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LIVING COLOR

BY LAURA FENTON

Warming Effect

Add a dash of burnt orange, a slightly smokey version of the secondary hue, to your home this fall

Think of burnt orange as a deep shade of orange with its brightness stripped back—a bit brown, a little dark, and decidedly distinguished. It is a color that lends instant warmth to any interior where it is used.

“Burnt orange has a kinship to nature not only because of its association with autumn and deciduous trees, but because of the warmth implied in its name,” says Donald Kaufman, the founder of Donald Kaufman Color, whose signature paints grace the walls of the Portland Museum of Art. Indeed, the hue is everywhere in nature: it’s the color of a large tree’s rotting heartwood, iron gone to rust, and fiery zinnias in late August. But burnt orange is also the color of the automotive paint and synthetic fibers of the 1970s—think rust-colored sofas (the kind that might still be lingering in the family summer house) or a vintage Mercedes in deep orange. What you pair it with in a room will influence which of these associations it summons up.

Whatever style you are craving, burnt orange is a way to draw focus, add warmth, and highlight contrasts in your interior decor. Here is some advice from the experts on how to use this rich, rustic hue in your own home.

Play with dashes of color.

“Pops of burnt orange can give a neutral or white room many different feelings depending on the use,” says Samantha Pappas, an interior designer based in Yarmouth. “It can provide a bold, modern, or edgy vibe, or it could add a calming, organic feel that ties to nature.” Pair it with chrome and Lucite for a swinging ’70s feel, or match it with natural wood and stone for a softer, more natural look.

Use it to warm up a colorless room.

“Black and white can read very cold at times, so I always try to throw in some color [like burnt orange] to warm things up,” says Jennifer Morrison, principal of Morrison Design House in Windham, who used rusty orange pillows in an otherwise monochromatic room. Pappas agrees, saying, “Against white or gray, burnt orange is such a striking color.”

Lean into rich textures.

Designers encourage using burnt orange in a textured way. Pappas says she likes the color in a pillow, upholstered piece, or a throw blanket with visible weave. Morrison notes that a material with texture, like velvet, “creates a bit of friction.” If you are thinking of a burnt orange wall color, you might look at textured grasscloth, limewash, or a ragged paint effect.



Photo: Jeff Roberts



Photo: Meredith Perdue

Look to the forest for color ideas.

Morrison always draws inspiration from the natural world for interiors, but she notes that indoors does not need to be a literal translation of the outdoors. For example, when she noticed birch trees holding their leaves in January, she loved the way the gray bark and brown leaves intersected with one another, but she increased the saturation when she translated the pairing to a room. Our experts say that burnt orange is a perfect partner for natural wood furniture and cabinetry.

Use it adjacent to something you want to feel bright.

You can use burnt orange to play up the contrast between spaces. For example, "Next to a white kitchen, a burnt orange dining room can be lovely," says Kaufman, who notes that "the person occupying that space [the kitchen] will be fooled into thinking the light is brighter than it is because of the high contrast, since that's what evolution has taught us to see in nature."

Draw attention with orange.

"Burnt orange in an otherwise neutral room will immediately catch the eye and be one of the first things you're drawn to when walking into the room," says Pappas, who used a garland of burnt orange yarn as the focal point in a nursery design.

Use burnt orange sparingly.

"I typically like to use this color in accents," says Pappas. "When you only add accents of the orange it isn't overpowering." When using burnt orange, Pappas suggests you let neutral hues, like white or gray, dominate the color scheme.

Balance its warmth with cooler colors.

"I love pairing burnt orange and green, as they perfectly complement one another with the balance of warm and cool tones," says Pappas.

Don't try to find a pastel version.

"There's no such thing as a pale burnt orange," cautions Kaufman. "If you tried to make it, it's some weird cosmetic color." Instead, match burnt orange with off-whites, golden yellows, and sandy tans.

Tread carefully when working with black.

When pairing orange and black, Morrison says, "it's important to use a rusty or earthy hue, like burnt orange." Any bright tones will create that Halloween feel. Morrison notes that materials also make a difference: "I tend to stick with velvets or linen."

Yarmouth-based Leandra Fremont-Smith used orange as a focal point when she painted this wet bar a bold shade of orange (opposite, top). Bronwyn Huffard of South Portland's Huffard House threaded touches of orange throughout this project (opposite, bottom), including the leather on the two midcentury modern Redford House chairs and the skateboard decks printed with Warhol soup cans.

(This page, from top) Jennifer Morrison of Morrison House Design in Windham drew inspiration from the forest in winter for this calming bedroom papered in Cole and Sons' Woods wallpaper; rust-colored pillows warm up the cool scheme. An all-white loft by interior designer Samantha Pappas gets a burst of warm, natural color from an orange leather chair from CB2 and a velvet pillow. This burnt orange couch adds punch and fun color to an otherwise neutral family living room by Heidi Lachapelle Interiors in Portland.



Photo: Erin Little



Photo: Courtney Elizabeth Media



Photo: Erin Little

Burnt to Perfection

What does the word “burnt” mean when describing a color? Narayan Khandekar, the director of the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at Harvard Art Museums, says that for colors like “burnt umber” and “burnt sienna” it literally meant burning: people would take earth and heat it to change the color. “For example, ochre is an iron oxide, but it also has some water as part of its crystalline structure,” explains Khandekar. “When you heat that up or burn it, it forces the water out of that structure, and then it will not change color from a yellow to a red color.”

Khandekar notes that the practice dates back to ancient times. In a recent study of Australian Aboriginal art, Khandekar says, there was no naturally occurring red pigment found on an island where the prehistoric art features the color. “We haven’t been able to prove it, but we can confidently speculate the artist would take the yellow pigment, heat it up in a fire and make red pigment,” he says.

In the case of burnt orange, the name is more evocative than literal: there is no specific raw material that must be burnt to create the hue. However, Khandekar notes that it’s a color people can quickly visualize: “When you apply ‘burnt’ to orange, there’s a distinct color that comes to mind. Anyone who lived through the 1970s can picture it. It’s orange as if it had been through the fire.” **MH+D**



Photo: James Salomon Photography

The University of Texas at Austin’s official colors are burnt orange and white. The school is so serious about the integrity of their hue that they had Pantone designate a specific color code (16-1448 TPX) for their color and then trademarked it!

Palette Picks



PPG Siena

A rich, reddish orange from the Lisa Sharp Colors collection.



Sherwin-Williams Cut the Mustard

A deep, velvety saffron hue with an undertone of gold.



Portola Paints Moccasin

A rich, earthen copper clay with a touch of terra cotta.



Benjamin Moore Pilgrimage Foliage

A bold, saturated orange that says autumn.



Benjamin Moore Firenze

This sophisticated orange plays nicely with other colors.

In this nursery by Samantha S. Pappas Design, a quiet scheme of creams and grays gets a lift of color with the orangey yarns of the wall hanging that Pappas created for her client.

Color Curated

We scoured the market for 9 delightful burnt orange finds.



Smith Large Table Lamp, \$999
Circa Lighting // circalighting.com



Kartell Sound Rack, \$795
Y Lighting // yighting.com



Amber Glass Mug, \$28
Schoolhouse // schoolhouse.com



Granada Shams, \$128
Serena & Lily // serenaandlily.com



Sentrum Side Table, \$395
Design Within Reach // dwr.com



Reed Kilim Rug, \$238 to \$2,228
Dash & Albert // annieselke.com



Manta Alpaca Bedcover in Orange, \$775
Hollywood at Home // hollywoodathome.com



Reva Storage Chair, \$1,349
EQ3 // eq3.com



Quilt Wallpaper in Cayenne, \$175
Hygge & West // hyggeandwest.com