

design report

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how to play along

Three designers whose work embodies Playfulness in all its forms explain how to get the look – from curating a nostalgic colour palette to experimenting with materials

FEATURE Ellen Finch

A dining scheme by Paris firm Batiik Studio encompasses the materiality and heat of Playfulness





5 ways to embrace Playfulness

1 BE JOYFUL WITH COLOUR

There's a certain rose-tinted quality to many of the designer schemes that tap into Playfulness: blush pinks and mauves are key, but look also to yellow-toned neutrals (new magnolia, anyone?), hints of rust, burgundy and deep brown, forest greens and small touches of pale aqua.

2 WELCOME MATERIALITY

A one-note scheme this is definitely not: the most successful looks involve schemes layered with rich, deep-toned woods, coloured stones, rattan and jute and a hit of glossiness through lacquered surfaces or zellige tiles.

3 CLASH YOUR PATTERNS

Use traditional and folk-inspired prints on upholstery and fabrics, but don't stop there: combine them with candy stripes, busy contemporary botanicals, chequerboard patterns and a small dose of animal print for a scheme that's just the right amount of maximalist – and set it off with a pared-back base.

4 GO LOW(-SLUNG)

The slouchier the better when it comes to furniture: low-profile sofas feel relaxed and informal, so keep things close to the ground. The playfulness comes through in the pattern you choose to upholster with, but also in the shape: there's a softness to the silhouettes in this trend that can lean towards the ultra organic.

5 LAYER IT UP

The easiest way to introduce all of these elements into your scheme is through buildable accessories, which is why rugs, cushions and throws are key to the look. Layer flatweave rugs with high-pile textures, combine round and rectangular throw pillows in clashing patterns: as long as there's a thread that holds them together, your scheme will still feel cohesive. ►

PHOTOGRAPH ALICE MESGUICH



shape shifting

INTERIOR DESIGNER MICHAEL HILAL ON THE CURVES AND LOW-SLUNG SHAPES THAT MAKE UP THIS TREND IN FURNITURE

The reintroduction of the curved sofa opened the floodgates to playful furniture shapes. Curved pieces have come in and out of style since the art deco era – but what people have done [now] is make curved seating more playful. That’s because we now have a better understanding of materiality, of how to frame a sofa like that. New materials have led to a new generation of furniture-makers, like Virgil Abloh, pushing the boundaries: they’re taking historical designs and riffing on them, reinterpreting the classics.

The way people live has also changed. Formality has gone out the window and so we’re apt to move into a new direction in how we think about seating, in particular – it can be a bit more interesting looking. I always balance engaging shapes with some more ‘standard’ pieces in my projects: otherwise, it becomes a little jokey when, for example, every piece of furniture is a sculptural piece. It diminishes the value of the individual item. Likewise, if I had vintage in a space – some beautiful 70s pieces, for example – more of my other seating would be from a different era, and of a more standard format, because I want those 70s pieces to sing.

Low-slung furniture is a big part of this look: I think it’s the insinuation of a less formal space. It makes you feel like you can actually sit in the room, curl up on the sofa and lounge as opposed to having to be precious. Low profile furniture also makes the room feel much taller than it is, [especially] balanced with floor-to-ceiling drapery.

For our Big Sur sofa series, I didn’t want everything to feel too rounded: it has a bit more angularity than the average amorphic- or biomorphic-shaped sofa. I take inspiration from Philippe Malouin’s pieces, which have a good balance of softness and structure. Velvet, mohair and heavy chenille work really well on these kinds of seating because those fabrics feel a lot less rigid and help to soften the edges. A material like linen will take it into a completely different direction. Ultimately, slouchy furniture is all about getting people into a space by making it feel a little less formal, a little fresher. The way we live now has changed to something that is much more conducive to cooler, loungey, more interesting furniture choices.



Michael Hilal's Big Sur furniture collection for St Vincents

michaelhilal.com



colour chemistry

THE NOSTALGIC LOOK OF OLD FILMS INSPIRES LAUREN GEREMIA'S APPROACH TO COLOUR; TENSION IS KEY TO A PLAYFUL PALETTE

Colour, for me, is a very emotional, instinctive thing. Most of my palettes are custom created: I have a painting degree, so colour and paint as a material are things that I address in the very beginning stages of a project. Rather than working from a paint book, I tend to mix my own colours with gouache, a high-mineral paint I've been working with since college: it's very opaque and there's a lot of pigment in it. I love playing around and mixing colours I've seen in movies and paintings to inform my palette for a project. Doing this means I can create something really custom rather than something that's trend based: it's a journey based on instinct and individuality.

I watch films and source artwork before I even look at photographs or mood boards. Films tend to have colour threads that make them cohesive and really beautiful – you can often look up the palette of a movie and somebody's already derived those colours for you. I watch a lot from the 60s and 70s, which have a particular kind of yellowness to them. I love that nostalgia created by colour, like a room that looks vintage because of the particular shades that have been selected. You can create such a mood with colour and it doesn't need to be bright or juvenile – it can be very sophisticated.

Colour theory is something that I learned at a young age, and at this point it's so ingrained that I get excited when there's unusual chemistry with colours. When I'm playing with materials, I'm looking for a bit of tension – an electricity or energy from the combinations of colours. By themselves, they don't do anything, but they vibrate off of each other, just like with different styles of furniture or fabrics – the combination creates the mood.

Right now, I'm really into yellow: it's such a happy colour, and it's very Californian to me. I've been using it a lot in projects with the citrusy combination of oranges, peaches and pinks. I also just finished a project that I'm excited about – it's a little more feminine and uses a lot of pink: it wasn't heavy-handed, but soft and mature. If you want to create a mood around pink that is more masculine, it holds well against heavy woods like oak. Somebody told me once that I treat colours like neutrals, even navy blues or olive greens. I do have projects that are exclusively neutral with a 'star' hue that sticks out and electrifies the room, but mostly, the neutrals are filling gaps and creating moments of calm amongst the colour. ▶





material balance

YASMINE GHONIEM, DIRECTOR OF DESIGN STUDIO YSG, DRAWS ON A DIVERSE RANGE OF TEXTURES FOR HER DISTINCTIVE SCHEMES

Successful interiors merge the rough with the refined, polished with raw, and matt with sheen elements. Similarly, colourful spaces also need moments of respite, so neutral shades with strong pops are my go-to. I'm drawn to extreme or unlikely pairings, like velvets with woven straws. As much as I love coloured natural stone, I feel marble especially has somewhat saturated kitchens in recent years. I've pared back its use to glorify its beauty again, like for a floating vanity in a bathroom. We've been crafting some spectacular oversized marble door pulls and adding custom lazy Susans with energising tonal patterns to circular timber tables. Both are a great way to utilise marble offcuts as opposed to committing to purchasing entire slabs and finding purposes for them through the home, which can end up looking a little matchy-matchy.

I'm interested in exploring tiled floors and walls, plus raw, less refined timbers for work surfaces and joinery – rich woodgrain patterns always catch my eye. I've never been one to specify timber floors, but I am interested in looking at different formats with less traditional stains and unexpected board sizes and laid patterns. Tactility is key for me; it's how you connect to a space.

I love varied timber species that have really interesting woodgrains, like the dark watercolour-like blobs on Poplar Burl – and their swirling hollows, which invite touch. Lighter timbers like birch also appeal as they stain really well (I'm talking colour, not varnish) and look fabulous on cupboard doors. I sometimes mismatch timber species or veneers for tonal contrasts and create tapestry-like jigsaw connections on joinery surfaces.

Glossiness is synonymous with light reflection. That's what a lacquered surface does best: throw light around. A resin finish is an interesting way to bring gloss in, as [are] foiled finishes and gilded corners; coloured glass also brings sheen to a space in an unexpected way. Glass bricks divide spaces fantastically without creating a sense of enclosure: I love how natural light can filter through coloured [blocks] and cast tonal reflections on neighbouring walls. I'm also partial to painting feature walls and ceilings with Venetian, Waterstone or Marmorino plasters and French washes, which bounce light about and create incredible shadow-play come nightfall with lights set on low.



YSG's Soft Serve House features burl wood and mixed stone surfaces

emerging idea

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something unexpected

The 'unexpected red theory' has been creating a stir online, but is it really a way to instantly elevate your home?

FEATURE Hugh Metcalf

We are, perhaps quite understandably, a bit wary of an interiors trend that surfaces from social media. However, there's a recent export from TikTok that seems like it may be impossible to ignore in the design landscape.

You may have already heard of the 'unexpected red theory' – a term coined

by TikTok user Taylor Simon to describe the concept that a seemingly random injection of red into a room will make it look more elevated. It's not an entirely new concept, but it seems to have coincided with a mood in design to which it lends itself very well.

Red was an unlikely hero of Milan Design Week, from the dark burgundy of

the Rosso Levanto marble in the hero pieces of a number of brand showings, to a colour palette that included retro red terracotta, reimagined for 2024.

This unexpected use of red is also the calling card of some of the world's best designers, the people who are doing exciting things with colour schemes – but beware, as it's an idea that sounds easier to pull off than it really is. After all, how do you successfully introduce red into a room where 'it doesn't match at all' – as Taylor says in the viral video?

In the examples of this colour theory going viral, it's a classic, nearly-primary shade of red you'll see as the prime example of how this idea is implemented. So why red? Why not an equally shocking intervention of blue? Orange? Bright pink? 'Shades of red can really ignite a space, providing a visceral glow,' explains Yasmine Ghoniem, founder and director of YSG design studio.

'It is bold yet classic and surprisingly versatile as it goes with everything in small doses,' adds interior designer Eddie Maestri, founder of Maestri Studio. 'It adds drama and energy to a space. It's nice to incorporate a small pop of red in accessories now and then just to make sure the space comes alive.'

For Róisín Lafferty – founder of a eponymous design studio – it is red's emotive power that makes the use of 'unexpected red' so engaging. 'Colour is powerful and subconsciously evokes a lot of emotions, in particular red,' says Róisín. 'Red is bold and dominant, therefore when used, we feel it either needs to take centre stage or have strong colours, textures and shapes to work >

Complementing the warm, subtle tones of this Sydney beach house, flashes of bright red make an impact. Design by YSG



In the hidden pantry
in this kitchen designed
by Maestri Studio, an
unexpected red paint
colour reveals an
exciting surprise when
opening the doors



emerging idea

alongside it. Choosing red tones encourages people to act and feel differently within the space – it's sexy and powerful.'

To put how these designers use red as simply 'not matching the room' is to perhaps do a disservice to how deftly they wield it in their designs. What's the difference between using red in an unexpected way and just using red?

For Róisín, this use of red is less about being random and more about it making the right impact. 'Using red as a sole colour within a space can make it appear unexpected,' she says. 'However, if using it solely it needs to appear dominant to act as a statement piece.

This can be achieved by using the colour red in a contrasting furniture style to allow it to shout, or oversizing a red piece of furniture, where everything else appears in the background yet complements this feature element.'

In the kitchen pictured below, Róisín used red as an unexpected foil to a teal. 'We introduced a dreamy natural red pigmented quartzite stone to the kitchen, creating a backdrop that entices you to touch, feel and interact with the space,' Róisín explains. 'To complement this vein-enriched stone we populated the room with subtle hints of vibrant red tones in the form of door handles and accent lights. These accents of red offset

the rich tones of rosewood timber, blending harmoniously to create a dreamlike, sensual environment.'

While Róisín's designs see red used among a kaleidoscope of other colours, for interior designer Yasmine Ghoniem it can be a powerful addition to make a palette come alive when decorating with neutrals. 'We tend to go for the warmer hues en masse, like painting a ceiling or feature wall with a velvety Marmorino or French wash finish, and save the more vibrant, brighter reds for accents like joinery trims or a feature piece of furniture for example,' says Yasmine.

For a holiday home in Sydney, Yasmine introduced a bold red element. The most unexpected might be a red kitchen tap, crowning the contemporary island (pictured on the previous spread). 'The brighter shade also activates the island with an energetic pulse, sandwiched between two types of natural stone to enhance the complementary pairing,' Yasmine says.

Another way to approach red in an unexpected way is to hide it inside part of your design – a wardrobe or cabinet, for example – for a burst of joy when opening the door. The kitchen design (pictured on the previous spread) by Maestri Studios might be the very definition of unexpected red, as the kitchen cabinet doors open to reveal a pantry painted in a energetic shade of red. 'For the hidden pantry, the use of red is just that, unexpected and bold,' says Eddie. 'When the door is open, the view of the red has a strong visual impact against the kitchen's black and white palette.'

What makes the use of red in these schemes 'unexpected', rather than carefully and considerately designed into them from the outset is hard to define, but regardless there's a clear lesson to learn from these spaces. If your room's colour scheme is feeling a little flat, why not try a bit of red? It might be just what you're missing.



A MATERIAL WORLD

Glass bricks, crazy paving, luxe marble, mosaic tiling – the beauty of this Sydney home is all down to its components

PHOTOGRAPHY Anson Smart

✕ STYLING YSG

WORDS Kara O'Reilly

LIVING AREA

'Given this corner is exposed to ample light, the teal curtains cool it, as do the black mosaic tiles,' says designer Yasmine.

Prime Time **chair**, Great Dane. **Side table**, Dirk van der Kooij at Studio ALM. **Painting** by Sam Leach, Sullivan + Strumpf. **Tiles**, Bisanna Tiles. **Curtains** in Manipi linen, Designs of the Time; made by Simple Studio. Miss 1 LED **pendant**, Davide Groppi at Dedecé. Vintage ceramic **vase**, Rudi Rocket

LIVING AREA

The toffee-coloured plaster ceiling has a wonderful mottled velvet finish. 'We've created spaces with tranquil tonal intensity,' says Yasmine.

Ceiling in Waterstone polished plaster, Bishop's Master Finishes. **Asymmetric sofa**, BassamFellows at Living Edge. **Shelving unit**, designed by YSG; made by Élan. **Vase** (on shelf, left) by Liam Fleming, Sabbia Gallery. **Horse sculpture** (top shelf), Rudi Rocket. **String vase** (bottom shelf), Studio ALM. **Screen** in glass bricks, Poesia; designed by YSG; made by Promena Projects



KITCHEN

'The island that glitters like a black diamond acts as a partition yet maintains open sightlines and conversations towards the dining and lounge areas,' says Yasmine.

Island in Magnesite stone, Artedomus; with Nero marble mosaic tiles, Bisanna Tiles; and aquamarine glass brick inset, Poesia; designed by YSG; made by Mediterranean Marble. **Iva stool**, Grazia & Co. **Table**, designed by YSG; made by Élan. **Elettra chairs**, Arflex at Space Furniture. **Floor-to-ceiling lamp**, Asaf Weinbroom



Yasmine Ghoniem of YSG design studio is not afraid to turn convention on its head. In lesser hands, choosing glass bricks or crazy paving could be a cause for concern for those who remember them as signifiers of suburban 1960s and 1970s design, but Yasmine's skill set is in using such materials in a way that makes them both modern and much coveted.

In her revamp of this Sydney home built into a hillside overlooking the harbour, she's used those very materials, as well as other retro-leaning elements, such as smoked glass and black mosaic tiles, and given them an oh-so-now resonance. As well as her clever materials revivalism, she has been canny in making the most of what was previously an awkwardly arranged house.

The house was divided into a series of small, dark rooms and felt cramped for a family home. The first task was to 'gut' the middle floor to create a far more workable living/dining/kitchen space. As a part of that process, Yasmine sacrificed some of the floor space to reconfigure what were originally two divided balcony areas into one generous one, now running the width of the house and large enough for a dining table and a seating area – both intended to make the most of that Aussie affinity for outdoor living as well as, obviously, 'enhancing those harbour views'.

The joy of the outdoors is also seen in the tweak to the pool area – where the surrounds of the original amoeba-shaped pool have been reclad in the aforementioned crazy paving but with the addition of a platform projecting over the pool to house a generous daybed for enjoying long, lazy summer days – perfectly meeting the clients' desire to create a home that felt 'like a boutique hotel'.

Key to the project's success is its palette: welcoming sunshine hues in the entrance, with the pop of ochre in the glass brick wall and luminous orange console, give way to richer teals and purples in the living room, which act as a foil to the dazzling light that now infiltrates the space thanks to the glass walls. Bedrooms and bathrooms are more muted in relaxing hues of plaster and caramel. Tactility was key to the material choices, from the rose marble in the vanity to the monolithic black slab of the kitchen island, via boucle upholstery, teak cabinetry and zellige tiles. 'Touch played a key role in the selections of fabrics and finishes to instil a sense of connection to the moment,' says Yasmine.

On paper, it sounds like a mixed bag but in Yasmine's skilful hands even elements considered dubious are made desirable – once again showing how much of a design visionary she is. And proving that she really does get that the devil is in the details.

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ysg.studio



POOL

'Retaining the amoebic outline of the pool, we designed a cantilevered platform supporting an upholstered lounge that extends over one curve, refreshing it with a retro Palm Springs mood,' explains Yasmine.

Day bed in Ecriture in Rust outdoor fabric, Holly Hunt; designed by YSG; made by Rematerialised. **Cushions in** Switchback outdoor fabric; **bolsters in** Birds of Paradise in Blood Orange outdoor fabric; both Holly Hunt. **Caribe Chic basket side table** and **Caribe Chic basket planter**, both Ames at Origine



ENTRANCE
'Unifying the home's unique port windows, the custom timber entrance door features spherical indentations,' says Yasmine.

XX glass console **table** by Johanna Grawunder for Glas Italia, Space Furniture.
Artwork; vase, by Martyn Thompson, Studio ALM.
Dotdot **platter** (on console), Maison Balzac.
Door with bronzed mirror perforations, designed by YSG; made by Winchester Interiors

STUDY

'We converted a bedroom into a private office,' says Yasmine. Porthole openings inspired by the building's original windows are replicated here.

Desk, client's own; custom finished by YSG. **Table lamp**, Studio ALM. Elettra **chair**, Arflex at Space Furniture.

Sculptures (back, left to right) tall Pod vase; small white two-footed Pod vase; large green two-footed Pod vase, all by Emma Young, The DEA Store. Hello **Sonia!** **rug**, cc-tapis at Mobilia





CLOAKROOM

'The angled Tiberio marble vanity is seemingly carved from a block of stone,' says Yasmine.

Vanity in honed Tiberio stone, Artedomus; designed by YSG; made by Mediterranean Marble. **Assemble Dial tap**, Astra Walker. **Vintage mirror**, Studio ALM. *Sunrise Nightfall sculpture* (left) by Bettina Willner, Saint Cloche gallery. **Walls and floor** in tumbled Rosso travertine, Bisanna Tiles. **Leo joinery pull** in antique brass (used as towel rail), Pitella



the download

THE DESIGNER

Yasmine Ghoniem, founder and director of Sydney-based architecture and design practice YSG, who transformed this three-storey 1990s house for her clients, a couple and their two children.

THE PROPERTY

A three-storey house in the Mosman area of Sydney with views of the harbour from its cliffside location. In the basement is a playroom, laundry, guest bedroom and bathroom, plus office. This floor leads to the garden. The middle floor has the kitchen-dining-living areas, walk-in pantry, cloakroom and balcony. On the top floor is the main bedroom with walk-in wardrobe, en-suite bathroom, plus a living area with study, as well as the two children's rooms and a bathroom.

HALLWAY

'Within the entry level beside the new feature glass wall, we highlighted the staircase balustrade with a creamy polished plaster to bounce light about,' says Yasmine.

Windows in neutral and golden amber glass bricks, Poesia; designed by YSG; made by Promena Projects.

Ceiling in Waterstone polished plaster, Bishop Master Finishes. **Stair balustrade in** Fresco, Porter's Paints

MAIN BEDROOM

'This is the owners' favourite spot,' says Yasmine. It turns their room into a sanctuary where they can flop with a book or share a drink.'

Seat in Arundo in Roseaux by Métaphores at Boyac (top), and Tessellate in Ivory/Beige by Kelly Wearstler (bottom); designed by YSG; made by Rematerialised. **Cushion**

(left), Spence & Lyda. **Cushion** (right), client's own. **Joaquim table,** Stylecraft. **Sheer curtains in** Guarani linen, Designs of the Time; **blackout curtains in** Satori Stonewash in Nude, Mokum; made by Simple Studio





MAIN BEDROOM

'This was reconfigured to maximise wardrobe space. A low wall frames the bed with joinery behind,' says Yasmine.

Le Fruit D'Un Savoir Faire, **wallpaper** (on doors), Élitis. Flocca **headboard** in Brun, Hale Mercantile Co. **Bedside table** in Verde Bardini marble, Artedomus; made by Mediterranean Marble. Roy **wall light**, Viabizzuno for VBO. (On shelf) Turned wood **lamp**, Goodmoods at Studio ALM. Aardwolf **sculpture** by Georgia Harvey, Saint Cloche gallery. Orizzonti **rug** in Dune, cc-tapis at Mobilia

TERRACE

'The incredible views of Sydney harbour are now accentuated, and once-neglected outdoor entertaining areas are both enhanced and more easily accessed,' says Yasmine of the newly extended space.

Gioi table, Artedomus. Stool, Floris Wubben at Studio ALM. Banquette in Birds of Paradise; cushions in Ecriture and Switchback outdoor fabrics, all Holly Hunt; made by Rematerialised

