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photography by
Jan Baldwin



ACCENTS OF ORANGE

Project Orange is a young, modern, award-winning architect and design team with bright, open-plan offices in a converted industrial building in Clerkenwell. No one sitting at the slick ranks of desks looks over the age of 40 and it is pleasantly counter-intuitive to learn that one of their favourite Christmas party games is a mark of devotion to Farrow & Ball paint.

LEFT James Soane and Christopher Ash of Project Orange bought their flat on the first floor of a converted garment factory as a shell and divided the L-shaped space to leave a single large room that spans the building from front to back, with a kitchen at one end and a sitting area at the other. One long wall is painted in 'Railings' and the alcove is 'Lime White'.

ABOVE Walking through the windowless entrance hall, which has walls and ceilings also painted in 'Railings', into the main room has all the drama of emerging from a tunnel into the light. The variegated terracotta of the exposed brickwork on the opposite wall shadows the bursts of orange and red throughout the flat, such as the legs of the kitchen table seen on the left painted in 'Blazer'.

'We have at least 150 Farrow & Ball paint charts lying around the office,' says James Soane, sitting at the kitchen table of the flat he shares with partner and business partner Christopher Ash. 'There are two versions of the game. In one we test our ability to identify particular shades by name, which is extremely difficult when it comes to all the different whites, and in the other we take turns to recite the name of a colour, sometimes having to invent one, which gets extra points if it goes unchallenged – "Oh yes, didn't you know, 'Grenadier Green'. It's one of their new ones." – that sort of thing.'

If further proof of devotion were needed, James can reel off a list of projects that feature Farrow & Ball: 'Chemise',

'Blazer', 'Stony Ground', 'Slipper Satin', 'Yellow Ground' and 'Etruscan Red' for a reconfigured 1980s house in Bloomsbury; 'Railings' for the façade of buildings in Whitecross Street, East London where their combination of renovation and new-build won a prize at The Design Awards in 2009; 'Arsenic' and 'Off-Black' for the Plus Seven Hotel in St Petersburg; 'All White' and 'Down Pipe' in Eynsham Hall hotel, a mock-Jacobean mansion in Oxfordshire. 'It's never difficult to persuade clients to choose Farrow & Ball over a less expensive paint. All you have to do is paint two sample areas, one with Farrow & Ball, another with a matching colour, and they will always choose the Farrow & Ball. It has a depth unlike any other paint.'

LEFT *Instead of attempting to brighten the entrance hall, which has very little natural light, James and Christopher have created visual drama with ceiling lights that make the wood floor glow and paintwork that looks almost black and seems to expand the sense of space. In fact, 'Railings' is a dark bronze colour and less harsh than a pure black. The low shelf is the protruding back of a plan chest, the drawers of which open into the study on the other side of the wall.*

RIGHT *At the sitting end of the main room, light pours in from a large metal window. 'People think that dark grey will suck up all the light,' says James Soane, 'but in this big room it actually seems to reflect it. It also works incredibly well with hot colours, which have all the more impact seen against it.' Here, the impact comes from the physalis lanterns, the patriotic cushion and the haloes of orange in the photograph of the London Docklands by night.*





LEFT The bathroom is an internal room painted in 'Powder Blue', an archive colour, and the room is further brightened by the mirrored doors of a made-to-measure wall cabinet. Brick laid white tiles give the room a feel of old-fashioned solidity.

RIGHT The bedroom is lit by large, metal-framed windows and is painted bright 'Lime White'. The same accents of red, the bedhead painted in 'Blazer', the upholstery of the reproduction Mackintosh chair and the bedspread by Kvadrat, are more cheerful than sultry against a pale as opposed to a grey dark background.

A more personal project was the re-decoration of James and Christopher's flat in a 1910 building near their offices. The handsome carved stone entrance flanked by expanses of glazed brickwork once opened into a garment-making factory. 'When they took up the floors during the conversion, they found thousands of pins and scraps of cotton under the boards,' says James. 'We bought the flat as a shell in the early 1990s when the idea of converting industrial buildings for domestic use was still quite radical. Obviously it helped that we are both architects.'

The space that James and Christopher bought was an L-shaped segment with three large, metal-framed windows and double doors onto a fire escape along the bottom edge of the L and a single, large window across its top. They lowered the ceiling height of the shorter leg so as to hide pipes and used its three windows to light a bedroom and adjacent study. Opposite are a bathroom and utility room, both without windows. The space that remained was a long room spanning the building, from the window and doors onto the fire escape on one side to the single window on the other. One end became the kitchen, the fire escape with its wide metal stairs and landing their 'sneaky back garden' with plants flourishing in large pots. The middle of the room is

the dining area and at the far end, gathered in the light from the other window, is the sitting area.

The back wall of this long, multi-purpose room is bare brickwork and, until recently, the rest was painted 'Lime White'. 'We're a bit more sophisticated and grown-up than when we first bought this place,' smiles James, 'and we decided it was time for some colour'. The colour they chose was 'Railings', 'a typical architect's colour,' says James. 'We wanted to prove that such a dark shade doesn't need to be like some gothic nightmare and doesn't kill the light.'

This warm, moody charcoal covers walls and ceilings in the hall, making a theatrical prologue to the volume of the main room where the same colour almost seems to reflect rather than absorb light. It also throws into relief the splashes of red and orange that punctuate a mainly neutral scheme; whether the bright lanterns of physalis in a vase, or the upholstery of an Eames chair, James insists that these accents of orange are not an intentional visual pun, although he admits that 'people do tend to give us orange things'. But the bedhead and the legs of the kitchen table are painted in 'Blazer', which is the closest the Farrow & Ball chart comes to orange. Perhaps someone in his office could christen a new Farrow & Ball colour. 'Seventies Kitchen' anyone?

