



## COLOUR MASTERCLASS

# *Shades of fig*

Deep plum and fig hues of purple can bring richness, warmth and an exciting depth of colour to neutral schemes without being overpowering, or – if used with confidence – can provide a daring backdrop to enliven artwork and traditional furniture



**BEN PENTREATH**  
*Director, Ben Pentreath Ltd*

Pentreath is a well known figure in the design world. His architectural studio specialises in large-scale residential housing projects including major sites owned by The Duchy of Cornwall. His decorating service is a growing

part of the business, with a focus on richly layered rooms that use colour and pattern, and a mix of old and new furniture. Pentreath also co-owns Pentreath & Hall, the much admired interiors and accessories shop.

**ABOVE LEFT**  
 The vivid purple, Plum from Papers and Paints, provides a flash of colour around Pentreath's collection of framed Piranesi engravings.

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
 Pentreath advocates some splashes of colour contrast in flowers and accessories to give relief to the intense purple colour.



“ This room is in my house in Dorset, a Regency Parsonage on the edge of a beautiful south-facing valley with generous bay windows facing an idyllic view.

When I moved into the house I painted the room a safe pale grey from Farrow & Ball – Light Stone. After a while, I got bored with this, and one winter, starved of sunlight and colour, I decided to repaint the dining room a crazy vivid purple colour. Patrick Baty, of Papers and Paints, produces a wonderful range of paint colours, many of which are more startling than the historically toned hues of Farrow & Ball and their imitators. I've always loved Patrick's colour charts and turned immediately to his 1960s' range. I bought a sample pot of Plum and set to work. It seemed to work beautifully.

The paint took many coats to cover – six or seven from memory. When complete the walls had a deep, rich velvety texture like nothing else. I had already planned to hang the dining room with a large collection of Piranesi engravings that I had bought at auction, in a job lot, for a song – each print, I think, worked out at about £6. Obviously, they needed framing, which added to the cost, but I knew that the plum walls would work well only if they provided a flash of colour around something plain: a close hang of pictures was essential.

The brown furniture was already in the room, junk-shop and auction finds, together with bits of old creamware and silver plate. I bought china lamps from my Bloomsbury shop, and marbled paper lampshades, to provide a rich orange-green hue that picked up on the mahogany tones elsewhere. I hung orange linen curtains that had previously been in my study at the Parsonage, taking down the black and white ticking curtains that had belonged to the previous pale grey scheme. And the masterstroke was finding (online, in fact) a superb set of cheap Victorian oak dining chairs complete with their original faded orange-red velvet seat fabric that provides precisely the relief that the vivid purple walls need. Green comes into the room in the form of geraniums, or paperwhites, and Victorian china. There have always been bits of blue-and-white china here, too, which once provided cool co-ordination with the pale grey walls; now they are a further flash of vivid contrast.

By day, when the afternoon sunshine pours in, the room glows with an extraordinary, retina-tingling intensity. By night, lit only by candlelight, it takes on a wonderful, rich, plum-toned hue; evenings in this room take on a powerful intensity. ▶ ”



Troubadour wallpaper from Thibaut in Metallic Gold on Plum looks smart, pretty and makes an unexpected impact without being overpowering.



**STACY SENIOR ALLAN**  
Marketing director, Thibaut

Senior Allan has worked for fabric and wallpaper specialist, Thibaut, for 20 years. She liaises with the design studio on product development.

“ We have been hesitant to use purples in our collections, but we feel that now the time is right and customers are embracing this colour. I think it is a great choice and not one that people should feel at all nervous about using. Purple is ideal for those who want something unexpected, but not overpowering; it’s not as bold as a deep red or bright blue, so it is easy to live with. This deep plum tone has a boldness which makes it a confident colour choice, yet is gentle and soft. This is further softened with the contrast in the pattern, which is in metallic gold. If you painted the walls in this colour, I think it might feel a bit heavy, so the gold brings some relief and makes it the right balance of colour.

Here, the purple also stands out nicely against the white trim and wood floor. We have ensured it has plenty of light and air, so that it feels open and the pretty purple pattern brings some warmth to the space.

We have combined both silver and gold finishes, with some warm wood tones. I think it feels quite contemporary. Purple could have quite historic or traditional connotations, so the use of subtle metallic touches gives it a modern feel. We have kept it quite simple here, but a purple, citrus yellow and grey palette is a great combination that looks fabulous. Purple also works really well with greens – you can see in the cabbage flower that is purple and green, that the two colours have a natural harmony, so we’ve picked out a little of this in the striped fabric. ”



Deep fig tones introduce a subtle layer of colour, adding warmth and richness to a soft caramel scheme.



**SAMANTHA JOHNSON**  
Founder, Samantha Johnson Interior Design

Based in Berkshire, Johnson is an experienced designer who has had her own business for 15 years. Her portfolio of beautiful properties

includes family homes and boutique hotels. Her style is softly modern, marrying traditional features with high-end contemporary design.

“ This is part of a full house refurbishment. The house is quite modern, built in the 1990s, and we used soft caramel colours throughout, but broke these up with the use of some lime greens and purples. In the hallway and kitchen we used more of the yellow-green colour, but for the living room we wanted to make it calm and have a richness and luxurious feeling. As purple is associated with opulence and decadence, we felt it would bring the desired level of warmth. Purple brings warmth and cosiness. It brings some life to the space as this is quite a dark room, which doesn’t get much sun and can feel quite cold. I think also that

if we had stuck to a neutral caramel palette it would have felt quite flat.

There are a lot of patterns in this room but it doesn’t feel busy, as they all work together. I chose patterns that played on nature and brought the outside in, so the wallpaper is Brambles from Knowles & Christou and the curtain is in Cirrus from Zimmer + Rohde which has a small leaf print in a trellis pattern.

The sofas are upholstered in Zimmer + Rohde fabrics with a velvet-like chenille pattern. They are soft, tactile and the cut texture catches the light. As the curtains have a lilac-purple tone, I felt it would be too strong to have both sofas in the purple fabric – I didn’t want purple to overwhelm the room.

The two cubes are in an Osborne & Little fabric that has the caramel tones, some dark and light purple, and lime green to bring the whole room together. Purple and green are great partners – you see them together in nature a lot, so they feel calm, and sophisticated. Purple is lovely in a bedroom as it has both masculine and feminine appeal, but I think the combination of deep fig tones and lime green is a more vibrant choice for a living room. I didn’t want it to feel too soft and ‘bedroomy’.

Finally, walnut and oak look lovely with purples, so I’ve used warm woods, but I find that purple looks best combined with cool metals such as nickel. ”



## RECOMMENDED PAINTS

**TOP** "Purple has always been a much-loved colour and has a timeless appeal," says Sarah Cole, director, Farrow & Ball. "Both Brinjal [left] and Pelt [centre] are stronger shades of purple and create a luxurious feel in a room. These colours are perfectly suited to dining rooms or smaller rooms where their intensity can create a dramatic and intimate atmosphere when lit by candlelight." £36 for 2.5l estate emulsion  
Zoffany's Purple Tulip is chosen by Liz Cann, design director: "A refined, elegant choice for the home. Its dark tones would look especially cosy in colder months, with warming accents." £39 for 2.5l flat emulsion

**MIDDLE** Rebecca Craig, head of design, Sanderson, advises: "This vibrant shade of purple [Meadow Violet] would look wonderful in modern and period homes, particularly in drawing and dining rooms." £38 for 2.5l matt emulsion  
Deep Ellis is a lovely purple from the Konig Colours range. Director, Vanessa Galloway comments: "It is a dark, vibrant purple that works really well in a cosy snug or TV room." She recommends to use on walls and bookcases and pair with Hellebore green inside shelving for a pretty contrast. £42 for 2.5l low sheen emulsion

**BOTTOM** "Damson Mousse fuses the softest grey hues with a deeper, more intense purple, reminiscent of dusky evenings and cosy nights in," says Cathryn Helsby, a colour expert at Earthborn. £32.70 for 2.5 litres of clay paint  
Fired Earth's creative director, Rob Whittaker suggests: "Tyrian Rose makes a particularly striking backdrop for gold and bronze frames and vintage fabrics." £35.50 for 2.5l matt emulsion  
From her eponymous collection of paints, Francesca Wezel picks Piedmontese Aubergine: "It is an eclectic colour, full of life and energy, it lights beautifully at night. It is not cold as there is a lot of red in it." £56.88 for 2.5l emulsion ▶



## TEXTURAL TONES

If purple walls are too daring, add layers of fig in soft furnishings and accessories

**TOP LEFT** Colefax & Fowler's new collection is a cool palette of steely blues and greys, enriched with flashes of pinky reds and soft aubergine. Cushions in a selection of fabrics, from £59 a metre **TOP RIGHT** Use accessories to add tones of fig and plum to neutral schemes, or as a bold contrast to hot pinks or citrus notes. These covetable mohair throws come in just the right colours. £79.95, Annabel James **BOTTOM LEFT** This chair just begs to be sat in, with its tactile velvet upholstery bringing an inviting vibrancy to a deep-purple hue. Richmond Velvet in Medici, £65 a metre, James Hare **BOTTOM RIGHT** Purple looks fabulous with a grey palette, and injects a splash of colour confidence. A fun stair runner in a statement pattern adds a little wit, too. Dotty in Damson from the Quirk Collection, £96.00 a linear metre, Alternative Flooring ■