Serious about colour

Paint is a great way to quickly update your living space. Here’s one company’s ideas for 2013’s colour trends to help you pick the right hues.

By Andrew Sia

How would you choose a colour scheme for your house or office? What are the trendiest hues for 2013? Can paints on walls mimic a flock of birds swooping, dispersing and regrouping in the sky?

On a recent study trip to Holland, one highlight is the AkzoNobel Global Aesthetic Center in the old town hall of Sassanam, about 45 minutes from Amsterdam. First, there is a display of the history of paint making, from hand-powered grinders of tree saps and stones to automated machines with chemicals.

Next we enter a series of small rooms that challenge our perceptions of colour. For instance, we see for ourselves how a patch of, say, green appears “different” depending on what colours are surrounding it.

“It’s the same colour, but our perception of it is different,” explains Willeke Jongejan, the senior global colour designer based at the centre.

Our group includes three students – Johnson Heng from Saito College, Melissa Chong from Alfa International College and Simon Chong of UCSI University – who won a contest on design ideas at the Dulux Emerging Talent Awards (DETA) 2012.

In another demonstration at the Aesthetic Center, we enter rooms lit by reddish or bluish light bulbs to give us a dramatic experience of how moods can change with colours.

“Colours make spaces,” points out Jongejan.

Even white is a lot more complex than we imagine, and we are shown how the “white light” of 10am differs from that of 4pm, and so on.

“We have to master white, for we paint with light,” she says.

AkzoNobel is a Fortune 500 company that has a whole slew of paint (and chemical) brands under its umbrella. This includes the Dulux range of paints, which was acquired along with Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) back in 2008.

Jeremy Rowe, the managing director of AkzoNobel Deco Paints, South-East Asia, who joins us on our study trip, notes that, in general, younger people are more adventurous in using strong, deep colours. “They may search online for ideas on colour combinations.”

Paints can, of course, create different ambiances and enhance moods in homes and offices.

“Strong reds can encourage appetites, as can be seen at McDonald’s and KFC, for instance, and my own dining room has a dark, maroon red on the walls,” says Rowe.

Once a year, the Aesthetic Center invites an international group of creative experts from the fields of fashion, travel, architecture and design, people who have their fingers on the pulse of what is happening in trends and colour. They meet to brainstorm which ideas and colours they think will be key for the following year.

“They get inspiration from looking around the places they live in and travel to, and from reading magazines and newspapers. They are aware of what’s going on in the arts and social media,” explains Jongejan.

“We want to know what’s in consumers’ heads so that we can supply it in two or three years’ time. We also visit graduations of young designers to see what they are doing and thinking.”

After meeting, they come up with an overall theme on colours plus five beautiful trends and palettes. Last year, the mood of the moment was entitled “Possibilities” and for 2013, the experts see communities and individuals embracing these possibilities and forming “Connections”.

The experts also select a “colour of the year”, which for 2013 is a shade of indigo called “inspired violet”. The reason?

“It’s a visual band-aid to our hectic lives, a striking statement colour associated with wisdom and honesty that enhances your environment. Like the dreamy ocean landscapes, this colour gives us a sense of tranquillity and stability which is very restful, yet can be as dazzling as sapphire,” is the paraphrased explanation from the website, colourfutures.com.

Within a colour palette, indigo is also a versatile hue, and it pairs very well with brights of a similar saturation level, such as citrus.
colours, as well as other blues, purples and greens.


The first trend, Collective Passion, recalls how a flock of starlings take to the sky and, almost like a single organism, they change direction, disperse and regroup. This recalls the vibrancy of social media where people dynamically create new possibilities to connect, share ideas, or even come together as a flash mob.

To capture this visual feast of movement, the colour palette swoops from one colour cloud to the next, with distinct colour groups flowing together; attention-grabbing fluro and pastel colours express energy, joy, creativity and purpose.

If this sounds too animated and pulsating, one can opt for the quiet, subdued and ethereal hues in the trend called “Switching Off”, which is when “we declare ourselves temporarily disconnected”, find stillness and clear the mind to create space for new thoughts.

The Art of Understanding is about a bright, charming version of life, recalling Kodakcolour fantasies of an idealised, retro era in America when everything was perfect.

Home Factory is about making things on a small-scale (be it cakes, handicrafts or clothes) so this trend’s colours are inspired by nature’s dyes such as reds from beetroot, the warm burnt orange of carrot juice and the bright green of alfalfa.

Every year, Dulux also has a recommended set of feng shui colours to fit people with different horoscope signs (tinyurl.com/a6w7dadv). For instance, those born in the Year of the Horse were advised in 2012 to “avoid extreme sports” plus “visit a dentist” and to use the “lucky colours” red, pink, purple, white and silver. And just in time for Chinese New Year, the website now also has a special section for the Year of the Snake (tinyurl.com/avyo8fq).

While it’s great to be inspired, how does one go about putting it all together? And, given that workmen’s charges are getting higher, how do we paint our home’s walls by ourselves? Dulux has a website that people can access for tips and advice at icipaints.com.my. You can also call the company’s help line at 1-800-88 9338 (Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm).
Trendy colours: Among the 2013 trends that colour experts have come up with is the ‘Art Of Understanding’, a palette that implies a bright, charming version of life, recalling an idealised, retro, 1950s feel.

In Holland

A demonstration of how colours affect our moods.

(Pic inset) There are many kinds of ‘white’, as Willeke Jongejan demonstrates to the study group.