

A new Group of Seven

Designers take inspiration from the landscape in creating new colour palettes

BY JULIE BEUN, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN JULY 6, 2012



Interior designer Ulya Jensen was one of seven challenged with creating uniquely Canadian paint palettes using their local environments as inspiration. Jensen immediately thought of Parliament Hill, focusing on the patina of the buildings' roofs.

Photograph by: Wayne Cuddington, Ottawa Citizen

The artists are different and the canvas is bigger, but Canada's latest Group of Seven has one thing in common with its namesake: the Canadian landscape.

True, the current group consists of interior designers challenged with creating uniquely Canadian paint palettes rather than iconic Canadian paintings, but the idea is the same: Use the vibrancy, depth and colour of unique regional

environments to generate something new.

At least that's the approach Ottawa-based designer Ulya Jensen took when asked by Rona to develop spring-summer and fall-winter palettes as part of a clever marketing ploy to promote their new 1,400-colour interior paint line. Six other designers represented other parts of the country, including Teresa Ryback in British Columbia, Alberta's LeAnne Bunnell, Rob Everitt in Central Canada, Jean De Lessard in Quebec, Roy Banse in Toronto and Halifax's Denise Hermanson.

For Jensen, who has lived in Ottawa since 1993, finding the right creative influences in Eastern Ontario was a no-brainer.

"I instantly thought of Parliament because of Canada Day. It's such a big part of who we are in this city," she says. "So the Green Pearl colour came from the patina roof top of the Parliament.

"I also wanted a colour based on the Canadian Tulip Festival. A really bright purple wouldn't work, so I tried to keep one eye on livable colour, which is why Degas is a softer shade. The Nasca Lines yellow came from a photo I had of Rideau Falls at night, when it takes on this soft, yellowy gold."

Taken together, she says the palette would work well throughout a house or in a bedroom, where soft purples are increasingly being used in lieu of traditional neutrals.

Much stronger is the fall-winter palette, for which she, not surprisingly, turned to the majestic fall colours of Gatineau Park.

"It's something so special to us in Ottawa. The rest of the world comes to us for our fall colours, but I wondered if maybe people in Winnipeg didn't know about Gatineau, so I wanted to include that." The result — a vibrant orange called Adobe — is meant to be used in accents such as chairs, cushions or even a square on a wall to highlight a painting.

More subdued is her choice of greys. One reflects the canal-quarried stone used in Rideau Hall (Moon) while the other evokes the frozen ice of Winterlude. "I was looking for a moody grey and when I flipped over the colour I chose, it was called Skate," she recalls. "I started laughing in my office. It was an a-ha moment."

In choosing the tones, she says she and the six other designers "had quite a few webinars" and sessions with Rona where they discussed the paint and colours, which each have extra shades.

Overall, the designers offered a mix of vibrant greens and yellows to reflect the Prairies and Central Canada, earthy russets and greys for the Rockies and surprising pops of pink, teal and blue for Quebec and the Maritimes.

"It's such a neat way to connect Canadians to the landscape and their homes," Jensen says of the project. "At the end of the day, I always say make sure you have livable paint on your walls. It has to be something you can live with, day in and day out."

Ulya Jensen's top paint tips

- Use trendy colours — but sparingly. "Do little accent chairs or vibrant toss cushions. If you use really bold colours, you will feel like your room has shrunk in size."
- Go big in small spaces. Strong colours and design elements do best in smaller spaces, like powder rooms, that aren't part of the "flow" of your home. "It's a chance to flex your style a little bit."

- Paint the ceiling. “Skate (a grey tone) would look great on a living room ceiling, for a bit of drama,” she observes. “There’s a bit of a trend away from plain white ceilings to using a complimentary tone to the same depth of colour.”
- Buy good paint. Consider choosing a paint and primer combination such as Rona’s new line. “It’s time-saving, premium quality and cost-effective.”

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