ABERMAW
DECORATING

FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

The Homeowner's Colour Confidence Guide

A practical way to choose colours that work with the light, fixed finishes and rooms you actually live in.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Make the room the starting point.

Choosing a colour is rarely difficult because there are too few options. It is difficult because the same colour can look completely different once it meets your room.

Light, flooring, tiles, timber, furniture and the colours next door all influence what you see. This guide is designed to make those decisions smaller and more deliberate.

Use it in order if you are starting from scratch, or jump to the section that solves the decision you are stuck on. You do not need to become a colour expert; you just need a reliable way to narrow the choice.

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WHAT THIS GUIDE HELPS YOU DO

L **Read the light**
Notice how the room changes through the day.

U **Spot clashes early**
Compare undertones with flooring, tiles and furniture.

F **Create flow**
Link rooms without making every space identical.

T **Test properly**
Make the final decision in the room, not on a phone screen.

START WITH THE ROOM

Not the paint chart.

Before choosing a shade, understand the things that are already influencing how colour will look and feel in that particular space.

01 Natural light
Notice how much daylight the room receives, when it arrives and where the shadows sit. Colour can shift noticeably from morning to evening.

02 Orientation
North-facing rooms often read cooler; south-facing rooms tend to receive warmer, brighter light. East and west change more dramatically through the day.

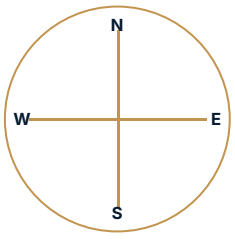
03 Fixed finishes
Flooring, worktops, tiles, fireplaces, timber and built-in furniture are expensive to change. Let them narrow the palette rather than fighting them.

04 How the room is used
A bedroom may need calm; a kitchen may need brightness and practicality; a snug can carry more depth. Decide how you want the room to feel.

Orientation is useful - but not absolute.

North
Steadier, often cooler light.

East
Brighter in the morning.



West
Warmer later in the day.

South
Usually brighter and warmer.

Window size, trees, nearby buildings and room depth can matter just as much. Treat orientation as a clue, then judge the actual room.

QUICK ROOM CHECK

- Look at flooring and fixed finishes.
- Notice existing furniture and fabrics.
- Decide the mood or purpose.
- View the room in daylight.
- Look again in evening light.
- Only then begin comparing colours.

UNDERSTANDING UNDERTONES

The hue underneath the colour.

Two colours can both be described as “neutral” and still look wrong together. Undertones are the quieter hints of warm, cool or coloured pigment that become obvious once a paint meets its surroundings.

Warm

Hints of yellow, peach, red or warm brown. Often comfortable with timber, warm stone and natural fibres.

Cool

Hints of blue, green or violet. Can feel crisp beside cooler stone, grey flooring and blue-toned light.

Balanced

More evenly balanced between warm and cool. Useful when you need a quieter bridge between several existing finishes.

White is never just white.

A warmer white can feel soft and creamy; a cooler white can look cleaner and bluer. The right choice is the one that sits comfortably beside your wall colour and fixed finishes - not the one with the nicest name on the card.

THREE USEFUL UNDERTONE CLUES

1. **Compare beside a clean white**
   The contrast often makes a hidden yellow, pink, green or blue bias easier to see.
2. **Put it next to what is staying**
   Flooring, worktops, curtains and timber will expose clashes quickly.
3. **Look in more than one light**
   A colour that seems balanced at noon may change noticeably under evening lamps.

> **You do not need to name every undertone perfectly.** The useful question is simply: do these colours make each other look better, or do they make each other look wrong?

BUILDING A WHOLE-HOME PALETTE

Create a thread, not a uniform.

Rooms feel connected when colours, materials and undertones repeat with purpose. They do not need to be the same colour - they just need to look as though they belong to the same home.

The 60 / 30 / 10 idea

A useful starting point for balancing a room - not a formula you need to measure.

Dominant field
Often the main wall or largest visual surface.

Supporting family
Furniture, woodwork, textiles or a second tone.

Accent
Smaller moments that add contrast or character.

Create flow between rooms

- **Repeat with purpose.** Reuse a core neutral, timber tone or accent in more than one room.
- **Adapt, don't copy.** A darker or lighter version can suit a different room without breaking the connection.
- **Use fixed materials as the thread.** Flooring, stone, metal and timber can link spaces more naturally than paint alone.
- **Let architecture lead.** Doorways, sightlines and adjoining rooms tell you where a colour change will feel intentional.

A SIMPLE FORMULA

1. **Choose the anchor**
   One neutral or colour family that works with the fixed finishes.
2. **Add a supporting family**
   Something related, softer, warmer or cooler depending on the room.
3. **Repeat a thread**
   Carry one or two tones, finishes or materials into adjoining spaces.
4. **Add accents last**
   Use the strongest colour where it earns attention.

EXAMPLE COHESIVE SCHEME

WALLS, CEILINGS & WOODWORK

Treat them as one composition.

Walls usually carry most of the colour, but ceilings and woodwork frame what you see. Thinking about all three together is one of the easiest ways to make a room feel deliberate.

W

Walls set the field.

Your wall colour normally becomes the largest coloured surface in the room.

- **Match:** use a close tonal family for a calm, enveloping scheme.
- **Soften:** move lighter or darker within the same family.
- **Contrast:** use a deliberate opposing tone where the architecture can carry it.

C

Ceilings affect light and proportion.

White is common, but it is not compulsory.

- A softer related tone can make a room feel more cohesive.
- A lighter ceiling can keep the room feeling open.
- A darker ceiling can create intimacy or drama where height and light allow it.

T

Woodwork frames the architecture.

Doors, skirting and architraves can disappear quietly or become a strong part of the scheme.

- Tonal trim gives a softer, more contemporary flow.
- Warm or soft whites reduce hard contrast.
- Dark trim can make doors and details feel intentional rather than incidental.

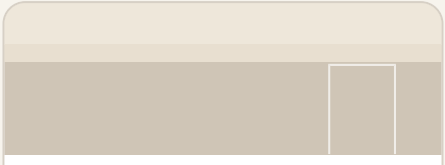
Walls, ceiling and trim are seen together

Should ceilings always be white?

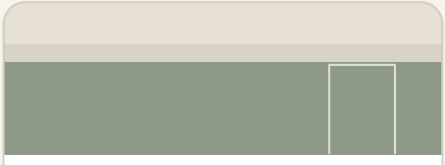
Not at all. The better question is what the ceiling needs to do in that room. A soft related colour can feel calm; a brighter ceiling can lift a dark space; a deeper ceiling can add definition.

> When in doubt, test the wall and ceiling colours together. A ceiling colour can change how the wall colour appears.

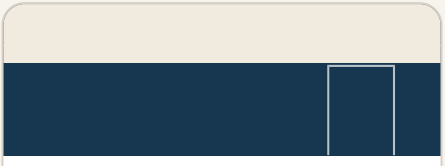
THREE RELATIONSHIPS TO CONSIDER



Matched
Low contrast, calm and unified.



Soft contrast
Balanced, with gentle definition.



Bold contrast
Graphic, architectural and deliberate.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FINISH

Performance first. Sheen second.

Finish names describe how paint reflects light, but they do not tell the whole performance story. A high-quality durable matt can outperform a basic eggshell in some rooms. Always match the product specification to the surface and use.

FINISH	SHEEN	OFTEN USED FOR	WATCH FOR
Matt	● ○ ○ ○	Ceilings and lower-traffic walls where a flatter look is wanted.	Durability varies enormously by product. Flat finishes can mark more easily.
Durable matt	● ○ ○ ○	Hallways, family rooms, kitchens and other walls that need regular cleaning.	Choose a genuinely washable/scrub-rated product rather than relying on the word “matt”.
Eggshell	● ● ○ ○	Woodwork, furniture or selected walls where a low sheen is appropriate.	Not automatically a “bathroom finish”; moisture suitability depends on the actual coating.
Satin	● ● ● ○	Doors, trim, skirting and other joinery where a wipeable finish is useful.	More sheen means more light on the surface - preparation becomes easier to see.
Gloss	● ● ● ●	Front doors, selected woodwork and details where a high-shine finish is intentional.	Shows imperfections readily and creates the strongest visual contrast.

> **Kitchens and bathrooms:** prioritise the manufacturer's suitability for moisture, condensation and cleaning. The sheen level alone does not guarantee performance.

A PRACTICAL RULE OF THUMB

1. Decide what the surface needs to cope with.
Cleaning, moisture, knocks, UV exposure or normal low traffic.

2. Choose the coating system for that job.
Then choose the sheen you actually want from the suitable options.

3. Remember that sheen reveals preparation.
The shinier the finish, the more easily bumps and defects catch the light.

TEST BEFORE YOU COMMIT

The room gets the final vote.

Screens, brochures and paint cards are useful for narrowing the field. The final decision should happen on a physical sample, in the actual room, beside the things that are staying.

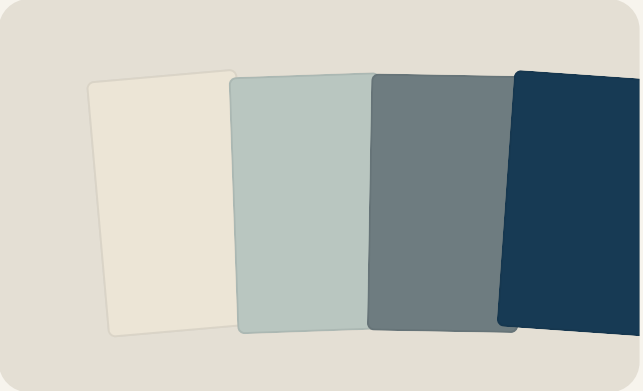
1. **Paint a large movable sample board.**
   A3 or larger gives you a much better read than a small patch. A movable board also avoids comparing colours on different walls permanently.

2. **Move it around the room.**
   Check beside the window, in a darker corner and near the main furniture or fixed finishes.

3. **Look morning, afternoon and evening.**
   Natural light and artificial light can pull the same colour in different directions.

4. **Compare it with the things that are staying.**
   Flooring, worktops, tiles, curtains, upholstery and timber are more useful references than another paint card.

5. **Live with the shortlist for a few days.**
   The best choice often becomes obvious once the novelty wears off and you stop staring at the sample.



Best practice

Keep sample boards separate rather than touching. Colours influence how the colours beside them appear.

If you are comparing whites, include the actual ceiling, trim or fixed white that will remain in the room.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Choosing under shop lighting
Use the shop to shortlist, then test at home.

Trusting the screen
Phone and monitor colour is not reliable enough for the final decision.

Testing a tiny patch
Small samples hide the real depth and behaviour of a colour.

Ignoring fixed undertones
The floor or worktop can make a perfectly good colour look wrong.

Deciding too quickly
A colour you love for ten minutes may feel very different after three evenings.

Comparing against the wrong white
Whites vary hugely. Use the white that will actually be in the finished room.

STARTING PALETTE IDEAS

Six directions, not six prescriptions.

Use these as a way to think in colour families. The swatches are deliberately generic - your final colours still need to be tested in your own room.

Warm neutrals 01

Soft creams, biscuit, taupe and warm brown. Useful where timber, warm stone or beige flooring already leads the room.

Soft coastal 02

Quiet blue-greys and softened whites. Calm without becoming overtly nautical.

Muted greens 03

Sage, olive and deep leaf tones. Particularly useful beside timber, stone and rooms with a garden outlook.

Earth & clay 04

Terracotta, clay and warm mineral tones. Adds warmth without relying on yellow-based neutrals.

Calm bedroom 05

Soft mineral neutrals, muted blue and greyed lavender for restful spaces with gentle contrast.

Dark & dramatic 06

Charcoal, ink, deep teal and burgundy. Strongest where the room has enough light, architecture or purpose to support the depth.

Important: colours in a PDF, on a phone or from a home printer are only indicative. Use real paint samples for the final decision.

Your room · your light · your finishes

OLDER & CHARACTER HOMES

Work with the building, not a theme.

An older property does not need a “heritage palette” simply because it is old. The most convincing schemes usually begin with the building's real materials, proportions, daylight and original details.

1. **Respect what is genuinely distinctive.**
   Cornicing, fireplaces, panelling, old timber, stone and unusual proportions can guide the palette. Decide what deserves attention and what should sit quietly behind it.

2. **Use original materials as colour clues.**
   Stone, brick, timber and metal often contain the warm/cool information you need. Pulling a related tone from them can make new paint feel settled quickly.

3. **Do not be frightened of depth.**
   Deep colour can work beautifully in older rooms, especially where there is good daylight, generous scale or strong architectural detail. It does not need to imitate a particular historical period.

4. **Keep colour and coating decisions separate.**
   The colour can be right while the coating system is wrong for an older surface. Existing paint, moisture, plaster and substrate condition still need to be assessed before decorating.

> **Older homes reward restraint.** A room often feels more authentic when the palette supports the existing detail rather than trying to make every surface look “period”.

Old College, Aberystwyth - heritage project experience undertaken within contractor teams. Shown here for architectural context, not as a direct Abermaw Decorating commission.

A USEFUL COLOUR QUESTION

If you removed the paint card from the room, what colours are already present in the timber, stone, flooring, metal and daylight? Start there.

COLOUR FAMILIES THAT OFTEN SIT COMFORTABLY IN CHARACTER INTERIORS

Stone & soft grey	Chalky neutrals	Muted greens	Deep blues	Warm earth	Soft historic reds

YOUR COLOUR PLAN

Put the decision on one page.

Use this as a working sheet while you test. Write the actual colour name/code once you have seen the sample in the room.

ROOM _____

MOOD / PURPOSE _____

FIXED FINISHES TO CONSIDER _____

WALL COLOUR _____

CEILING COLOUR _____

WOODWORK COLOUR _____

ACCENT / ADJOINING ROOM _____

PRODUCT / FINISH NOTES _____

SAMPLE OBSERVATIONS _____

BEFORE YOU DECIDE

Viewed in daylight	Viewed in evening light	Compared with flooring	Compared with fabrics	Lived with for a few days
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Want a second opinion on the colours?

If Abermaw Decorating is quoting for the work, include the colours you are considering and a few room photos. Colour decisions can be discussed as part of planning the project.

abermawdecorating.co.uk
07810 578857
dan@abermawdecorating.co.uk

> **Keep the sample board.** It gives you a physical reference later if you need to compare furniture, fabrics or adjoining rooms before the project begins.