



## Subtlety and spice in a single palette

A Toronto restaurant gets striking results by mixing blue, dark brown and muted yellow-green



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When I first sat at the bar in Toronto's Tati Bistro and ordered steak frites, I did what I always do: I looked around the room. While others assess the menu, I find it impossible to resist sizing up the colours – not so much for how they look, but how they feel.

When Tati opened in the space formerly occupied by Kensington Kitchen in my lower Annex neighbourhood last fall, I was sure the new place would not feel as relaxed and laid-back as its slightly run-down, bohemian predecessor. As a rule, I find places that are too new and pristine – i.e. too white – are not as comfortable as rooms that are under-designed, uncoordinated and slightly worn.

Tati's owners, Wayne Parent

and chef Laurent Brion, wisely saw the value in continuity (not erasing all remnants of Kensington Kitchen) and in adding just the right mix of new colours.

Here is my mini colour assessment:

I give a thumbs up to the owners for knowing what to retain and what to ditch. Out with the former pink marble façade – wrong colour, wrong material – and in with the Victorian-style storefront in vintage red (Benjamin Moore's Raisin Torte 2083-10) that suits a traditional bistro.

Inside, a similar (and welcome) nod to the past is evident. Rather than ditch the well-used bistro tables, Parent saw their charm. They remain as a respectful link to what went before and their retro turquoise-blue tops are a spicy accent colour.

Turquoise's true colour complement, red, is the colour of the plush banquette that runs down one long wall and begs to be sat on. Those not lucky enough to nab the plush side face long mirrors on the wall so they don't miss the action behind them. Extra points

to Parent for good feng shui.

Those seated at the bar face a black-and-white photograph of the Toronto Islands by Anthea Baxter-Page; it's hung on a wall that is painted spa blue (Benjamin Moore's Marlborough Blue HC-153). The colour blue creates a sense of space, so looking at the wall doesn't feel confining. Blues are also relaxing, making them a great hue to help you chill out over a cocktail – an effective use of colour psychology.

Then there are the colours that are there to work and not be seen. Unlike most people, Parent made the ceiling darker than the walls. I am sure not many patrons even notice the muted yellow-green (Benjamin Moore's Spring Dust 2150-40) that creates the feeling of a soft canopy over the room. The main wall colour is a lighter variation, a yellow-cream (Para Paint's Ivory Tusk B572-4) that doesn't go grey in the dim lighting. The two colours merge, erasing the horizontal divide between ceiling and walls.

Because the walls are full of niches and angles, a one-colour-does-it-all scheme was

not possible, Parent says. Instead, these are great places to change colour. The half-walls at the front and back of Tati morph into a deep ochre colour that glows at night when the light hits it, but it is not noticeably different from the wall colour. Good colour takes lighting into consideration.

Ah, the beauty in the judicious use of a dark colour! Used as a vertical zone at the front door, dark chocolate brown (Para Paint's Black Creek P2074-5) does a lot of the work in this palette. And it is the perfect background for art, which in this case is one of Parent's coloured photographs: a still life of wine and cheese. (Parent says 20th-century American photographer Ansel Adams always hung his images on dark walls.)

Dark brown, meanwhile, turns windows, doors and trim into dark wood, which is so much richer-looking than white.

Parent also uses brown as it is used in theatre or in a painting by Leonardo da Vinci – to hide what isn't interesting and emphasize what is. At Tati, dark chocolate erases the walls

around a table in a small alcove. Rather than feeling confined or set apart, the space becomes mysteriously special. The same dark colour in the hall leading to the kitchen acts like black-velvet theatre curtains. It melts into a mysterious void without breaking the spell or making diners facing that way feel left out of the party. The 18th-century British romantic painter J.M.W. Turner said that light could not be painted without dark colours. Dark colour at the edges makes the core of Tati glow. Dark colours are terrific ambience enhancers. An extra point for Parent's being brave enough to embrace colour's dark side.

I was so impressed with Parent's choices that I asked him to explain his colour decisions. A man of few words, he describes the palette as "classic but pushed." He just saw the way it should look in his head and convinced Brion it would work. He did it by feel and it feels great.

By the way, the steak frites are good, too.  
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### Tati's tones

**VINTAGE VICTORIAN RED**  
Benjamin Moore's Raisin Torte 2083-10

**SPA BLUE**  
Benjamin Moore's Marlborough Blue HC-153

**MUTED YELLOW-GREEN**  
Benjamin Moore's Spring Dust 2150-40

**YELLOW-CREAM**  
Para Paint's Ivory Tusk B572-4

**DARK CHOCOLATE BROWN**  
Para Paint's Black Creek P2074-5

Above: Holdovers from the previous restaurant in the space, Tati's turquoise-blue tabletops serve as eye-popping accents in the new colour scheme.