

Paintbox

BLACK

For lashings of decadence and drama, you can't beat dabbling on the dark side



BOLD ENTRANCE

By keeping the ceiling white, Tiffany Duggan of Studio Duggan draws the eye upwards to stop her narrow hallway feeling claustrophobic.

The walls and staircase are painted in Basalt absolute matt emulsion, £43.50 for 2.5L, Little Greene. For the ceiling, try All White estate emulsion, £45 for 2.5L, Farrow & Ball

CLASSIC CHOICE
Faded black paint complements the time-worn quality of the exposed brick wall in this London living room. Aged Black matt emulsion, £46 for 2.5L, Atelier Ellis



Something magical happens when you paint walls black. 'The delicious contrast between lighter objects against a dark background emphasises unique qualities in materials and the finer details you might have missed in a light-filled colourful space,' explains Marianne Shillingford, creative director at Dulux.

And even if you're not ready for floor-to-ceiling black, small dabs can add definition and drama. 'Picking out a door frame, shelves or window frames in black makes a space come to life,' adds Alison Teverini of Milward Teverini.

A word of warning: there are many shades of black and some may not work with the rest of your scheme. The trick is to identify the undertones that define one black from another. Source samples of fabric and wallpaper and compare these to your paint swatches, so you can see which shades feel harmonious

and which feel wrong. 'It's sometimes hard to see subtle variations on small swatches, so make sure you order a larger sample,' advises Helen Harlow of London-based design studio Paintbox.

Fortunately, it doesn't matter which space you paint black, it only matters how you apply the colour. 'Black is intimate, romantic and protective in a bedroom – so in this environment, paint all the walls in a rich shade of grey-black or blue-black. Then balance it with a white ceiling and woodwork,' suggests Claire Pascoe of Pascoe Interiors.

'Hallways embrace black woodwork, where you can use the colour to pick out and enhance skirting, architraves, dado rails and panelling. In a living space, paint a wall black as a dramatic backdrop for feature artwork,' says Claire.

Whatever you do, don't scrimp on the quality of your paint. Blacks and dark colours are notorious for showing up roller marks, scuffs and imperfections.

[How to use it]

* It's not true that small rooms must be painted white to make the space look bigger: a similar impact can be created with black, which gives the space more depth as the colour subtly changes throughout the day. Paint expert Annie Sloan explains: 'Pale colours will emphasise the light in the room, but dark colours will blur the corners and edges, creating the illusion of space.'

* Use dark colours on the walls but ensure flooring and furnishings are lighter. This will draw the eye to the foreground and allow the walls to act as a backdrop. Also, the greater the contrast between the black and any complementary colours, the more striking the scheme will be,' says Helen Shaw from Benjamin Moore UK. 'If you want a strong visual impact, choose lighter tones or for something more soothing, pair your black with other mid and dark tones.'

* North-facing rooms can be notoriously difficult to decorate as they're often darker spaces with a cool light. This is where black comes into its own. 'Instead of competing with the limited light, bring in dark paint colours such as black to create a cocooning, comfortable feel,' says Cathryn Helsby, colour expert at Earthborn.

* When teamed with white, black can be used anywhere. However, it's crucial to choose the right shades of both, according to Tricia Guild, founder and creative director of Designers Guild. 'A sharp clear white and black feels powerful, timeless and strong, whereas a softer white and charcoal is a gentler incarnation of monochrome.'

* Black works really well with strong, jewel colours – orange, fuchsia, turquoise, lime – but it doesn't always need to be paired with standout shades. 'It's equally a wonderful contrast with the new soft neutrals which we've loved in recent months: the blush pinks and sage greens,' says Helen Harlow, colour expert at Paintbox.

Best for a dramatic backdrop
Graphite wall paint, £39.95 for 2.5L, Annie Sloan

Best for teal undertones
Midnight regal flat, £20.50 for 0.4L, Benjamin Moore

Best for pairing with muted shades
Albany Soot Print vinyl matt, £30.48 for 2.5L, Brewers

Best for eco lovers
Hidey-Hole claypaint, £40 for 2.5L, Earthborn

Best for creating a cocooning interior
Paean Black estate emulsion, £45 for 2.5L, Farrow & Ball

Best for a softer take on a stark black
Black Cab matt emulsion, £38 for 2.5L, Graham & Brown

Best for absolute pitch black
Jack Black absolute matt emulsion, £43.50 for 2.5L, Little Greene