

# Small space, big impact

Leverage the transformative power of paint colour when working on petite projects.

Designing an expansive building that features spacious rooms and lofty ceilings can be thrilling. With big projects, there are often increased opportunities for influencing the building's overall design and aesthetic. Larger builds generally have more surfaces that can be customised by specifying different paint colours and materials and more chances to grab attention through specialised design elements or show-stopping artwork. As a bonus, they may also feature vast windows to flood spaces with light and sizable budgets to accommodate innovative design ideas.

But not all projects are grand; in fact, substantially-sized builds are much more likely to be the exception than the rule. In typical projects, chances are there will be portions of your plan that are on the smaller side because of space, site or budget constraints. Tiny home builds, while currently a popular concept, are just one typology where small space design comes into play. Baches, apartments, hotels, retirement homes and aged-care facilities regularly involve small space design. Even large projects often have smaller components such as spare rooms, powder rooms, laundries and retail change rooms, and you'll still want to make the most of these spaces within your design.

In compact spaces, paint colour choice is crucial. The hues you decide to use wield a profound influence on how occupants will perceive and experience your project's confined environments, impacting its visual scale and functionality. The psychology of colour also plays a fundamental role in this process, as certain hues have the power to visually expand or contract a room, enhance natural light and evoke an emotional response.

Most designers are aware that certain colours and combinations can create an illusion that an interior seems more spacious than it really is, but there remains a lot of confusion and debate about how to go about it. The reality is that there are no hard and fast rules about colour that can be universally applied to each and every situation, but there are a few important elements to pay attention to which can make choosing paint colours less complicated.

## When to go light

White and light paint colours are revered for their versatility and timeless appeal, making them the most popular choices for interiors – no matter how large or small a project may be. These paint colours are frequent favourites for small spaces due to their

**right top and bottom:** In well-lit areas, a white paint colour used uniformly across painted surfaces can create an illusion of more space in tight quarters. Slat style timber panelling, orientated vertically, adds to the effect by drawing the eye upwards. Built-in furniture and floating shelving can help to free up floor space in tight areas. Walls and ceilings painted in Resene Wan White and built-in headboard and shelving in Resene Apple Blossom. Design by Nott Architects, [www.nott.co.nz](http://www.nott.co.nz). Colour selection and interior design by Alex Fulton Design, [www.alexfultondesign.co.nz](http://www.alexfultondesign.co.nz). Build by Trevor Hone Builders, [www.trevorhone.com](http://www.trevorhone.com). Painting by Dyer Decorators. Images by Simon Devitt, [www.simondevitt.com](http://www.simondevitt.com).

Resene  
Wan White

Resene  
Apple Blossom



high Light Reflectance Values (LRV). Expressed as a percentage, an LRV represents a paint colour's ability to reflect light back at the viewer. White and very light paint colours have high LRVs because they reflect back a high percentage of light. It's easy to find out a Resene colour's LRV. Simply look on the back of your swatch, colour card or colour chart or look up your hue online in the digital Resene colour swatch library, [www.resene.com/colour](http://www.resene.com/colour).

Popular whites like Resene Quarter Alabaster and Resene Eighth Black White have some of the highest LRVs in Resene's extensive collection of colours (92%), but whether or not that will be of benefit to your particular small space design depends on the lighting circumstances that you're dealing with. When adequate natural light is present, these paint colours can assist in amplifying it – visually enlarging the space and making it feel more open and airy.

However, when bright whites are used in small rooms that are flooded with natural light, rather than an illusion of expansiveness, these colours can create a lot of glare – making the space uncomfortable to spend time in. In these circumstances, look to more pigmented greyed-off whites and light colours with lower LRVs as an alternative.

White paint colours can also feel dreary and dull in some rooms that have minimal or no natural lighting because there is simply not enough light to reflect. While artificial lighting can and should be added to these areas, it's unlikely that you'll be able to replicate the ambience of bright, clear sunlight streaming in. In these spaces, you may be better off choosing a dark colour instead.

## Embrace the darkness

While light colours are often considered the go-to option for expanding small spaces, strategic use of darker hues can also be effective in certain contexts. Contrary to popular belief, dark colours need not be avoided in small space design; rather, they should be employed judiciously to create depth and contrast. In fact, darker shades are often the best solution for compact rooms where you have little to no natural lighting to work with.

Rather than fighting against your space's lack of sunlight, it may be a better strategy to lean into the darkness and enhance it with blacks, charcoals, navy blues, chocolate browns and deep bushy greens such as Resene Jaguar, Resene Times Square, Resene Blue Night, Resene Dark Chocolate and Resene Top Notch. These dramatic and sophisticated hues imbue small, dark spaces with a sense of intimacy and cosiness without overwhelming the senses. In these spaces, you'll ideally want to take your chosen hue from tip to toe on the walls, ceiling, trims and doors in order to create a cocooning effect. Instead of adding an excess of downlighting or spotlights in an attempt to brighten the space, focus on incorporating strategically-placed task lighting and accent lighting to illuminate activities and architectural features to maintain the moody effect.

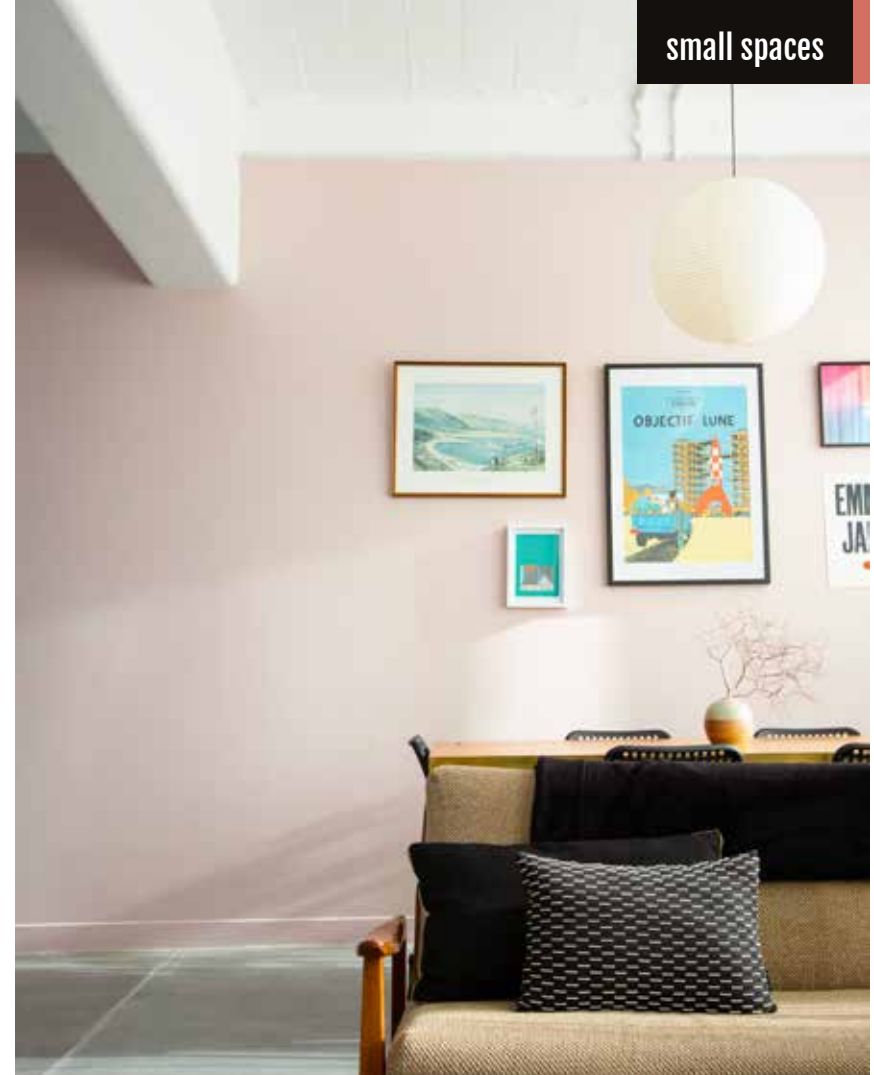
## top tip

For more on how to use lighting to make the most of your Resene paint colours, turn to page 58.

## Be prudent with paler picks













Perhaps the trickiest paint colours to get right in small spaces are mid-tone hues. Often, mid-tone colours are chosen because clients don't want white but are too afraid to commit to deeper tones. In larger rooms, mid-tone shades can add subtle depth and understated complexity that can infuse the space with character, personality and warmth. But in compact areas, they often appear to advance and make the space feel even more closed in.

If low lighting isn't an issue in your small space and you and your client want to explore more pigmented colour, stick to subtle and pastel hues such as pale blues, greens, creams and greiges. Hues like Resene Timeless, Resene Kangaroo, Resene Villa White or Resene Half Rakaia are calming and effective options that can simultaneously enlarge and brighten smaller spaces. In dark rooms, encourage your client to choose a deeper colour to avoid the potential for mid-tone melancholy.



**above:** Pale hues were used for the base of this apartment's Resene colour scheme to visually expand the space and make the most of its high ceiling and large windows. The wall colour, Resene Blanched Pink, continues down on to the skirting boards so as not to add unnecessary breaks within the room. Ceiling painted in Resene Alabaster. Design and image by Shaw & Shaw Architects, [www.shawandshaw.co.nz](http://www.shawandshaw.co.nz). Build and painting by Form & Dwell, [www.formanddwell.com](http://www.formanddwell.com).



 Resene Quarter Alabaster	 Resene Villa White	 Resene Kangaroo	 Resene Dark Chocolate
 Resene Eighth Black White	 Resene Timeless	 Resene Top Notch	 Resene Times Square
 Resene Alabaster	 Resene Half Rakaia	 Resene Blue Night	 Resene Jaguar

## top tip

If you want to include bold or bright colours in your design, save them for accents rather than using them on walls or ceilings. These hues have a tendency to visually advance and can bring too much attention to major surfaces in a small space.

## Make it monochromatic

A monochromatic colour scheme works a treat in small spaces as it allows the eye to move around the room without interruption. By specifying a single paint colour for your walls, trims, ceiling and built-in features, your ceiling will seem higher because the surfaces appear to be continuous. If a single colour will be too monotonous, you can also try using the same colour in varying strengths for different areas such as Resene Double Duck Egg Blue for the walls, Resene Quarter Duck Egg Blue for the ceiling and Resene Half Duck Egg Blue for the trims and doors to bring nuanced, layered colour to your small space while minimising the visual breaks created by joinery. Including a variety of textures or varying sheen levels between materials can add interest without taking away from the expanding effect.

## Take a shine to it

Reflective surfaces can be leveraged to make the most of the light that's in your small space and can help make it seem larger. Mirrors and metallic accents can be used strategically to bounce both natural and artificial light around the room. Placing a mirror near a window so that it reflects a view of the outdoors is especially effective at visually expanding a room while items like mirrored wardrobe doors, cabinets, consoles and glass tables or acrylic chairs virtually disappear from view, thus taking up less visual space.

Another expansive idea is to look to the Resene FX Metallic range. Available as both paint and wallpaper, Resene FX Metallic colours are suitable for use on a wide range of surfaces and substrates. Their metallic flecks reflect light and provide interest through their added texture. When used on a ceiling, metallic paint

colours like Resene Gold, Resene Proton or Resene Bedrock drive the eye upward and can create the illusion of increased height.

Choosing higher sheen formulas for elements of your small space design can also help to reflect more light around the room. Use a gloss or semi-gloss finish such as Resene Enamacryl or Resene Lustacryl on elements such as furniture, cabinetry and built-in shelving, but stick to a matte or low sheen Resene SpaceCote finish on your wall and ceiling for contrast and to avoid creating unnecessary glare.








## Be thoughtful about timber

Interior timber cladding and panelling are popular for bringing biophilic appeal, texture, depth and an architectural element to projects – and it's become a major trend in small space design. Because the cost of beautifully grained and finely-finished sheets of wood can be too costly to use in larger projects, smaller projects may be seen as more economically-viable opportunities to incorporate the trend. However, because many timbers tend to be mid-range in tone and command far more attention than plain plasterboard, they need to be used carefully in order to keep your cladding from visually contracting your small space.

Recently, it has become more popular to use broad sheets of plywood for wall and ceiling cladding for those after a contemporary look. While timber can be used to clad an entire space, it is often more effective as an accent wall or to frame a specific element in small rooms, such as a window or an alcove. This strategy will help make the room feel more defined without the 'boxed in' effect that can occur as a result of using too much timber cladding in too confined an area.

Slat-style panelling, which is more popular for traditional tastes and heritage projects, offers an illusionary advantage. In the same way that painted stripes or striped Resene wallpaper designs can make a room feel wider when oriented horizontally or higher when pointed vertically, the same goes for the visual lines created with slatted or tongue-and-groove style panelling.

**below:** Carefully curated pops of colour – including Resene Colorwood Emerald Green on the coat nook, Resene Colorwood Desert Yellow on the storage access panel and Resene Pelorous on the door – highlight architectural features to draw interest without overwhelming the senses in this compact apartment. Hallway walls and skirting boards painted in Resene Blanched Pink and entryway wall, entryway trims and ceiling in Resene Alabaster. Design and image by Shaw & Shaw Architects. Build and painting by Form & Dwell.

	Resene Alabaster		Resene Blanched Pink		Resene Bedrock
	Resene Quarter Duck Egg Blue		Resene Pelorous		Resene Proton
	Resene Half Duck Egg Blue		Resene Double Duck Egg Blue		Resene Gold







**above:** These luxury cabins at Matawhero Wines are an excellent example of the transformative power that colour has within small spaces. Though they have nearly identical floorplans, the 'Noir' cabin features timber clad walls stained in Resene Colorwood Pitch Black finished with clear coats in Resene Aquaclear satin and a ceiling in Resene Colorwood Whitewash finished with a clear coat in Resene Aquaclear satin. The 'Blush' cabin's walls and ceiling are finished in Resene Aquaclear satin only. Design by iDWorkshop, [www.idworkshop.co.nz](http://www.idworkshop.co.nz). Build by Podular, [www.podular.co.nz](http://www.podular.co.nz). Images by Brennan Thomas, [www.strikephotography.co.nz](http://www.strikephotography.co.nz).



Resene Colorwood Whitewash

- |   |                                 |   |                                |
|---|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
|  | Resene Colorwood Rock Salt      |  | Resene Colorwood Charred Black |
|  | Resene Colorwood Becalm         |  | Resene Colorwood Crowshead     |
|  | Resene Colorwood Light Greywash |  | Resene Colorwood Pitch Black   |

Just like with paint, a general rule of thumb is that timber cladding stained in a dark colour, like Resene Colorwood Crowshead, will work better in darker rooms while lighter stains, like Resene Colorwood Rock Salt, will sit better in spaces with ample natural light. However, timber stains don't have light reflectance values (LRV) like paints do. Light travelling through these finishes gets absorbed and/or is reflected by the underlying

timber. A stain applied over a light timber like pine will have a higher light reflectance than the same stain applied over a darker timber like cedar. If you need an approximate LRV for a wood stain finish, apply the colour onto a representative sample of the timber and then compare this to the closest pigmented paint finish to estimate the approximate LRV of that stain colour.

The tricky thing about using timber in small spaces is that the thing that makes it desirable – the warmth, beauty and natural texture of its grain – generally causes it to visually advance. Colourwash finishes, which subtly obscure the wood grain without covering it up entirely, can be advantageous in smaller spaces. Resene Colorwood Whitewash, Resene Colorwood Light Greywash and Resene Colorwood Becalm can be used to lighten your interior timber's inherent hue and lessen the eye-catching effect of bolder wood grains. One to two coats are recommended, but more coats may be added where stronger pigmentation – and less visible wood grain – is desired.

Bold black stains like Resene Colorwood Pitch Black are perfect for minimalist contemporary timber-clad interiors and work beautifully for creating dramatic and cosy restaurants, bedrooms, media rooms or theatres. Just like with the stain colourwashes, Resene Colorwood Pitch Black is pigmented and will minimise the appearance of the wood grain without covering it up entirely. If you are after a black-coloured wood stain but want more of the grain to show through, choose Resene Colorwood

Charred Black instead, carefully wiping off excess stain for a sheerer finish. Keep in mind that porous timbers and multiple coats of stain will give a darker colour result, and the longer your stain is left on the wood's surface before wiping, the more it will be absorbed and the darker your final finish will be.

Your timber's natural colour will affect the way the Resene Colorwood stains you apply will look. The same stain can look very different depending on the timber you apply it to. Always make sure a sample panel is completed first using all the planned products and the application technique to make sure it achieves the desired look. Choose Resene Aquaclear in a natural flat or satin finish to get a softer matte or low sheen look or opt for a semi-gloss or gloss Resene Aquaclear finish for a glossier, higher-impact finish. **BW**

### top tip

How you furnish a small space has a significant effect on whether it feels open and airy or closed and cramped. Sofas and armchairs with open or no arms and exposed legs allow more light to circulate, which can help make small spaces feel larger. Keep window treatments to a minimum, as small rooms can become overwhelmed with billowing curtains or drapes with lots of pattern. Pick simple window treatments that let in as much light as possible. Window treatments that are a similar colour to the walls will blend in and help visually open up the space.