Colour your office!

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The Pantone Colour Institute has voted Viva Magenta as colour of the year 2023. The vivid red with a touch of magenta is particularly striking and brings up the question about integrating (trendy) colours into office design.

Yvonne Meindl-Cavar is founder and CEO of Schönstil, consulting engineers for interior architecture and design, in Vienna. Among her activities, she designs worlds of work and has a predilection for integrating a variety of colours. She knows only too well: “Colours can generate worlds of atmosphere quite specifically, soothing or stimulating according to need. The prerequisite

is that you study the effect of different colours." Blue and green, for instance, have a relaxing and calming effect; black used in the correct amount can be elegant but if applied too extensively can appear heavy and negative. Yellow generates an optimistic and stimulating atmosphere, while extensive areas in red can evoke an aggressive mood. However, if used skilfully, a touch of red can boost activity. White is a non-colour that steers focus and concentration onto the actual task at hand, but shouldn't be used too spaciously, because white can easily come across as sterile and cold.

Transposed to office design, this means that not only the effect of the individual colours is a key factor but also their combination and dosage. For instance, if you work all day at the screen, the desktop colour should be light in hue so that the contrast to the screen isn't too strenuous for the eyes. In the extended office setting the correct combination of colours is of primary importance. Best of all, you should restrict yourself to three or four tones that can be applied in different proportions. "I use colours to create demarcations – for instance between communication zones and task areas, and to cite the firm's corporate identity in terms of a resonant and cohesive overall concept. In doing so, I rely mostly on muted colours, which you don't get tired of so quickly," says Meindl-Cavar.

Trendy! But sensible, too?

So much for colour theory. But let's get back to this year's trend in colour – Viva Magenta. It brings us to the question of whether it's sensible to tune office design in with (short-term) trends. How do you integrate trendy colours without having to keep adapting to the latest craze? "I feel that all colours are timeless that are reflected in muted form and in great abundance in the natural environment. For example, blue tones, green, beige and brown. These colours never go out of fashion, and you don't get tired of them so quickly. This is why I wouldn't advise applying trendy colours at random. Colours should always relate to the firm, or be deliberately applied to create a specific image for it. In principle, though, we should stop being afraid of colours. A wall can usually be repainted quickly and without too much trouble. This does not outweigh the enormous benefits to be gained by colour," says the interior designer emphatically.

Viva Magenta is outstandingly vivid and intensive. People are very shy about using striking colours – especially in the office environment. "Basically there isn't any colour in existence that is too intense. It's all a question of how it's applied. Ultimately, the colour design ought to be perceived as pleasant by a great number of people. Only then will they feel "at home", and this is what it's all about. If a firm's corporate design is underscored by a striking colour, you can inject this subtly into the design with accents of colour. If people want to paint a large number of walls, they should choose a more muted version of the colour so as not to be swamped by hyper-stimulation," Meindl-Cavar describes the experiences gained in her daily work.

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