

PAUL MASSEY

One of Britain's leading interiors photographers explains why neutral colours are so inspiring



Paul mastered the art of working with white while turning his homes in both London and Cornwall into oases of calm. Here, he praises the decorative power of pure white.

A colourful rug inspired my epiphany to use white. Years ago, when I was a celebrity photographer on a newspaper, I spent three-months' salary on a Ralph Lauren tartan rug. I brought it home, put it down and it looked awful – it had too much colour for me. So I went the opposite extreme and for many years painted everything white. Floors to walls to ceiling, all white.

Subtle greys balance out all-white schemes. White looks much better with a contrast colour – grey lends a soft, calmness to white. By going to photo exhibitions and walking round the National Gallery, I realised how good paintings and photos look against grey. It doesn't overwhelm the other colours in the pictures.

A neutral palette offers opportunities for accessories. I think of it as a canvas to layer texture on to, through furniture, textiles and lighting. Shots

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LEFT The Rope rug, from £200, Plantation Rug Company; copper fittings add a rough-texture touch to Paul's home in London; enamel lamp shade, £45, Lebour and Wait; and Heavy Metal pendant, £35, Buster. PUNCH AT HEAL'S Paul's preferred decor: a mix of grey and white. Annie Sloan Paris Grey chalk paint, £18.95 for 3L, and Cornforth White estate emulsion, £39.50 for 2.5L, Farrow & Ball; and natural materials take centre stage in Paul's home in Cornwall.

of metal – beaten copper, vintage tin – rough things up and stop the look from being too clinical.

White isn't just for walls.

I like the feel of bleached-out timber, but it's hard to find old wood that doesn't have a yellow tinge to it. So I bring old pieces back to life with a bit of DIY magic. For cupboards, I layer a light shade, such as Farrow & Ball's Skimming Stone, over a darker shade and sand through to give it lovely worn patina. My latest discovery is Annie Sloan chalk paint; usually, you strip furniture of its varnish and sand it back, but with this, you can just paint straight on.

White makes any space feel bigger.

Keeping the ceiling and floor as light as possible and painting all the walls white will mean even the smallest room feels twice as big. Painting architraves and skirting in a greyish white really makes everything else in the room ping – a bit like the effect of washing the windows and suddenly everything looks clear and bright.

Rough-hewn textures lend warmth to white.

I love rough Polish linen on cushions for winter and a softer linen for summer. I like to hunt out vintage sofas, which are often much more affordable than modern versions – and re-cover them in wool or linen. I like bedding from The Linen Press too. One of my favourite home accessories, the Rope rug by Plantation Rug Company, has the feel of a big knit jumper. Decorating with a neutral canvas makes things stand out and lends a room gravitas.

For more info, visit paulmassey.me



CLOCKWISE FROM THIS PICTURE

Marmoreal wallpaper, £88 per roll; and curtains in Marquisette silk, from £120 per m, both Designers Guild; Ardasso mosaic tiles (also seen in cutouts), £375 per sq m; Tricia Guild for Blazza Wave bed, from £995; Designers Guild; Jade Temple linen, £75 per m; Designers Guild; and The Onward March of the Pygmy Elephants, tissue and saucer, £320; Kate McBride at Designers Guild.