

*Poems from*  
***A Year of Colour***

*by Nigel Morgan*



In November 2011 I wrote the words and music for an unaccompanied choral work to celebrate the birthday of a dear friend at the end of a particularly colourful autumn. I called it *November Colours*. The words were 'coloured' with six descriptive titles found in a paint catalogue, and not just any paint catalogue, but that of the renowned Farrow and Ball of Wimborne in Dorset. This uniquely British company says of itself 'we are devoted to producing unparalleled paints and wallpapers that transform homes around the world. We are paint perfectionists, creating unmatched paint colours using only the finest ingredients and age-old methods which have withstood the test of time and the passage of many a fickle fad.'

Almost a year later I returned to develop the idea further in *A Year of Colour* - twelve songs for chamber choir (SATB). I commissioned the artist Alice Fox to select six Farrow and Ball colours for each month of the calendar year. From her selection I wrote the remaining poems always starting from the six chosen colour descriptions.

To find out more about *A Year of Colour*, visit:  
[www.nigel-morgan.co.uk/ayearofcolour](http://www.nigel-morgan.co.uk/ayearofcolour)

## December Colours

*Green smoke* from damp leaves  
float from gardens' bonfires,  
rise in the silver *blackened* sky.

Close by the tall *railings*,  
fast to *lichened* walls  
we walk cold winter streets

to the warm world of home, where  
shadows thrown by the parlour fire  
dance on the *wainscot*, flicker from the hearth.

Hanging from our welcome door  
see how *incarnadine* the berries are  
on this hollyed wreath of polished leaves.

## January Colours

In the winter garden  
of the Villa del Parma  
by the artist's *studio*  
*green* grass turns *vert de terre*  
and the stone walls  
a wet *mouse's back*  
grounding neutral – but calm,  
soothing like *calamine*  
in today's *mizzle*,  
a permanent dimpsey,  
fine drenching drizzle,  
almost invisible, yet  
saturating *skylights*  
with evidence of rain.

## February Colours

In the kitchen's *borrowed light*,  
dear Grace makes bread  
on the *mahogany* table,  
her *palma gray* dress  
bringing the outside in.

Whilst next door, inside  
Vanessa's garden room  
the French windows  
firmly shut out this  
season's bitter weather.

There, in the stone jar  
beside her desk,  
branches of heather;  
Erica for winter's retreat,  
*Calluna* for spring's expectation.

Tea awaits in Duncan's domain.  
Set amongst the books and murals,  
Spode's best *bone china*  
turning a porcelain pink  
as the hearth's fire burns bright..

Today  
in this house  
a very Bloomsbury tone,  
a truly *Charleston Gray*.

## March

Not quite daffodil,  
not yet spring,  
*Lancaster Yellow*  
was Nancy's shade

for the drawing room  
walls of Kelmarsh Hall  
and its high plastered ceiling  
of *Blue Ground* blue.

Playing *cat's paw*  
like the monkey she was,  
two *drab* husbands paid  
for the gardens she made,  
for haphazard luxuriance.

Society decorator, partner  
in paper and paint,  
she'd walk the grounds  
of her Palladian gem  
conjuring for the catalogue  
such ingenious labels:

*Brassica* and *Cooking Apple*  
*Green* to be seen;  
in gardens and orchards  
grown to be greens.

## April

It would be *churlish*  
to expect, a *folly* to believe,  
that *green* leaves would  
cover the trees just yet.

But blossom will:  
clusters of flowers,  
Damson white,  
Cherry red,  
*Middleton Pink*,

And at the fields' edge  
primroses *dayroom yellow*,  
a convalescent colour  
healing the hedgerows  
of winter's afflictions.

Clouds storm Salisbury Plain,  
and as a *skimming stone*  
on water, touch, rise, touch  
and fall behind horizon's rim.  
Where it goes - no one knows.

Far (far) from the Madding Crowd  
Hardy's concordant cove at *Lulworth*  
*blue* by the cold sea, clear in the crystal air,  
still taut with spring.

## May

A spring day  
in *Suffield Green*,  
the sky is *cook's blue*,  
the clouds *pointing* white.

In this village near Norwich  
lives Marcel Manouna  
thawbed and *babouched*  
with lemurs and llamas,  
leopards and duck,  
and more . . .

This small *menagerie*  
is Marcel's only luxury,  
a curious curiosity  
in a Norfolk village  
near to Norwich.

So, on this  
blossoming  
spring day,  
Marcel's *Blue Grey*  
parrot James,  
perched on a gate,  
squawks the refrain

Sumer is icumen in  
Lhude sing cuccu!  
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med  
And springþ þe wde nu,  
Sing cuccu!

## June

Thrownware

*Earth Red*

thrown off the hump

the Japanese way.

Inside hand does the work,  
keeps it alive.

Outside hand holds the clay  
and critically tweaks.

Touch, press, hold, release  
scooting, patting, spin!

Centering: the act  
precedes all others

on the potter's wheel.

Centering: the day  
the sun climbs highest  
in our hemisphere.

And then affix the glaze  
in colours of summer:

*Stone blue*

*Cabbage white*

*Print room yellow*

*Saxon green*

*Rectory red*

And fire!

## July

I see you  
by the *dix blue*  
asters in the Grey Walk  
via the Pear Pond,  
a circuit of surprises  
past the Witches House,  
the *Radicchio* View,  
to the beautifully manicured  
*Orangery* lawns, then the  
East and West Rills of  
Gertrude's Great Plat.

And under that *pea green* hat  
you wear, my mistress dear,  
though your face may be April  
there's July in your eyes of such grace.

I see you wander at will  
down the *cinder rose* path  
'neath the *drawing-room blue* sky.



## August

Out on the *wet sand*

Mark and Sarah

take their morning stroll.

He, barefoot in a *blazer*,

She, linen-light in a wide-brimmed *straw*,

together they survey

their (very) elegant home,

Colonial British,

Classic Traditional,

a retreat in *Olive* County, Florida:

white sandy beaches,

playful porpoises,

gentle manatees.

It's an ever fine August day,

humid and hot

in the hurricane season.

But later they'll picnic on

*Brinjal* Baigan Bharta

in the *Chinese Blue* sea-view

dining room fashioned

by doyen designer

Leta Austin Foster

who 'loves to bring the ocean inside.

I adore the colour blue,' she says,

'though gray is my favourite.'

## September

A perfect day  
at the Castle of Mey  
beckons.

Watching the rising sun  
disperse the morning mists,  
the Duchess sits  
by the window  
in the *Breakfast Room*.

*Green* leaves have yet to give way  
to autumn colours but the air  
is seasonable cool, September fresh.

William is fishing the Warriner's Pool.  
She waits; dressed in *Powder Blue*  
silk, *Citron* tights,  
a shawl of *India Yellow*  
draped over her shoulders.  
But there he is, crossing the home beat,  
Lucy, her *pale hound* at his heels,  
a *dead salmon* in his bag.

## October

At *Berrington*

*blue*, clear skies,  
chill mornings  
before the first frosts  
and the apples ripe for picking  
(place a cupped hand under the fruit  
and gently '*Clunch*').

Henry Holland's hall -  
just 'the perfect place to live'.

From the *Picture Gallery*

*redolent* in portraits  
and naval scenes,  
the view looks beyond  
Capability's parkland  
to Brecon's Beacons.

At the fourteen-acre pool

trees, *cane* and reed  
mirror in the still water  
where Common Kingfishers,  
*green blue* with *fowler pink* feet  
vie with Grey Herons,  
funereal grey,  
to ruffle this autumn scene.

## November

In *pigeon* light  
this damp day  
settles itself  
into *lamp-room gray*.

The trees intone  
farewell farewell:  
An autumnal valedictory  
to reluctant leaves.

Yet a few remain  
bold coloured

*Porphyry Pink*  
*Fox Red*  
*Fowler*  
*Sudbury Yellow*

hanging by a thread  
they turn in the stillest air.

Then fall  
Then fall



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