

What's Danish for Elephant's Breath?

As the posh paint brand Farrow & Ball is sold for £500m, Katrina Burroughs looks at the new British shades and what your hue says about you

Farrow & Ball has long been the Aga of paint brands, the black labrador of emulsions and a style signifier of membership of a certain tribe.

The Dorset-based paint company created a new language when it came to painting our living rooms. Knowing the names of its 132 shades, from Dead Salmon to Salon Drab via Elephant's Breath, became shorthand for intensely pigmented, unimpeachable good taste.

This week Farrow & Ball was sold to Hempel, a Danish coatings company, for a reported £500 million. It's a long way from the clay pit where John Farrow, a chemist, and Richard Ball, an engineer, met in 1946. Does the deal signal the end of the brand as middle-class heaven and is it now simply middle-of-the-road? Has it become as shudderingly commonplace as Hunter, Barbour, Jo Malone and Le Creuset?

Possibly. The paint market has been remixing for a few years and there is a colour chart's worth of new companies that offer similar heritage hues, the same "made in Britain" DNA and more social cachet. Here's a guide to the brands to know and what your hue says about you.

Abigail Ahern

Edward Bulmer

The master of heritage paint, a designer, architectural historian and Britain's "colourman". From £49.50 for 2.5 litres, edwardbulmerpaint.co.uk
It says National Trust fan, supporter of the greenbelt and ardent resister of open-plan living.

Graham & Brown

A northern powerhouse with as long a history as F&B, but its lower prices have kept it under the radar. From £48 for 2.5 litres, grahambrown.com/uk/paint
It says Blue wall or red wall, at this price you can always change your vote next month.

Graphenstone

Nature and nurture: an eco-paint that is wipeable and purifies the air. It is the hot choice of cool decorators. From £19.16 for 1 litre, graphenstone-ecopaints.store
It says You are an early adopter who cares about the planet and can use the term "nanotechnology" in a sentence.

Lick

Founded in March last year and offering a colour card of 49 shades, this hip company caters to a generation of savvy DIYers born from the pandemic. For every 2.5 litre tin of paint Lick sells, it takes 18g of plastic out of the ocean in partnership with 4ocean. From £38 for 2.5 litres, lickhome.com
It says Be the change you want to see in the world — and on your walls.



Isabella, from £49.50 for 2.5 litres, edwardbulmerpaint.co.uk
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The "queen of the night" has been tempting to the dark side many homeowners, including celebrity clients, with 31 shades ranging from Rivington Blue to Noir. From £56 for 2.5 litres, abigailahern.com

It says I love a kitchen disco, and why should my life(style) change just because I have kids?

Atelier Ellis

The muted palette offers a soothing range of natural colours such as Faded Blossom and Solstice. From £49 for 2.5 litres, atelierellis.co.uk

It says Self-care in a paint pot. I'm sensitive and spiritual: this is as maximalist as I get.

Coat

Beloved of millennials and founded by millennials, this carbon-neutral paint company offers 32 shades that are snapped up by digital nomads. From £40 for 2.5 litres, coatpaints.com

It says I love my rental. I'm on the move, but won't settle for second best.

Dulux

Admittedly not new — it is celebrating its 90th anniversary — this is the decorators' go-to basic brand with a new heritage range and book. From £16 for 2.5 litres, diy.com

It says Top choice for those with Daylesford taste, but an Aldi budget.

Bricks & Mortar



Down Pipe in Modern Emulsion, £53 for 2.5 litres, farrow-ball.com
JAMES MERRELL



Golden Sands in Simply Refresh, £25.36 for 1.25 litres, dulux.co.uk

Mylands

Paint that plays a starring role in movie series from Harry Potter to James Bond. Mylands is Britain's oldest, family-owned and run paint manufacturer. From £51 for 2.5 litres, mylands.com

It says You've chosen a stellar label that's still almost a trade secret. Now, would you prefer that tin shaken, not stirred?

Paint and Paper Library

Beloved of architects and designers, this company has a premium palette that has long been the insiders' go-to with subtle grades of well-judged shades. From £51 for 2.5 litres, paintandpaperlibrary.com/paint
It says I love a cornice and a ceiling rose, and you can't beat a picture rail.

Pickleson

Non-toxic and on-trend, this brand launched last June and does what it says on its exemplary cool Budapest pink tin — best shown off on Instagram. From £49 for 2.5 litres, picklesonpaint.com
It says Welcome to the arthouse cinema fans' paint club. Is your home accidentally Wes Anderson? ■