

Q+A

Janice  
LINDSAY

**J**anice Lindsay is a Toronto-based colour designer who prefers instincts to rules; she thinks colour harmony is “rubbish.” In *All About Colour* (McClelland & Stewart, \$35), Lindsay explores all aspects of colour, from its symbolic significance in early cultures to how it works with light and scale to create radically different effects. She writes with passion and perception about both paintings and paint chips.



your body or what season it is — it’s that crude!

✕ **You say that women have a much better sense of colour than men.**

Women trust their emotions, dwell in their emotions, so they are more fluid in their approach

✕ **You write, “Colour is like playing the piano, the more you do it, the better you get at it....”**

People are intuitively good with colour in the way we are good with flavour — we know what tastes good, we know what music sounds good, even if we’re not a musician or a chef. We know our own responses, but we don’t know how to get ourselves surrounded by the colours that are going to make us happy, make our places feel good. That’s the learning process, the piano-playing part.

✕ **This isn’t a decorating book; you spend a lot of time looking at paintings and at the use of colour historically.**

I wanted to show what awe colour used to bring to people’s lives. Colour was God’s creation or it had magic powers, depending on the culture. It was revered and rare, like jewels. Medieval artists were actually forbidden to mix colours. And

they didn’t have red, blue and green; they had vermilion and lapis lazuli. Their best blues and reds were as expensive or more expensive than gold. Painters waited months to get pigments from Afghanistan, then they had to grind, wash, filter...it took months to make paint usable. Imagine if you spilled it or made a mistake!

✕ **You have strong feelings about colour — “white ceilings should be banned from all rooms with deep wall colour....”**

People use paint colour simplistically, drawing on rules often told to them by a painter who just wants to come in and get the job done — white ceilings, white trim, same white all the way through the house.... That’s like putting on a beautiful dress and thinking you can wear those same white pumps that you wore in the summer, no matter what you’re wearing on

to colour. And a significant percentage of men (eight per cent of Caucasian men, for example) are colour-blind. But the biggest reason is that for 75 million years women were the gatherers; we didn’t see just the red berries against the green foliage, we had to know that the green with pink around the edges means there’ll be fruit in 10 days. We had to anticipate harvests on the basis of nuances of shade and tone. So 75 million years of practice means something.

✕ **The book treats colours like characters....**

Each colour has a personality. For me, mauve and purple are not my best friends; they’re foreign and strange. So it’s challenging to [work with those colours] with other people, which is why I enjoy it. But give me the six reds I have in my kitchen and I’m a happy person.

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