

THE CHEERFUL ASPECTS OF COLOURATION OF HOME

Children's Rooms [L1]and Kitchens During the Post-War Reconstruction Period

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Abstract. Colours spread[L2] the intangible aspects of happiness. I studied the interior colourations of homes during the post-war reconstruction period in Finland from 1948 to 1955. For this study, I adopted a material-based approach with qualitative research methods and applied a theory-guided content analysis.[L3]

The children's room and the modern standardised kitchen were the youngest and most quickly developing spaces of the home. In children's rooms bright primary colours communicated the optimism of the future. The children's room should be bright, protected and happy. The purpose of happy colours in the kitchen was to increase the enjoyment of the matron while working there. During the post-war reconstruction period everything had to have a purpose.

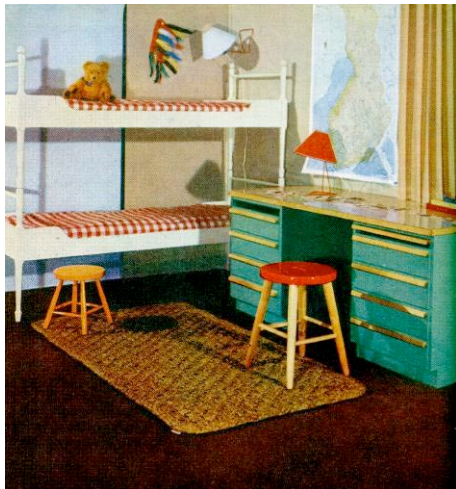


Figure 1. . Paint-it-yourself furniture in children's room (Kaunis Koti 3/1954, 20).



Figure 2. Red ceiling and blue floor in kitchen (Kaunis Koti 1/1954, 19).

1. Colouration at Home

Colour was an important topic of conversation in post-war Finland. The methods of depicting colours visually were poor, as colour photography was still in its infancy, and the print quality of colour pictures in periodicals was rough. This lack of visual material raised the question of the intangible aspects of colour. Quite a bit was written about colour in a descriptive manner. The primary sources for my study were two periodicals of the period, the first being the legitimate architecture viewpoint of *Arkkitehti* [Architect], a professional Finnish architectural periodical; and the second, *Kaunis Koti* [Beautiful Home], which belonged to the sphere of popular architecture and was directed at the general public to develop their taste. The writers of Beautiful Home were mostly architects and interior and industrial designers. The questions from the readers and the editors' responses regarding interior design solutions in the "Kysykää me vastaamme"^[L4] [Questions & Answers^[L5]] column of the periodical Beautiful Home provided a clear indication of the direction of interior design in Finnish urban homes. Even though the printed images were black-and-white, through the other documents provided it was possible to understand the context of colouration.^[L6]

During the post-war reconstruction period, the colouration of the interior of the home was non-uniform. The compositions and methods of using changed according to room type. The overarching concept in the colouration of the rooms was a purposeful aesthetic. The changes dealt with the development phase and the content of the room types, as well as the emphasis given to the space of the whole of the rooms. In addition to the changes among room type colouration, changes in some of the home furnishings and their colouration^[L7] were noticeable as well during the post-war reconstruction period. The importance of good taste^[L8] was also emphasised in different ways for different room types. When talking about older, already formalised room types, such as the living room and the bedroom, good taste was often brought up, and interior design according to good taste was constructed from previous criticism of colouration in interior design. In connection with newer room types, such as the kitchen and the children's room, a

¹ I refer to Pierre Bourdieu's writings (*Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 1984) and his definition of good taste. I also use Richard Shusterman's critique of Bourdieu's idea of good taste. When talking about good taste in using colour at home in passive I refer to the writings of the architects and journalists of the popular *Kaunis Koti* -magazine.

purposeful aesthetic was at the forefront and good taste was hardly ever talked about, since colouration was not given value in relation to what had come before. Dissymmetry of colouration was common for all home interiors. The dissymmetry was derived from the modernity principle² of embracing the new and forbidding the traditional.

2. Children's Room and Kitchen

The children's room and the modern standardised kitchen were the youngest and most quickly developing spaces of the home. Previously, there may have been rooms meant for children in apartments, but those were furnished in a style similar to the adults' rooms. In the post-war political demographic in Finland, attention was paid to the position of the child and, by extension, to the spaces for the child and their furnishings³. The exemplar of the modern standardised kitchen, *Frankfurt kitchen*, was displayed in 1927⁴[L9]. The functional content of the Finnish kitchen and its outer form were shaped by Swedish examples⁵. The change in kitchens is dependent upon changes in the woman's position in society. Many women went to work outside the home, and domestic chores needed to be done by the family alone without any domestic help. The kitchen changed from the workplace of the domestic helper to the workplace of the mother. The kitchen had to be made a pleasant and efficient space of the home. During the post-war reconstruction period the furnishing of the children's room and the kitchen did not build upon criticism from the previous decades, as thanks to the youth of this room type there was not much criticism to begin with. Equally, in connection with these room types, the question of taste was not raised either. The habits of interior colouration of the

² The concept of modernity has meanings such as 'new', 'now' or 'present' and the idea of new includes the idea of forbidding the old and traditional. I refer to Matei Calinescu's idea of modernity divided parallel into two: objective and subjective modernity (Calinescu 1988, 13.) This definition is important for understanding the whole state of the post-war reconstruction period home and its colouring.

³ Family Federation (Väestöliitto) was founded 1941. Its aims were practical. For example, one of its aims was that every child should have his or her own permanent bed with a pillow, a blanket and sheets. (Junto 1990, 198-199.)

⁴ (Woodham 1997, 50). Woodham mentions also the 1930 Minimum Apartment Exhibition in Helsinki, where also Aino Aalto's kitchen design was exhibited.

⁵ For example, the Swedish kitchen handbook *Köket av i dag* [Kitchen of Today] (1950) by Åke Ekelund and Yngve Steen was largely quoted in Finnish kitchen handbooks *Nykyaikainen keittiö* [Contemporary Kitchen] (Mertaola-Nylund & Ervanne 1952) and *Keittiön kalustaminen ja sisustaminen* [Kitchen Fixtures and Interior Design] (Stenlund 1952).

children's room and kitchen did not noticeably change during the period under scrutiny. (Herneoja 2007.)

2.1 CHEERFUL COLOURATION

For the interiors of children's rooms and the modern standardised kitchen, bright primary colours were favoured: red, blue, and yellow⁶[L10]. In children's rooms this "cheerful", as it was called, colour scheme was limited to loose furniture, fabrics, and rugs. Wall and ceiling surfaces were practically [L11]left light-coloured, and floors had the same surface material as the rest of the dry spaces in the apartment, namely the often light brown cork mat, as it was called. (Herneoja 2007.)

"Ikkunan edessä on matalalle asennettu piirustuspöytälevy, joka on päällystetty kirkkaan sinisellä muovikäsitellyllä. Levy nostetaan myöhemmin kahden laatikoston avulla kouluikäisen lukupöydäksi. Levyn viereisellä seinällä on liitupiirustustaulu. Toisella seinällä neljä kappaletta seinäkirjahyllyjä, joita alussa käytetään lelujen säilytystilana ja myöhemmin kirjahyllynä. Pyöreä matala pöytä on linolipintainen ja jakkarat ovat kirkkaan punaiseksi maalattuja. Vuodepeite on kirkkaan keltainen. Kirjavat riepumatot peittävät lattian. Verhokangas on punapohjaista painettua iloista kangasta, verholista maalataan valkoiseksi. Piirustuspöydän yläpuolella seinällä on pellavakangasvarjostiminen seinään kiinnitetty valaisin ja keskivalopisteessä yhdistetty paikallis- ja yleisvalaisin, väriltään valkoinen. Seinäpaperit ovat vaaleapohjaiset, sinipilkulliset." (Kaunis Koti 1/1955, 35, question 2.)⁷

In the kitchen, bright primary colours were used, in addition to the loose furniture, primarily on the curtains, the floor, and on work surfaces. Colourfully coated[L12] hardboard was recommended to be

⁶ The readers' questions and the editors' responses regarding interior design solutions in the Questions & Answers (Kysykää me vastaamme) column of the Kaunis Koti periodical provided a clear indication of the direction of interior design in Finnish urban homes. This column, in addition to the articles of the same periodical, form the main source for the depicting of children's rooms and kitchens' colourings.

⁷ Translation: [In front of the window there is a drawing table coated with bright blue plastic. Later, when children go to school, the drawing table will be lifted up by two sets of drawers to form a desk at which to study. Next to the drawing table on the wall there is a blackboard. On the other wall there are four sets of bookshelves, which at first will be used as toy shelves and later for storing books. The low round table has a linoleum cover and the stools around it are painted red. The bedspread is bright yellow. The floor is covered with multi-coloured rag rugs. The curtains are made out of red fabric with a cheerful print. The curtain board has been painted white. Above the drawing table there is a wall lamp with a shade made of linen. On the ceiling in the centre of the room there is a lamp that provides integrated spot and overall lighting. The wallpaper is light with blue dots.]

used also for walls and work surfaces susceptible to spills. Colours produced for standard hardboard included tones of white, ivory, light green, green, and blue. Similarly, red and yellow were missing from the plastic board colour scheme as well. Plastic board was produced in white, as well as tones of blue and green. Linoleum and plastics made it possible to use colour on the floor. In my material there are some references to suggestions to use blue and red as floor colours, and there is even a colour picture of a red ceiling. The walls of the kitchen were not recommended to be painted in bright colours. Rather, it was recommended that the walls should always have a light tone to them. (Herneoja 2007.)

”Ikkunan edessä on ruokapöytä tuoleineen, joissa on puna-valkea raidalliset irtotyynyt. Pöydän alla on yksivärinen sininen riepumatto. Suppilonmuotoinen riippuvalaisin, väriltään vaaleanharmaa on asetettu pöydän yläpuolelle. Verhokangas on kelta-valkea ruudullista. Keittiön kaapit ovat maalatut valkoiseksi, seinät siniharmaaksi ja katto valkoiseksi. Lieden yläpuolella on pyöreä valkoinen lasivalaisin.” (Kaunis Koti 6/1954, 34, quest. 1.)⁸

”Iki-levypintainen pitkä pöytä on sinertäväsävyinen. Vaahtokumitäytteinen sohvapenkki, joka on verhoiltu kelta-valkealla markiisikankaalla on pöydän toisella ja pari punaista tuolia toisella puolella. Pöydän yläpuolella on niinikangasvarjostiminen riippuvalaisin. Verhokankaaksi ehdotamme sinivalkearuudullista puuvillakangasta.” (Kaunis Koti 4/1955, 6, quest. 2.)⁹

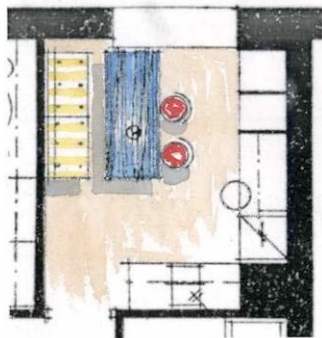


Figure 3. Typical colouring of a kitchen according to the Questions and Answers column (Kaunis Koti 4/1955, 6, question 2, colouring according to the written description

⁸ Translation: [In front of the kitchen window there is a dining table and four chairs with red-and-white-striped separate cushions. Under the table there is a plain blue rag rug. Above the table there is a light grey funnel-shaped pendant light. The curtains have a white-and-yellow checker pattern. The kitchen cupboards have been painted white, the walls are grey and the ceiling white. Above the stove there is a round white lighting fixture.]

⁹ Translation: [The table is long and its surface is covered with bluish laminate. Next to the table there is a bench with separate foam rubber cushions upholstered with yellow-and-white-striped canvas. On the other side of the table there are a couple of red stools. Above the table there is a pendant light with a bast fabric shade. We suggest blue-and-white checkered cotton for the curtains]

2.2 CONCLUSION: MEANINGS OF COLOURATION^[L13]

Positive meanings were attached to the use of colouration in children's rooms and kitchens. Tangible bright primary colours of red, blue, and yellow communicated the intangible optimism of the future in the children's rooms. During the post-war reconstruction period the children's room should be bright, protected and happy. The same kind of relationship between tangible colour and intangible meanings was attached to the colours used in kitchens. The purpose of happy colours in the kitchen was to increase the enjoyment of the matron while working there. During the post-war reconstruction period everything had to have a purpose. Thus, even enjoyment was not an end in itself^[L14], but cheerful colours were considered to improve the work efficiency of the person working in the kitchen. In my material, the opinions regarding the use of primary colours in children's rooms and kitchens among periodicals *Architect* and *Beautiful Home* were very uniform. There were some differences of opinion as to how to situate colour in the room. Architects were of the opinion that loose furniture should be wood-coloured, and the walls were recommended to be painted in bright colours. In practice, though, the Questions & Answers column did not recommend this method for furnishing the children's rooms, as can be seen from the former quotations. There were no noticeable differences between the responses in the Questions & Answers column and the opinion of the architects as pertained to furnishing the kitchen. The red ceiling could appear in home shows of the professionals, but this kind of colouring was not recommended in the responses in the Questions & Answers column. Clean primary colours were not connected with associative colour names as in the living room and the bedroom. Rather, colours were talked about without additional modifiers. Colours were often just called cheerful or bright.^[L15]



Figure 4. Girls' room
(Kaunis Koti 3/1955, 22).

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Periodicals:

Arkkitehti 1948-55
Kaunis Koti 1948-55