scheme, Purbeck Stone is a stronger neutral - neither too grey to be edgy and uncomfortable, nor too creamy to feel out of date. Combine with two lighter shades, Ammonite

and Cornforth White, to create a colour combination that appears to come straight from the very fibre of the natural world.

You can create a layered scheme which will flow throughout the home, with Purbeck Stone walls, Cornforth White woodwork and Ammonite on the ceiling. The minimal aesthetic of this combination will promote a simple, calm and easy living ambience.

To add colour to this scheme, try stronger hues like Mole's Breath, Stiffkey Blue and Railings. If you want to add some texture, try combining with our Tented Stripe wallpaper. Happy decorating!
Sarah Cole
farrow-ball.com



About Charlotte



Charlotte Starling is Creative Director of Velvet & Dash Interiors based near Dorchester. A keen supporter of local businesses, she works with Dorset-based designers and artists to offer styling and sourcing services for the home. Find out more at velvet-dash.com or call 01300 320 657.

Get the look

Felt wool rug from £640 - £1,020 Brush 64 (brush64.co.uk)



Above: Black and white patterned ceramic eggs (£20 each) by the Icelandic artist Bjork Haraldsdottir who is based in West Dorset. Available from velvet-dash.com



Above: Pallet pendant light shades from Decorator's Notebook. Small £30, large £70 (decoratorsnotebook.co.uk)



Llama throw £305 from Brush 64 (brush64.co.uk)



Above: Small double-sided picture frame from £10 Decorator's Notebook (Wiltshire) (decoratorsnotebook.co.uk)



Above: Ceramic tiles by Charmouth artist Caroline Barnes (cbceramics.co.uk) Above right: Llama throw, £305, from Brush 64 (brush64.co.uk)



Above: Feather print cushion, £40 from Decorator's Notebook

Bring interest to the scheme with sculptural shapes in neutral colours. Provencal Pitchers from £15 (velvet-dash.com)

