

House Beautiful

5 “Tacky” Paint Colors That Are About to Become Cool Again, According to Designers

They're ready for their redemption arc.

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Picking a [paint color](#) is one of those deceptively high-stakes design decisions. It's not just about liking a shade in theory—it has to work with the light, complement your furniture, flatter the room at all hours of the day, and somehow still feel like you. Unlike a throw pillow or side table, paint isn't something you casually swap out when the mood strikes. Once it's on the walls, you're living with it every morning and every night.

That pressure is exactly why so many people falter when picking up a paintbrush. Trendy colors can feel risky, and once-beloved shades have a habit of turning on us. What looked bold and playful five years ago can suddenly read dated, overwhelming, or—worst of all—tacky. According to stylist and interior designer [Jennifer Stephan](#), that reaction often comes down to balance. A space can feel “cheap, loud, or out of place” when there's too much saturation, the undertones clash with the lighting, or a color has simply been overdone to the point of trend fatigue.

But here's the plot twist: Many of the colors we once side-eyed are quietly making a comeback. With the right finish, placement, and context, shades like burgundy and mustard gold are being reimaged in a way that feels fresh, intentional, and surprisingly cool. We asked design pros which so-called tacky paint colors deserve a second look, and how to use them in a way that feels elevated, not regrettable. Read on for the hues poised for their redemption era.

Olive Green



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Once a hallmark of 1970s interiors, [olive green](#) eventually earned an unfair reputation for feeling heavy, dated, and a little too committed to the past. But lately, it's back—and this time, it's cooler. Interior designer [Samantha Mayo](#) calls olive green “the type of neutral organic” she’s loving for 2026, explaining that “as a society, we’re fading away from the ‘millennial grey’ that took over homes the past few years. People want natural yet vibrant hues that portray personality and don’t just linger in the background.”

The modern way to use olive is all about balance. Mayo recommends matte finishes instead of shine, paired with creamy whites, warm wood tones, and subtle metallics. Try it on kitchen cabinets, a moody bedroom wall, or even built-ins to add depth and character without screaming for attention, and you'll see exactly how this once-questionable shade is back and better than ever.

Burgundy



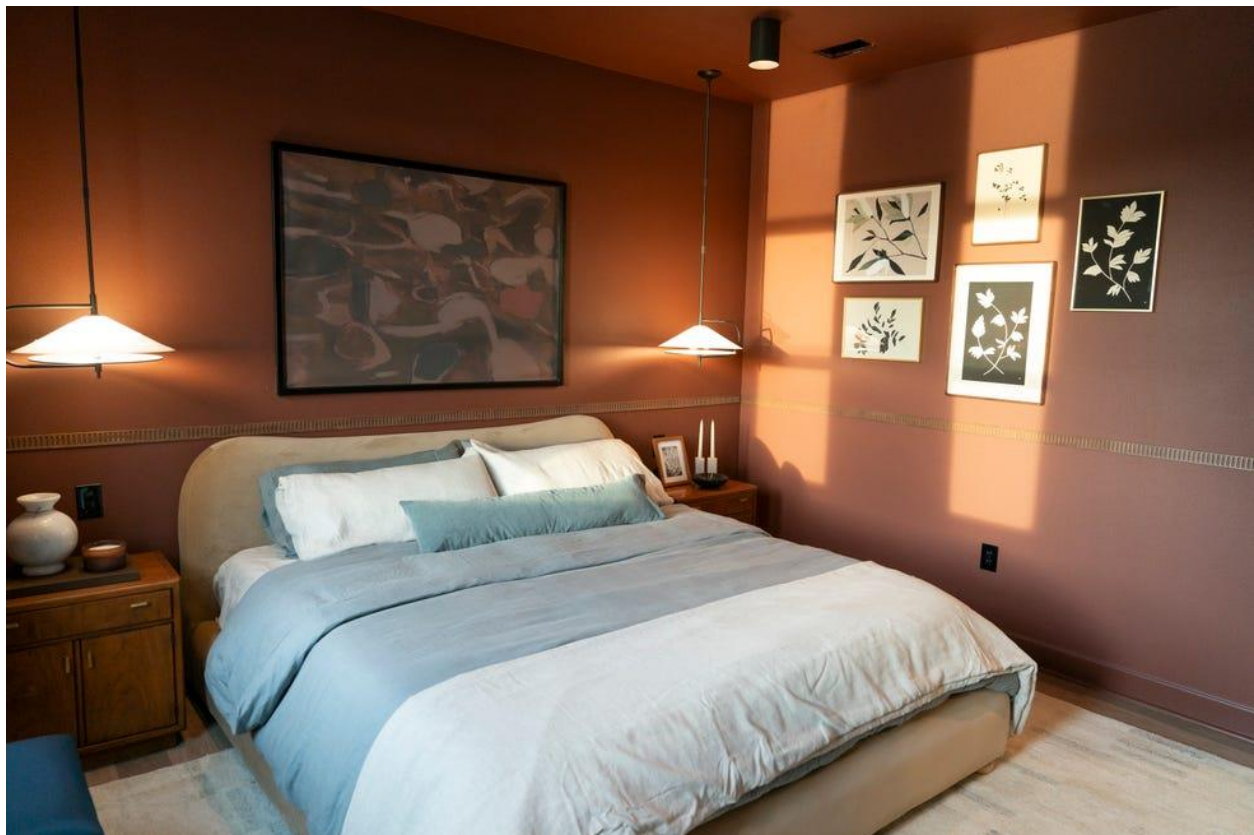
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Long associated with formal spaces and traditional interiors, burgundy spent the past decade on the sidelines, dismissed as too dark or too serious for modern homes. Now, it's reemerging with a fresh perspective—and with a lot more confidence. As Tabea Kobach, Design Coordinator at [Upstate Modernist](#), notes, “deep, heritage colors are returning because they create instant intimacy and sophistication.”

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Burgundy in particular delivers that cozy, enveloping effect while still feeling refined. The secret is pairing it thoughtfully, says Kobach, noting that “it works beautifully with dark-stained woods, vintage rugs, mohair or velvet, and warm metals,” which soften the depth and add dimension. It's best saved for “a powder room, library or office, or dining room,” where its depth creates atmosphere and makes the space feel thoughtfully designed.

Dusty Mauve



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Dusty mauve is officially back, and this time, it's leaving its grandma wallpaper reputation behind. For years, the color was written off as “too sweet” and overly precious, as Kobach says, people are now embracing a much cooler version of the shade. “[This hue] has been reintroduced as an [earthy neutral](#),” he explains, “It reads warm, soft, and grown-up.” That subtle shift is what makes dusty mauve feel fresh again, especially as people look for softer alternatives to beige and greige that still bring personality to a room.

Stephan agrees, noting that the comeback version is a “muted, gray-tinged rose that works as a neutral alternative to beige or greige.” The trick is to style it like a neutral by mixing it with warm off-whites, white oak, travertine or limestone, and aged brass, then add contrast with charcoal, olive, deep espresso, black, or dark bronze. Used this way, dusty mauve shines in bedrooms, dining rooms, powder rooms, dressing rooms, or calm sitting rooms, where it creates a relaxed, inviting vibe that feels intentional and zen.

Terracotta



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Terracotta is having a very main-character moment again. Warm, earthy, and a little sunbaked, the shade taps into our collective craving for spaces that feel grounded but still fun. Mayo loves it as a way to bring in nature

without going full boho. And depending on the saturation, “terracotta and green are fun ‘pops’ in terms of natural colors,” she explains, especially when layered in through accessories like pillows, throws, artwork, or potted plants.

If you’re ready to commit, it also shines as a statement piece, especially on a side chair or sofa, which instantly adds personality. Terracotta pairs beautifully with dark, rich browns like walnut or mahogany, and feels especially at home when balanced with neutral, warm walls, which keep things flexible long-term. The key is not overthinking it; look to vintage interiors for inspiration and treat terracotta as a refreshed classic for spaces you want to feel warm, relaxed, and effortlessly cool.

Mustard Yellow



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If you thought mustard yellow was permanently stuck in the “retro-cheesy” zone, think again. Once leaning a little too bright and feeling like a blast from the past, the color has recently evolved into something way more grown-up. Today’s version embraces “warm, earthy golden ochre tones that feel grounded and cozy,” says Stephan, especially when paired with natural wood and brass accents.

A subtle way to add personality without taking all the attention, designers suggest anchoring it with “neutrals like warm gray, taupe, and clay” and layering in textures like linen, wool, and velvet to keep the space feeling soft and inviting. Throw in a few darker touches, like charcoal or espresso, and you’ve got the perfect balance. It’s perfect for bedrooms or small creative corners, where mustard gold brings warmth and depth while still feeling chic and approachable.