PRUE RUSCOE

Conjuring with colour

How to fake a bigger space using just paint.

Looking to elevate a poky space or tiny room? Let your paintbrush run wild, recommend the experts, who say colour is as much about enhancement as about decorating.

"Colour is transformative like no other decorating trick," says Greenhouse Interiors' Julia Green, author of the colourful tome *Vivid*. "It's an easy way to change up the feel of a small space."

Add contrast

Does a small room seem larger dipped in white paint? No, says designer Lynne Bradley. "Mostly, it becomes colder and smaller because there isn't any contrast."

Lift spirits with colour and pattern clashes, says Green, who "wouldn't hesitate to combine duck egg blue with apple, lilac or chartreuse".

Designer Suzanne Gorman of Studio Gorman also loves playful combos.

"Yellow and mustard is joyful, as is ivory with emerald or blue," she says. "Bold colours are characterful but they have their place.

"A good neutral helps introduce colour to a space and tempers its vibrance."

Playful combos: Designer Suzanne Gorman of Studio Gorman, above and above right, says a good neutral is important.

Going bold in a confined space is perfect for experimenting with colour and makes it a talking point. Go to town in a powder room or in unexpected places, like inside a cabinet, for a playful focal point.

Crisp white makes dabbling with potent colours, like teal or magenta, a cinch. Or combine soft hues with deeper shades, like pink and burgundy.

"Every space is a symphony," says Alexandra Donohoe Church from Decus Interiors. "There are players who are more bombastic, while others are quieter. Polarity and tension between them is the goal."

White and light

Light-enhancing white comes in many shades, from chalky to brilliant, with a slew of variations in between.

"It's a science choosing white, so test patches are crucial," Green says.

Or go neutral with sand, oyster or grey.

"It should be the right balance of cool and warm tones," says Kylie Buhagiar, founder and director of GOLDEN.

"Assess it under natural light and artificial, which showcases cooler tones."

You can also enhance your space using a light reflective textural paint.

"It provides movement and catches light differently", says Bradley, who combines a flat finish that absorbs light, and gloss that reflects it.

Bronwyn Riedel of Bauwerk Colour specialises in lime-wash paint and loves its light refractive finish for creating depth in a way flat paint can't.

"It has the power to completely transform a space in a weekend," she says. "It takes time finding the perfect one as they are very light-dependent but they bring beauty to a smaller space."

Trick the eye

Wraparound colour is key for an ultra-modern interior and, this year, we're shifting from quiet to confident tones like green, lavender, orange and mustard, says designer Brendan Wong.

"Paint every surface, including adjacent joinery, for a sense of scale. Or, for a cocooning effect, paint the floor, too," he says.

Mix tonal hues, like blue and green, or try an ombre effect on walls – painting the lighter shade first, then the darker colour, and blending the point at which they meet.

Match your free-standing cabinets to your walls so they look like joinery, paint ceilings a metallic shade for height, add a stripe of interest for increased scale, or match walls and ceiling for an airy, space-enhancing, flow-on effect. ▶

SARAH HARWOOD

Creating depth: Bronwyn Riedel of Bauwerk Colour specialises in lime-wash paint.