

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

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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