

Design trends

by Nick Stanier of New House Textiles

Normally a 'trends article' is a bit of a cheat for me as one of New House's designers, Laura, now sits on the prestigious British Textile Colour Group (BTCG). If I ask her about 2011's colours, she'll say what season am I interested in? Spring, summer, autumn or winter? Do I want to know about the colours for interiors, fashion or leather goods, as these can be different? Would the latest ideas on structure and materials be of interest? What about the

new focus on creativity, escapism or nature? Oh dear, sometimes it's best not to ask, but I'm glad that someone in New House is thinking about all this stuff all the same.

Laura is on the British Textile Colour Group, but there are many national and international trend agencies that often link up. Trend prediction began as an industry after the Second World War, when raw materials were scarce and textile producers needed outside advice

to ensure they made next season's cloth in the right fashionable colours, rather than the wrong ones. It's grown into a serious and important business now, and why clever designers like Laura, are constantly looking at key factors that influence people, the things they buy, what they do, live, or at future developments that could affect how people act. A trend agency would then draw-up a picture of how the future might be, and suggest the colour palettes or materials to manufacturers who are creating new generations of products.

In a highly competitive world, good companies that want to stay ahead invest in obtaining the best information as part of their research. If you're interested in trends, then the huge Trend Hall at Heimtex is always worth a visit where you can see trend agencies and designers coming together.

However the biggest influence on trends is now economic. In troubled times people always play safe, so if you think in terms of colour, they tend to buy neutrals. This is why classic colours like charcoals, natural browns, creams, whites (plus a few inky-blues) should be the colours for 2010/11, and the New House collection is full of them. But more about colour later.

At the end of 2009 New House was invited to a presentation by Mintel, the big consumer trend research organization. We went along feeling quite rosy, as after all, we'd survived the 2009 recession pretty well, but Mintel soon wiped the smiles off our faces.

According to their figures, 2009 was a year of 'phoney recession'. People thought they'd gone through a recession, but deduct the lower spending of the newly unemployed from gains from lower mortgage rates, then UK consumers had an extra £6 -8 billion to spend. Older age groups (home owners) stopped spending, but the under 25's ignored the recession and spent more, especially on 'fast fashion'. This is why Primark and H & M had a boom year, whilst restaurants and the interior sector were 40% down (big names like MFI and World of Leather going bust).

Mintel warned us that the 'real recession' is due in 2010/11, especially once the election is out of the way and a new government comes clean about the figures. Mintel said they didn't

"According to the BTCG, it's charcoals all the way in 2010"



2010 *and beyond*

expect an economic growth 'you could feel' until early 2012. Our interior sector will keep suffering, there was a strong likelihood of another house price dip, Quantitative Easing was inflationary, so soon interest rates will have to rise too.

We had a good fill of doom-and-gloom from Mintel, but a week later New House had been invited to meet Lord Davis (Minister for small business), Mr. Beresford-Smith (chief economist for HSBC), an accountant from KPMG, the chief exec of our local Herefordshire & Worcester Council, and some chap from the Australian Embassy.

The council leader told us she was readying plans to cut 10% of staff in 2011. The KPMG accountant said now is a good time to buy-up your competitors and build market share. Money is available he said, if you have a good business plan (and KPMG are your accountants, of course). Lord Davis arrived with a phalanx of Civil Servant advisers, saying he wanted to find new ways to publicise business success stories to encourage more entrepreneurs. My only suggestion was to re-run of the 'Millennium Products' competition, timed to coincide with the 2012 Olympics (a few days later I had an email from Whitehall saying they were considering the idea). However the best speaker was Mr. Beresford-Smith.

HSBC's chief economist filled in the details of what we'd heard from Mintel the week before : A lot of UK businesses will go bust in 2010/11. Everyone in the UK is heading for a big fall in income as we adjust to the huge personal and government debts that have built up. HSBC believed UK's GDP growth would only average 1% a year for the next 10 years. Cutting government expenditure, investing in the UK's infrastructure, and for businesses to start exporting again would be the only viable way the UK could grow again. HSBC didn't think the £ was going to rise anytime soon either. Depressing stuff, but forearmed is forewarned I suppose.

The upshot is that over the next few years we're going to have to work dam hard to win the attention of cash-strapped consumers. Customers will be choosier, more careful and a lot more demanding than ever. Knowing your

customer well and what they want, will be vital.

Hearing what Mintel, Lord Davis and HSBC's chief economist said, felt like warning shots to us. At New House we've always spent time researching our market deeply, and I guess this is probably why our products and images appear in the glossy Homes & Gardens/Telegraph magazines so often.

Downturns don't last forever however. Laura tells us that by 2011/2, the British Textile Colour Group are predicting 'people will be tired of recession', so cheerful 'sunshine' colours like yellows and oranges will be back. Look carefully in the New House collection, and amongst the charcoals and neutrals, you'll find these sunny colours. They are there, just waiting for 2012 when people will want them (apparently).

"But just wait until 2011/12, when 'sunshine' colours make their return."

