



Green goes primary

The hot hue on the horizon is the green of Christmas trees and wine bottles, writes **JANICE LINDSAY**. But the comfort colour is getting some sizzle

Winter may seem like a crazy time to be obsessing about green, but that's the point. Green is about to come out of the shadows and into the limelight, showing up in the most unlikely places.

We are not talking about sophisticated greens that have been popular for years: celadon and sage, chartreuse and wasabi. The new greens are the most chromatically boring middle-of-the-road colours imaginable. Think grass, crayons and Christmas without the red.

It doesn't matter that it is unsexy and unexotic, unobtrusive and ultrarelated. Green-green has always been the comfort colour. It is the wife and never the mistress — supportive and comfortable but lacking mystery, magic or exotic passion. But put it where you least expect it and green suddenly becomes everything it has never been: sophisticated, exciting and hot.

The signs of this shift are everywhere. Full-page ads for Italian furniture company Cassina feature the Aspen sofa by Jean-Marie Mas-saud (available through Italinteriors, www.italinteriors.com) in bright green. Montreal architectural firm Atelier Big City recently clad the exterior walls of the courtyard of Y des Femmes housing project in vivid green. Williams-Sonoma, in honour of its 50th anniversary, has introduced a line of haute kitchenware in deep Sonoma Green, the colour of the awning on founder Chuck Williams's original store.

To get a real sense of how the ubiquitous can become beautiful, look no further than the line of laser-cut wine-bottles-turned-vases by U.S. firm Artecnic. Designed by Tord Boontje, they are created in Guatemala by an artisan collective. The same bottle green was the inspiration for the rerelease of an Alvo Aalto vase, which was originally produced in a bottle factory.

For sizzle, these workday greens are being paired with neighbours on the colour spectrum. The hot accent colour is an acidic green-yellow. Call it cybercitrus: In large quantities, it could bring on a migraine, but in small bursts, it gives the necessary electricity.

Toronto novelist Katherine Govier, author of *Three Views of Crystal Water*, was brave enough to choose this green for her kitchen cabinets. "One person referred to it as 'that bilious colour,' but I chose it because it is the colour of new growth and that Japanese grass that never loses its intense colour." She loves the way it lights up the dark centre of her semi-detached house, where there is no direct sunlight.

Ordinary green has always been too ubiquitous to seem special. As the predominant colour of our original home on the savannah, it became encoded into our genes as background — nature's wallpaper. Green was the colour against which attention grabbers like red could catch our eye.

Historically, green was a secondary colour in more ways than one. Red and blue, vermillion and lapis lazuli were up there with gold on the top of the pecking order. Greens were too bountiful to become the objects of desire. And unlike a good red or blue, they tended to fade.

But green has always wanted to be a primary colour. For centuries, no one realized that blue and yellow could be mixed to make green. Light itself has three primaries: blue, green and red and from these all colours are made. It's time to regard green as a fourth primary.

Green's biggest impediment to getting attention has always been red. If you don't believe me, test the theory. Ask yourself these questions: What are the two main Christmas colours? What are the colours of traffic lights? What are the colours of Smarties?

Chances are you answered each time with red first. Green gets stuck with red because of the outdated notion that complementary colours are complimentary — which they are not. Frankly, there is nothing more garish. Green can always use a bit of red to stir the pot, but a little goes a very long way.

Greens love the company of neutrals, like a greyed brown with a hint of mauve. They also love each other. When Govier asked me to help with colour for the rest of the kitchen, the solution was three more greens for walls (Farrow and Ball's Folly Green, Mere Green and Arsenic), a soft green on the ceiling (Benjamin Moore 2146-50) and a green-tan for the wall of bookcases (Benjamin Moore 2141-40). As in nature, the more greens there are, the better they look. It's hard to find greens that clash.

It is for a reason that green is the branding colour of products and practices that tread more gently on the earth. It's the colour of growth and renewal, and in that sense it's the colour of hope. In a chaotic world, it is a comfort colour that has always been connected with positive values, things clean and fresh and healthy. We want it because it is relaxing and uncomplicated. Because it feels like photosynthesized sunshine. Greens make us feel like we've come home.

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How to green your space

Remove red or reduce it to a minor role. Avoid primary red in favour of berry reds, apricots and blackened reds. Use cybercitrus as red's replacement.

Remember, it's all in the mix. The more greens, the merrier: primary green with yellow green and dark teal; avocado green with turquoise; olives and avocado with khaki. Anything goes.

To make greens dramatic, use them with large amounts of sophisticated neutrals. Pair them with grey browns with a pinch of mauve, off-whites and warm, complex greys. Use a pinch of black for a crisp edge.

Here are some great green palettes:

Pittsburgh Paint. Start with the more conservative Olive Spring (410-4) and Bahia Grass (310-4). Add the intense Mallard Green (305-4) as an accent. Add edge with a hit of black green, Black Forest (555-7).

Benjamin Moore. Use Split Pea 2146-30 (a sunlight-in-the-leaves green) on a feature wall. Add a hit of the sizzling new accent green Eccentric Lime (2720-30). Caution: A little goes a long way. For more conservative cousins try Guacamole (2144-10), Mossy Oak (CC600) or Creekside Green (2141-40), a fabulous green base neutral.

Sico. Use Mint Liquor (6121-54) for an accent, or Apple Orchard (6123-84) on one wall. Use Signal Hill Green (6129-84) on four walls and the ceiling of a small room. For a semi-gloss, choose Scottish Tartan (6127-84).

— Janice Lindsay

Alvar Aalto's 1937 Savoy vase, \$169.95 at Swipe Books in Toronto, 416-363-1332, and selected retailers across Canada.

Three Artecnic green vases from wine bottles. Left to right, \$49.95, \$79.95 and \$49.95 at Swipe Books and selected retailers across Canada (www.artecnicainc.com).

KitchenAid Artisan stand mixer in Sonoma Green. \$399.95 at Williams-Sonoma in Toronto. 416-962-9455, www.williams-sonoma.ca.

Le Creuset round 2.5-quart Dutch oven. \$230 at Williams-Sonoma.

Author Katherine Govier's 'cybercitrus' green kitchen: 'the colour of new growth.'