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“ Emma Culshaw Bell

A colour specialist who has worked with significant designers within the kitchen industry to consult on the perfect colour combinations for projects, **Emma Culshaw Bell** talks to **Vicki Evans** about trends and how colour is so essential in design

Q & A

Q: What is your main role?

A: I am a specialist painter and a bespoke colour consultant. It is common for designers to choose from preset colour cards, but I am a step away from that.

I collaborate directly with designers on bespoke projects like **Charlie Smallbone's Ledbury Studio**.

I've also colour consulted for brands like Smallbone of Devizes and Mark Wilkinson.

My side of it is always the paint. I am more interested in the traditional, soulful type of painting. I want to add in paint effects and textures and put the romance back into painting rather than picking from a colour card.

Q: How do you develop a project from start to finish?

A: I will meet the client and do a full-colour consultation. I hand-mix the colours on-site – so I do many samples of the various colours. That then develops into a bespoke colour and style. For example, with Charlie [Smallbone], we talked it through – we were even constantly firing photos to each other with any images that caught our eye in terms of texture, colour or style.

Then I started testing in my studio and finally I hand-paint the kitchen on-site. In the middle market, I still do a bespoke mix for those clients, and then those swatches go to a specialist paint company, who analyse the paint and then create it.

For the lower end of the market, I mix the desired paint and then match it up to colour swatches of major paint leaders like Farrow & Ball.

Q: How do you create the perfect colour combination for a house?

A: I keep an eye on the client's style when I am in the house, as it is all about their tastes. Then they talk their designs through and show colour cards. Then I can advise them on what would work best. They would have the desired colour, but I know that that shade would appear more yellow with their light, so I suggest something else. Then we will pick up more colour cards, which are

challenging to work with anyway, as it is a colour printed on white paper. It can take a few attempts of mixing to create the colour that they have in their mind's eye.

Q: What styles of paint design are catching your eye at the moment?

A: What I love is the flashes of discordant colour coming through. Instead of using accents in decoration or soft furnishings, use accents in the paint – for example, the housekeeper's cupboard in Charlie Smallbone's **Ledbury Studio**. I want to use something quite sexy. I am not scaring the client with something a little mad, but I am adding a bit of interest through a hint of colour. I am seeing this is catching on. I think we are also returning to a more classic British styling, but with a flash of colour, that you can do with an island or an over the mantle.

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I prefer the sensual act of painting. I want to add in paint effects and textures and put the romance back into painting rather than picking from a colour card

Q: Why do you love hand-painting?

A: It is soulful. I understand why kitchens are factory-sprayed, but there is something so soulful about hand-painting. It is so artisan. It is also adaptable, and you can change the sheen or light bounce. It is also easier to repair compared with factory-sprayed kitchens. I can retouch it more easily as I am not trying to emulate a factory spray. I prefer the sensual act of painting, which I do believe is more high-end.

Q: What advice would you give to kitchen designers about colour?

A: Start with samples and with the actual paint that you are going to be using. The sheen is a massive thing,



Emma Culshaw Bell collaborated with Charlie Smallbone's Ledbury Studio. This is one of their hand-painted shaker designs

but a customer can't visualise that until they see it. Give samples in the products they will be using. Also, think outside the box a bit more – a designer knows what works well with each other. Know your colours, know your client, and know the paint in terms of texture.

Q: How has the relationship between clients and colour changed over the past few years?

A: I think colour is more accessible now. People are trying out different colour options more at home with sample pots. It makes people less scared of colour.

Q: What are the current trends in terms of texture and finishes?

A: There is a trend for reflective surfaces. Also trends are leaning more towards the matt brass and bronze. There are so many sheens you can do nowadays.

You can get things that are like a waxy sheen. There are also matt shades. You used not to be able to go quite matt due to the lack of durability, but the latest products give us this possibility.

Q: What do you think will be the next big colour trend?

A: I think we are going into duller colours, but have a base of brighter shades. So, for example, the blue housekeeper's cupboard has a base of a bright blue, but then there are layers on top to knock back the shade. It keeps the luminosity and depth, but it is toned down.

Colour evolves so continuously but, in the same way with the fashion industry, you can extend trends by changing the tones and the combinations.

Q: What of paint innovations?

A: I've got products that I have been testing in the studio for adhesion quality. If you are going to go to all this trouble, it has to stick to the surface and be durable. The paint has to do what I want it to do as well as look good.

There have been some significant developments in matt colours as there used to be a big problem with scratches or fingerprints – the market has opened up every aspect of durable sheen, and it mixes into vibrant colours. **kbb**