

The history of Colour of the Year

How is Colour of the Year decided? Who is the team behind it? To answer these important questions, we look back at 17 years of Colour Futures with Heleen Van Gent, Creative Director of AkzoNobel's Global Aesthetic Centre, based in Holland.

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An interview with Heleen Van Gent



The annual launch of Colour Futures is the most important date in the Dulux calendar. Every year, a panel of experts gather together at a specially selected location in the Netherlands to discuss global issues, forecast trends and paint a picture of what life will be like for consumers in the next 12 months. Their aim? To transform this picture into colour, through the Colour of the Year and accompanying colour palettes, helping consumers bring a splash of colour into their homes.

It's a unique, meticulous and – you might be surprised to learn – emotional process. At the heart of it is Heleen Van Gent, Creative Director of AkzoNobel's Global Aesthetic Centre since 2009. Here, Heleen offers us a look back at 17 years of Colour Futures...

Q. Why is Colour Futures so important?

At AkzoNobel, we both want and need to know the colour preferences of our consumers before they even know it themselves. Colour Futures is about designing colour collections for the future and, as a commercial company, we need to know that these collections will be spot on and that our consumers will appreciate them.

Q. Can you tell us more about the process and who is involved?

Every year, I invite 10-15 people from all over the world, varying from leading journalists in China to pioneering designers from Brazil. I ask them to share what they think is going to influence the consumer in the coming years – the way they live and work, what will make them happy and what will keep them awake at night. I ask them what our world will look like in years to come.

[history-coty-2.jpg](#) [1]



Q. Those are big questions! Does it ever get emotional?

Oh, you don't want to know! There was one year where we were discussing a trend about working from home and family and one or two people were on the verge of tears. When you go in-depth about these things, it's easy

to get emotional and passionate. And it makes sense because trends are about emotion – and colour is about emotion.

Q. So when do the trends become colours?

From the discussion, we come up with four trends with one overriding theme, and the Colour of the Year reflects this. It has to describe the mood of the moment while at the same time be a true trend colour in architecture and interior design.

The four individual trends are then translated into the four palettes, with the Colour of the Year at the heart of them.

[history-coty-3.jpg](#) [2]



Q. How is the Colour of the Year name chosen?

There are many things to consider. It has to be a relatable name that helps consumers translate the colour, without having seen it. It has to be a name our competitors haven't used yet, and a name that we can protect from a legal perspective. It has to be a name that people will remember when they see it in a news article. It has to be a name that stands out and resonates all over the world. So, yes, there are a lot of elements, which is why it's quite difficult to come up with!

Q. How has Colour Futures evolved over the past 17 years and how has the Colour of the Year changed with it?

In the first 10 years, the team talked about colours in general and small day-to-day trends. Now, we're talking much more about the world and the bigger things in life. In 2019, for example, we've explored looking at the world with more optimism, and next year is all about human needs.

With regards to the Colour of the Year, our focus has shifted towards taking our products more seriously and nominating a colour that we really believe is best for four walls. Now, we have more tools for consumers and professionals that support Colour Futures, like our Roller Testers and Visualizer app, so it's much easier for customers to see what the paint colour will look like on their wall.

[history-coty-4.jpg](#) [3]



Q. What about the colours specifically? Is there anything we can learn from how each year's chosen colours have changed?

In the past, the colour palettes have been much brighter and lighter. Now, colours have become much deeper. In fact, our best-selling colours at the moment are the greys and muted colours. Greys have huge popularity all over the world.

Q. Why do you think this is?

People are trying to create a sophisticated environment and greys are perceived to be very sophisticated. Brighter colours are perceived as more childlike. Of course, they can still be used in a grown-up and beautiful way, but we're seeing them used less often.



Q. How do you see Colour Futures continuing to evolve?

Social media and user-generated content will definitely play a more important role, but the trend forecasting will remain a specialist area.

Ultimately, there will be interesting changes that will make colour selection and application easier for our consumers and to make them feel that their preferences are recognised. We will keep striving to make Colour Futures even more consumer and customer-friendly and relatable.

Q. Finally, what is your favourite moment from Colour Futures?

It's a very emotional moment and it happens every year: When we agree on the one overriding theme. In that moment, we realise we are just one world, we are much closer than we think we are and we're so much alike.

[Click here](#) [5] to find out more about 2020's Colour of the Year.



Links

[1] <https://www.duluxtradepaintexpert.co.uk/files/history-coty-2jpg>

[2] <https://www.duluxtradepaintexpert.co.uk/files/history-coty-3jpg>

[3] <https://www.duluxtradepaintexpert.co.uk/files/history-coty-4jpg>

[4] <https://www.duluxtradepaintexpert.co.uk/files/history-coty-5jpg>

[5] <https://www.duluxtradepaintexpert.co.uk/en/colours/collections/explore-dulux-colour-year-2020-tranquil-dawn>