

Colour planning in the interior design process

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ABSTRACT

Colour is a crucial element in any interior; interior designers desire to achieve appealing and effective colour schemes in their designed spaces. Many studies have been published in the areas of colour applications in interior design; in this paper we are concerned with the initial design process, mainly colour selections and thinking. In the interior design process, colour scheming and choices form an important step that any interior designer must pass through whether it is placed at their very early stages or later. Fifteen interior designers with varied professional backgrounds, but based in the Middle East (mainly the Arabian Gulf region), were interviewed. The results showed that the interior design process commonly involve a number of non-sequential steps including: meeting clients, visiting sites, programming, researching, sketching, building concepts, getting inspired, drawing (digitally and manually), and choosing colours and materials. In terms of colour, fourteen out of fifteen participants stated that colour thinking and its decision making take place at the early stages of their design processes; eight of fifteen believe that colour takes place in the first step when meeting clients and starting the project. In addition, the study documented 137 terms these designers use while brainstorming a design project; subsequent analysis of these terms could form a basis for understanding how designers communicate the abstract properties of colour as part of their design processes. Furthermore, designers were asked to choose the most frequent steps that occur during thinking of colour schemes for their designs and score them by importance. The results indicated that “satisfying stated clients requirements” was the most important consideration when thinking of colour schemes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The mission of interior designers is to create better solutions for enclosures. Designers in these fields generate objects or places that may have a major impact on the quality of life (Lawson, 2005). Hence interior designers work with intangible qualities including aesthetics. Pile (2007) detailed the interior design process and the phases the designer passes through. In his process, colour is mentioned at the fourth stage after finalising the drawings where he believes the selection of materials and colours fall. On the other hand, Grimley and Love (2007) strongly believe that colour remains one of the most challenging and contentious aspects of the interior design process; whereas Demirbilek and Smith (2010) concluded that colour, as an interior design element, potentially holds the power to impact on the identity of the interior space. McCloud (2012) called for the powerful ability of the colours chosen by the interior designer to be conveyed. The contradiction of different literature about how and where colour falls in the interior design process inspired this research to discover the ways practising designers deal with it; we aim for a cohesive answer to the questions: where does colour best fall in the interior design process, and how do designers prefer to choose and combine colours in their interior designs?

2. METHOD

A semi-structured interview approach was chosen, above other methods such as focus groups, to collecting in-depth data, to give privacy so as to try to find out what designers really think, and to prevent designers impacting on each (as in a focus group). A total of 15 designers were recruited from different cultural backgrounds, age groups (to study different needs and experiences), working experiences (novice / practicing / professionals / academics), and places or work around the Middle East (Dubai, UAE / Jeddah, KSA / Manamah, Bahrain / Beirut, Lebanon / Egypt, Cairo).

The aims of the study were explained to each designer who were then interviewed and data was recorded by taking notes and pictures. The duration of each interview was between 45 and 120 minutes with each participant.

Data were both qualitative and quantitative and were analysed in Excel.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Colour and the interior design process

The designers did describe doing things in different orders and using different terms; however, the following common non-sequential steps were identified: (1) meeting the client, (2) research & programming, (3) sketching, (4) concept development, (5) inspirations, (6) colour and materials thinking and choices, (7) manual or digital drawings, and (8) production or execution.

Designers were asked to state how they usually choose colour schemes for their interior designs, along with identifying where colour thinking/deciding falls in their design processes. Fourteen of the designers stated that colour comes at the beginning of their design thinking and processes; eight of these mentioned that colour is the very first element they think of. Table 1 shows the different methods that usually lead the fifteen designers to decide on colour schemes for their designed interiors (participants were allowed to list multiple methods). Ten out of fifteen prefer to get inspired rather than limit themselves to one or more ways to create a colour scheme. This, along with the multiple ways for each designer, was a crucial finding in the research as to keep in mind that designers may not like to limit themselves with specific tools; and subsequently we may generalise that it is an individual preference for designers to think of and choose colours. Colour wheels were also popular.

Table 1. Methods of choosing colours for interior design.

Method of choosing colours	Number of participants (out of 15)
Getting inspired / stated the words: inspiration	10
Colour wheels	8
Apps / online applications	2
Refer to colour research - UK	1
Depends on the chosen style for the project	1
Totally personalised to the desired mood and clients	1
When digitising the project / software material libraries	1



3.2 Colour terms designers use

Participants were asked to list colour-related terms that they usually use in their everyday profession to communicate colours in their designs. A total of 137 terms were collected; warm/cool was mentioned by ten of the designers. Figure 1 shows the most common colour-related terms among the fifteen designers. Additionally, an earlier study (case studies in 2012) took place in this research and resulted in four categories of colour discussion in interior design: *cultural, descriptive, emotional* and *functional*. Most of the collected terms could be categorised as being descriptive.

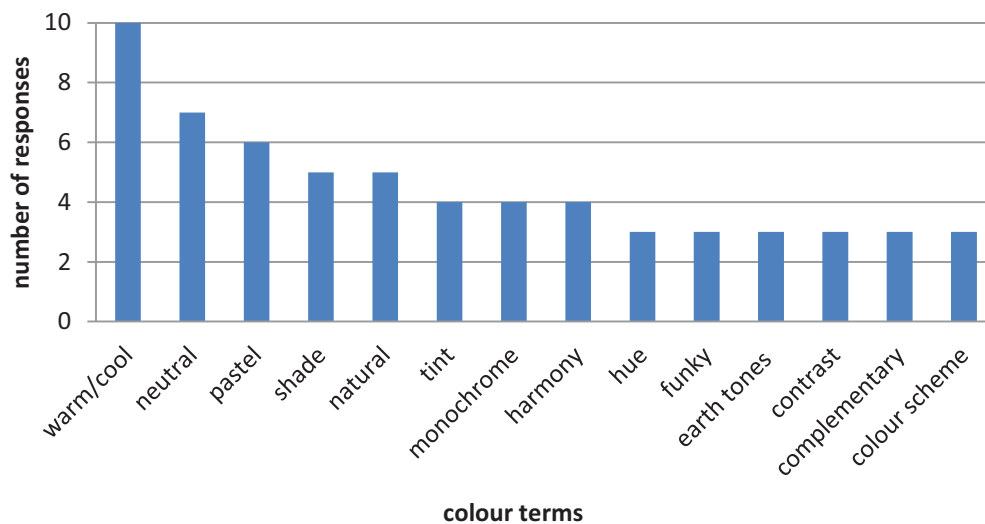


Figure 1. The most common colour terms used by the designers.

3.3 Reasons behind colour choices

The following question was asked to each designer:

As a designer, you choose your colour schemes “usually” for the purpose of: (tick then rank). Tick up to 10 choices and rank from 1 to 10 (as appropriate) where 10 indicates the most frequent purpose for using colour scheme.

On the form, there were 8 fixed options (Table 2) and 2 blanks for if the participant wanted to add a different reason behind choosing colour schemes. For each of the options (See Table 2) the average score was calculated (where the highest score is 10 and indicates it was ranked first and the lowest score is 1 and indicates it was ranked tenth).

Table 2. Average scores from the ranking data.

Options	Average Score
Satisfying stated clients requirements	9.12
Leaving an impact on users emotions	8.92
Manipulating spaces (e.g. narrowing-enlarging)	8.85
Applying what you think the users need (result of your research)	8.65
Leaving an impact on users physical actions	8.08
Impacting users mental actions/activities	7.93
Satisfying what users ask you to have	7.91
Satisfying your personal preferences	7.53

4. CONCLUSIONS

Pile (2007) indicated that colour and materials were considered relatively late in the design process. By contrast, the results from this study suggest that colour is considered by designers at the beginning of the process; indeed, in some cases it is the very first thing that is considered. When asked how they create colour schemes, more than half of the designers said that they used colour wheels; two thirds of the designers stated that they seek inspiration. Other methods such as colour research and mobile apps are rarely cited. When asked about colour communication, designers overwhelmingly tend to use descriptive terms and cited satisfying clients' demands as the most important reason behind a particular colour choice. Using colour to manipulate space and to influence users affectively were also strongly cited.

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