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L I N A P R E I Š E G A L A V I Č I E N Ė

ENDANGERED COLOUR TRADITIONS IN LITHUANIAN INTERIOR DESIGN

Summary. Colours – and colour combinations – are important considerations for architects, decorators, building owners, residents and visitors. Colour presents a complex issue in discussion and negotiation in the architectural design process, and aesthetic disagreements often arise due to different viewpoints. The object of discussion here is endangered traditional colour schemes in Lithuanian interior design, in which the collective cultural approach includes elements of both folk design and professional design. The issue addressed in this article is the culturological place of colour in interior design, while the aim is to define the role of colour in such design and provide a brief historical and cultural overview of significant Lithuanian colour combinations. In this article, a folk-theoretical approach is complemented by empirical observations, evidenced by archival historical material research. Theoretical analysis suggests that the colour combination of the Lithuanian national flag (yellow, green and red) is not suited to Lithuanian interior design, where natural earth colours are dominant – preferably non-intensive pastel-colours that reflect the Lithuanian landscape and climate. The conclusion is that the perception of colour combinations depends to some extent on human intelligence or artistic education, but to a greater extent on collective culture and collective memory.

Key words: colours, Lithuanian interior design, collective culture, collective memory.

INTRODUCTION

In an age of rapidly changing design trends and colour fashions, architects and designers encounter the problem that modern (fashionable) material expressions, at first highly valued, after several years become boring, or even hated. The problem is complicated in the interior design field where, unlike in other fields of design and fashion, it is not possible to change as frequently as clothes or other small everyday accessories. The subject matter of this article is endangered traditional colours in Lithuanian interior design, while the aim of the article is to find national symbolical and aesthetical meanings of the colours which have cultural roots and have a real chance to be accepted positively (a “feel good” effect, without deeper critical psychological dimensions). Folk interior tradition is compared with tendencies in contemporary Lithuanian professional design, offering new ideas for its revival.

Overview of previous studies. The limited space of this article means it is not possible to provide a wide

theoretical overview of research on colour, though studies in this field date back many years and are extensive (though it should be noted that this paper is not concerned with the marketing aspects of colour analysis). Regarding the article’s actual theme, some of the earliest texts on the subject were written by the Roman architect and engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (1st century BCE) in his celebrated treatise “De architectura”. Vitruvius wrote about the origins of natural and artificial colours, quicksilver, blue, purple, yellow ochre, malachite green, and indigo used in architecture and interiors,¹ and it is notable that his theoretical approach to colours mostly interfaces with the criteria for the origins of colours’ natural ingredients (compounds of natural products found and dug up in particular geographical locations). In the Renaissance and later periods, theories were very involved in analysing the symbolism of colours.² Recently, in 2024, Roy Osborne conducted a detailed historical survey of colour literature and authors (published in 1495–2025), with chronological indexes of authors showing

publication over the last century of many new works on colour analysis.³ Alongside art history, many other disciplines have considered the significance of colour in their domains: philosophy, natural science, neuroscience, social science and medicine. Contemporary scientists explain colour theory in the fields of anthropology, physics, and neuroscience by analysing Western literature and art. Some scholars acknowledge colour as “the soul of interior design”, while other scientists look for mathematical ways to calculate the “colour souls”,⁴ acknowledged as relevant properties of colour psychology in modern interior design. Admittedly, Alex Byrne and David R. Hilbert in their publication “Colors and Reflectances” say that “no reductive analysis of the colors is possible, whereas physicalism says that they are physical properties”,⁵ yet the psychological view is more prevalent. In 2016, psychology consultant and colour trends forecaster June McLeod revealed the latest colour psychology information emerging from her pioneering research and studies on colour. McLeod’s publication “Colour Psychology Today” is presented as “a ‘must have’ for colour enthusiasts, branding experts, marketers, advertising execs, graphic designers, and anyone who would like to expand and develop the application of colour in their field of work.”⁶ Collective study on the effects of interior colours on mood suggests “if it is desired that interiors be seen as spacious, restful, calm, and peaceful, then cool colors should be used. On the other hand, if it is desired that interiors should be seen as more arousing, exciting, and stimulating, then warm colors should be used.”⁷ There is a wide range of discussions about how colour stimulates emotions, emphasising the importance of colour in interior design:⁸ over recent decades, colour therapy in mental health and well-being has been widely analysed by various scholars all over the world. One recent publication, by Indian researcher Rakesh Gupta,⁹ promotes the widespread belief that without colour our environment would be dull and depressing.¹⁰ The role of colour in the “health and wellbeing” of the built environment is the focus of scientific interest of psychologists and neuroscientists across the globe. Anthoni Adomi Mbina and Ephraim E. Edem aptly noted that “the problem comes when one tries to find

universal principles, for it will be quickly discovered that emotional responses to colour are both culturally conditioned and intensely personal.”¹¹ Alongside the psychological approach it is possible to find intense and sophisticated discussions on how colour matters to philosophy, because colour presents philosophical problems in different areas and periods of the discipline.¹² John Barry Maund also argues about the philosophy of colour, and supplements its rationalism with “some version of an error theory”.¹³ Dimitria Electra Gatzia, besides various colour philosophical theories (realism, subjectivism, and eliminativism), presents the notion of Colour Fictionalism. Colour fictionalists “argue that contrary to appearances, colours are dispensable because colour theories do not have to be true in order to be useful in applications; they simply need to be closed under ordinary logical consequence. Fictionalists can thus maintain that colour theories are useful because they simplify communication.”¹⁴ We can find quite much research with interdisciplinary theoretical approaches to colour methodological analysis. In recent years, neuroscience has supported the methodological approach of “folk conscious theory” as an approach to people’s aesthetical choices:

*People’s folk theory of consciousness encompasses three prototypes of conscious mental functioning: monitoring (awareness), choice, and subjective experience. All three are embedded in a broader folk theory of mind and thus closely linked to the concept of intentionality, action explanation, and a conception of free will.*¹⁵

The problem of the understanding of colour is worth considering from the start of the discussion using the folk-theoretical approach, as this theory is currently used by neuroscientists. Although this method is considered incomplete, it addresses the issue from the outset – the naming of colours. David Lewis’ ideas seem “close to true”:

Like other folk theories, the folk psychophysics of colour is generally shared body of tacit belief. It concerns not only colours themselves, but also their inner states of colour experience that the

*colours tend to cause in us, and further inner states and behaviour that these colour experiences cause in turn.*¹⁶

In this article the folk theory of consciousness is filled with empirical observations, also integrating archival historical material research.

Given the rich range of international publications, Lithuanian colour study analysis appears inadequate in comparison with the international context: scholarly articles and monographs are limited to the analysis of the role of colour in Lithuanian folk art (folk art, furniture, and textiles).¹⁷ Useful Lithuanian research on polychrome studies for art history is generally not published, but remains in historical researchers' manuscripts – some of these were incorporated in Dalia Klajumienė's research on the interior décor of Vilnius residential houses.¹⁸ There is also a gap in colour studies in the field of Lithuanian architectural design – the issue of colour was only briefly touched upon in the monograph on interwar interiors (1918–1940).¹⁹ Most other publications in Lithuanian are based on foreign authors, and are intended for the education of art students.²⁰

The aim of this article is to discuss how colours matter culturally to Lithuanian interior design, to the personal impact on visitors' mood, to the total result of perception of the interior space as cosy and uncanny, following the Mbina and Edem research on "a built environment that should be 'attractive' and contribute to the 'feel good' experience of people."²¹ We can agree with those scientists that this "feel good" is not just personal perception, but is deeply rooted in the country's collective culture; hence the prevalence of folk theory in this article. The folk-theoretical approach is filled with empirical observations made by the author of this article, adding archival historical material research.

LITHUANIAN FOLK APPROACH TO COLOUR IN INTERIORS

The folk theory on interiors is based on the work of Lithuanian architect and folk art researcher Alfonsas Keturka (1919–1995). During his studies of Lithuanian traditional rural folk interiors, Keturka noted that "traditionally colours of Lithuanian interior components were selected not only according to function, but according to its place in the interior: in the most important well visible places have been arranged most beautiful furniture items and decorative artwork."²² For furniture and other items in the interior, the background consisted of natural wood walls, which eventually became dark grey-brown, pastel passive tones. However, rural people intuitively felt that surfaces of greyish interior planes look monotonous: to avoid this, Lithuanian folk aesthetics required the decoration of beds and tables with coloured ornament, painting the furniture and the ovens. At the same time, folk aesthetics advised people to avoid having too many colourful items, so as not to make the interior so bright as to clash with the overall colour scheme and adjacent colours. Interior equipment was abundant with wood, and included such other natural materials as brick, unpainted linen, stone, clay, and iron. The colours of the Lithuanian rural interior were quiet, the colour palette was easy, and polychrome ornament decorated furniture and other important items, especially fabrics. According to Keturka "the furniture was the most important component of the polychrome decoration of the living spaces. Alongside with the interior textile and all the interior equipment, they made a compositional entity."²³ Analysing the Lithuanian folk approach, we can see that the minimalist understanding of interior decoration is deeply rooted in Lithuanian folk interior design traditions. This could explain why bold colour combinations or fashionable rich colours from other countries could potentially cause problems in contemporary Lithuanian interior design.

LITHUANIAN NATIONAL COLOURS – NATIONAL FLAG COLOURS (YELLOW-GREEN-RED) IN INTERIOR DESIGN

For all nations, colours have both aesthetic and symbolic meaning; while such meanings may change over time, the aesthetic aspect is most likely to survive. For Lithuania, contrasting colours for details seem to be characteristic – as Keturka noted: “Lithuanian folk craftsmen usually decorated furniture with contrasting colours, less often with nuanced, non-contrasting colours. [...] Black colour for the background was used very rarely. Instead of it dark reddish-black, greenish-black, blueish-black background. White background was accepted by folk people as ‘not practical’, besides it, white colour fades the colours of the rest décor.”²⁴ One might summarise that pure black and chalk white²⁵ remained unused by Lithuanian rural people for a long time.

During the interwar period, according to the advice of home design specialist Mikalina Glemžaitė (1891–1985), the colours of Lithuanian national flag – bright yellow, green, and red (Fig. 1) were not favoured in everyday design. Regarding colour aesthetics, Lithuanian citizens in 1937 were taught that “yellow, green, red are the honourable colours of our national flag, and it is not appropriate to use them in the same order in our daily handicrafts”.²⁶ Despite this, the national tricolour was, in fact, visible and favoured in interwar architects’ professional and amateur interior design (Fig. 1–3).



Fig. 1. The national flag of the Republic of Lithuania, in Catalogue “Mūsų vėliavos 1918–1940 m. Nacionalinio M. K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejaus rinkinys [Our flags from 1918 to 1940, M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art Collection],” NCDM Cat. No 1, 69



Fig. 2. Example of wall painting from the interior decorator Liudas Stašaitis' work documents file, 1930s, in Preišgalavičienė's personal collection



Fig. 3. Carpet design project by Antanas Tamošaitis, 1930s, A. and A. Tamošaitis Gallery “Židinys,” ap. 1, b. 151

During the soviet re-occupation period (1944–1990) the national flag was strictly forbidden: the raising of Lithuania's tricolour was harshly punishable.²⁷ Despite this, Lithuanian people artistically incorporated the national flag colours into various items of their private everyday surroundings. In this regard, American vexillologist Whitney Smith (1940–2016) declared:

The yellow-green-red stripes of this flag were attributed symbolism relating to the national traditions of the Lithuanian people. Ripening wheat and freedom from want are suggested by the yellow, and green is for hope and the forests

*of the nation. Red stands for love of country, for sovereignty, and for the courage and valour that keep the flame of liberty burning.*²⁸

This could be an explanation as to why the national flag colours started to be integrated into contemporary Lithuanian fashion design,²⁹ although it is difficult to find the colour combination in interior design. Logically, this can be explained in Mbina and Edem's words that "strong colours should be used only when they are to be observed for very brief periods; in larger spaces, softer and more subdued colour should be used, so that the background would not be too obtrusive to the observers and the occupants".³⁰ However, an understanding of the political events of the second half of the 20th century in Lithuania reveals that the soviet occupation period not only erased the Lithuanian tricolour, but also the polychrome traditions of folk art.

RED AND GREEN

"For most people brought up in America [USA], red and green have strong cultural associations with Christmas,"³¹ while in Lithuania, the colour combination of terracotta-red with green has deep traditional roots in local folk art. Terracotta red and green colour examples of the 1930s remained in the records of wall painting in the work documents file of the interior decorator Liudas Stašaitis.³² The terracotta red and green colour combination is often seen in Lithuanian folk interiors, rural furniture and hand-woven textiles (Fig. 4–6).



Fig. 4. Example of wall painting from the interior decorator Liudas Stašaitis' work documents file, 1930s, in Preišgalavičienė's personal collection



Fig. 5. Pattern of Lithuanian folk textile, 1930s (Folk art patterns from expeditions to Lithuanian villages), NČDM, Lta-66

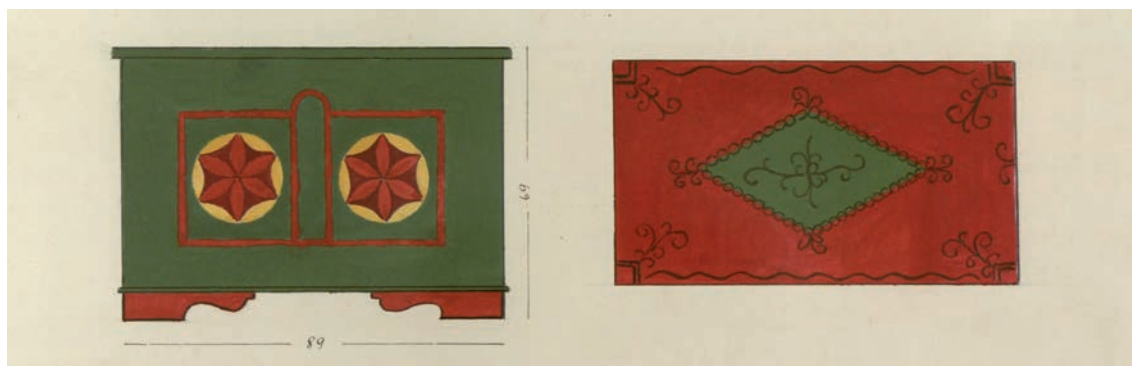


Fig. 6. Lithuanian folk furniture chest, painting by Liucija Šulgaitė, 1954, Lithuanian National Museum of Art, LNDM, Pb 461, <https://www.epaveldas.lt/preview?id=LIMIS-20000004186793>

Red and green colours were combined in the (unrealised) competition proposal “Amicus Amico” for the Presidential Palace in Kaunas (Fig. 7)³³. The impression of power in the entrance hall was created by following the laws and stylistics of sacred buildings. However, the red and green colour combination was characteristic of modernist buildings in the interwar Lithuanian cities.³⁴

The combination of yellow-ochre, green and red terracotta was designed by foreign architects, although aesthetically it had much in common with Lithuanian artistic professional and rural folk textiles. Those decorators who did not create patterns themselves followed ready-made examples of wall decoration brought from Germany and Poland that included fashionable stencils and colour combinations from European paint factories. The above-mentioned idea is attested in the works of the interior decorator brothers Liudas and Simas



Fig. 7. Competition proposal “Amicus Amico” for the Presidential Palace in Kaunas, Parodos / Kipro Petrausko g., original drawing, 1939–1940, LNM, AKP 541-5



Fig. 8. Examples of wall painting from the interior decorator Liudas Stašaitis' work documents file, 1930s, in Preišegalavičienė's personal collection

Stašaitis (Fig. 8).³⁵ Interior design of the interwar Lithuania period was replete with western trademarks of interior decoration materials,³⁶ which influenced the rich polychrome in interwar modernist Kaunas³⁷ apartments.

GREEN

According June McLeod “the ceilings of the temples mirrored nature; they were usually blue with a green floor, like the meadows of the Nile.”³⁸ Indian scientist Ananda Karmakar³⁹ considers the particular importance of the colour green, and its special place in Western cultures and Buddhism, noting “the colour green is significant in a number of different religions practiced all over the globe”.⁴⁰ These positive connotations of the colour are revealed through its connection with nature and because of the large number of religious rituals viewed through its specific hue.⁴¹ Also, for many years, shades of green have been popular in various living and public interiors, prominent in Lithuanian folk furniture collected in the interwar period as examples of the National style of interior design (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Lithuanian folk furniture chest, painting by Alfonsas Juškevičius, 1931, NČDM, ČDM Lta 2646, <https://www.limis.lt/valuables/e/805209/755889060?searchId=40900886>

MODERNIST COLOURS IN LITHUANIAN INTERIOR DESIGN

Due to historical black-and-white photographs and authentic interior elements, the presumption that white, grey and black were the colours of modernism persisted, and white-grey-black interiors were popular in the first decade of the 21st century. However, research by the authors mentioned above, the author of this article and polychromic empirical researchers, refutes this idea.

Polychrome denotes the colour descriptions in the documentation of projects by the famous interwar artist Kajetonas Sklėrius (1876–1932).⁴² The apartment of Juozas Urbšys, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, was very modest in terms of functionality and rationality, and featured colour combinations typical of modernism. For example, the black tabletop and plinth contrast with the yellow stained wood plane, as do the black straight wooden handles.⁴³ The famous professional furniture designer Jonas Prapuolenis (1900–1980) created polychromies using different kinds of wood (oak, birch, pear, etc.) and rural hand-woven upholstery; the success of his works can be explained by the fact that he drew heavily on folk craft traditions. Similar advice on colour perception can be found in the texts of the architect Keturka, proving that Lithuanian rural people have an intuitive understanding of colour theory, feeling that “the bright and active colours of large spots suppress the brightness of smaller, less active spots”,⁴⁴ or “light green combined with dark blue looks better than light blue with dark green, because pure blue is darker than green. Also, a light orange or yellow tone goes better with a darker brown, blue, purple tone, etc.”⁴⁵ Folk interiors were rich with various natural wood colours, that have influenced professional interior design. For many years, natural wood colours have been a prominent feature in various types of Lithuanian interiors.

Natural wood colours combined with black. During the interwar period, intarsia of various woods featuring geometrised, minimalist ornaments was a fashionable and exclusive form of décor for

unique furniture in the National style. In Lithuania, the dominant colour of natural oak was often combined with black details, such as furniture plinths, cornices, handles, black leather upholstery, painted baseboards and stair railings. In Kaunas, furniture in interwar modernist interiors was often varnished in the colour of natural wood or stained dark brown. The colour combination characteristic of famous Lithuanian interwar architects (Vladimiras Dubeneckis, Mykolas Songaila, Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis, Stasys Kudokas, Arnas Funkas, Feliksas Vizbaras, etc.) interiors was specified as: natural oak; large, veneered areas combined with black details; furniture plinths, cornices and handles, painted baseboards, and stair railings (Fig. 10).⁴⁶

Even the wicker furniture produced by craftsmen was predominantly natural in colour, or dyed with aniline in soft, smooth shades;⁴⁷ only very rarely was this furniture patterned and painted in red, purple, blue, yellow, orange, red, bronze or green.⁴⁸ The wooden and veneered surfaces of the integrated



Fig. 10a. Decorative wooden finish of the stair railing in the house of Jablonskytė-Petkevičienė, designed in 1930s by arch. Landsbergis-Žemkalnis. In the interior, the dominant colour of natural oak is combined with black details: furniture plinths, cornices and handles, painted baseboards, stair railings. Photo by Preišegalavičienė, 2010

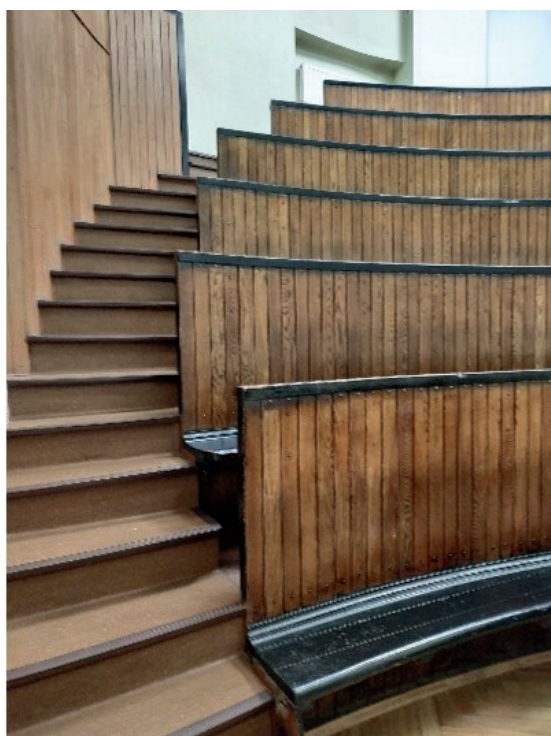


Fig. 10b, 10c. Auditoriums of Vytautas the Great University, Faculty of Medicine, designed in 1930s by arch. Vladimiras Dubeneckis (currently University of Health Sciences, Micevičiaus g. 9, Kaunas). Photos by Preišgalavičienė, 2018

and free-standing furniture were painted in a smooth white, cocoa, or other light brown colours. In Lithuania, such furniture was produced only in cities, usually created by young architects who had completed their studies in Western Europe. Lithuanian modernist wall-mounted wardrobes usually consisted of wood painted in a single colour, dominated by natural wood, or veneer. During the interwar period, imitation wood was not popular in Lithuania and was rarely used. The colour black was used in amateur interior decoration more often than in professional interiors. Black-anthracite combined with creamy-white was (and is) very often found in rural folk textiles (Fig. 11).

As regards floor tiles, these were laid most often as follows: a band of monochrome tiles laid parallel to the walls with two-tone tiles in a chessboard pattern in the centre of the frame, or tiles of different colours were laid as mosaic. Available colour combinations were grey and black, white and grey, or ochre-yellow and grey. The entire perimeter of the walls was marked with a darker colour. A popular way of laying tiles, used for large rooms, was to compose patterns similar to Antanas Tamošaitis'

(1906–2005) carpets. Ornamentation, patterns, and colours were taken from Lithuanian folk textiles. The floors of offices in the Bank of Lithuania (designed by architects Songaila and Funkas) were decorated with contrasting patterns based on Lithuanian rural fabrics.⁴⁹ Similarly, the floor of the Kaunas Central Post Office was also decorated according to a design by Vizbaras. The floors inspired by Lithuanian textile patterns in professionally designed premises reflected the mixture of modernism and select ethnic elements characteristic of Lithuania.⁵⁰ Remains of the original floors

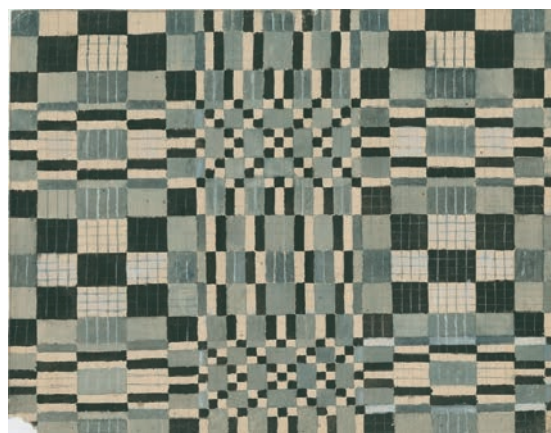


Fig. 11. Pattern of Lithuanian folk interior textile, 1930s, NČDM, Lta-628

evidence the popularity of the terracotta-red floor, that remained for many years a very popular colour in amateur design (Fig. 12–13).

Light and dark natural colour contrast was (and remains) popular in Lithuanian interior design. The inclination towards nature colours in Lithuania has deep culturological roots. Prominent examples of Lithuanian colour understanding are visible in



Fig. 12. Authentic linoleum in the J. Zikaras House-Museum (NČDM, Zikaro g. 3, Kaunas), is still preserved. Linoleum printed with geometricised patterns – dark brown, terracotta-red, and yellow colours. Photo by Preišegalavičienė, 2009



Fig. 13. Similar colour combinations were proposed for modern national design in the in the book “Sodžiaus menas. Liaudies meno dirbinių raštai [Homestead art. Patterns of folk art]” No. 3, colour chart 7. Kaunas, 1931



Fig. 14. Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, Sonata No. 6 (Sonata of the Stars) Andante, 1908, M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art (NČDM)

the paintings of the celebrated artist and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911). For many years, Čiurlionis’ paintings have been accepted as a symbol of Lithuanian collective culture. As art historian Agnė Narušytė claims about this national genius: “romantic signs of Lithuanian identity and of Lithuania itself are recognized in his paintings”.⁵¹ In Čiurlionis’ paintings (Fig. 14) we can recognise the colour combinations that Lithuanians keenly collect for their interior spaces.

NATIONAL STYLE COLOURS

Only the brightest and most variegated colour combinations and the most common and recurring ornaments were included in the composition of the official National style by interwar Lithuania artists and architects. Meanwhile, simple nature colours had been considered: natural oak, ochre, sand, brown, terracotta red, green, brown and blue. One can find a similar idea of the most popular patterns and exemplary colour combinations of Lithuanian folk art pieces selected and published in the book “Sodžiaus menas (Homestead art)”.⁵² Further similar colour combinations are preserved in an original interior project by artist Antanas Tamošaitis



Fig. 15. Living space interior project by Antanas Tamošaitis, A. and A. Tamošaitis Gallery "Židinys," ap. 1, b. 201, l. 5

(Fig. 15).⁵³ Tamošaitis' carpets are renowned for their "purely national, beautifully chosen" patterns and for their artistic style, colour selection, and compatibility, so that "the colours are not sweet and sensual, but lively, picturesque and adapted to the style of the patterns."⁵⁴

The book "Austiniai kilimai (Woven carpets)" published in 1935, describes a romantic attitude common to the majority of Lithuanian residents at the time: "We all grew up in a garden among variegated fabrics and patterns, uniquely combined colours, so we cannot give them up even today."⁵⁵ Ethnographer and pedagogue Mikalina Glemžaitė



Fig. 16. Carpet pattern project by Antanas Tamošaitis, A. and A. Tamošaitis Gallery "Židinys," ap. 1, b. 136



Fig. 17. Carpet pattern project by Antanas Tamošaitis, A. and A. Tamošaitis Gallery "Židinys," ap. 1, b. 139

criticised handicraft designs adopted from Western Europe, and taught Lithuanian women to look for home decoration ideas in ancient Lithuanian handicrafts – using dark grey, blue, and brown colours. Glemžaitė advised combining decorative elements of green, red, white, blue, pink colours for their background. Similar interwar carpet colour combinations are evidenced by surviving carpet designs by Tamošaitis, created in the 1930s (Fig. 16–17).⁵⁶

Architect Aleksandras Gordevičius, while creating a competition design for the President's Room (under the pseudonym "Anga" – the Hole) in the Military Officers Club Palace "Ramovė", directly imitated the decoration, furniture, national textile, decor, colours, and even the dark brown gloomy mood of Lithuanian rural homesteads (Fig. 18–19).⁵⁷ The commission members agreed that the room's combination of colours was very close to Lithuanian folk furniture aesthetics: "The room can be given to the Lithuanian character using folk doors, windows, furniture, fabrics, lighting motifs."⁵⁸ But despite this, the "Anga" design was finally rejected by the commission, witness to



Fig. 18. The design of the President's Room submitted to the competition under the pseudonym "Anga" (the Hole) by arch. Aleksandras Gordevičius. Project, 1936, LCVA, F. 6, ap. 1, b. 47, l. 1

the fact that it was not enough to directly follow the ethnic interior of the village house – aesthetic recreation of the traditional rural environment was needed as well. A similar design path was followed not only in Lithuania but also in Latvia,⁵⁹ Poland,⁶⁰ and Ukraine.⁶¹

BLUE

The purposeful and conscious use of blue in the decoration of the interior spaces is worth explaining through the research of the contemporary philosopher and Judaic scholar Gadi Sagiv, who explored the role of the colour blue in the contexts of Kabbalistic theology, symbolism, and mythology. He wrote that for many years the dazzling blue colour has been understood by Mediterranean cultures and Middle Eastern peoples, including Jews, as protection against the so-called "evil eye".⁶² Sagiv noted the many studies by scholars specialising in Jewish traditions on the question of the origin and meaning of the colour blue, presenting the genealogy of religious texts, where he discusses the symbolism and function of the dye *tekhelet*,⁶³ developed over time as "protection against evil".

Mbina and Edem (2015) add other connotations to the colour: "For the German painter, Franz Marc, blue was the colour of male spirituality. As the colour of the sky and the ocean, blue is often associated



Fig. 19. Similar colour combinations were proposed for modern national design in the book "Sodžiaus menas. Liaudies meno dirbinių raštai [Homestead art. Patterns of folk art]" No. 3, colour chart 1a. Kaunas, 1931

with freedom. It is a 'cool' colour and has been shown to have a calming effect. In the English language, blue is linked with sadness. In India, blue is the colour of the god Vishnu, the god of order and stability, but it is also associated with the dark and disturbing power of the goddess Kali.⁶⁴ However, for Lithuania, with regard to folk interiors across the various regions of the country, blue was rarely seen – usually only in the design of chests, where the colour appeared in various shades. As for interior textiles – bedspreads, tablecloths or cushions – blue was uncommon (Fig. 20).⁶⁵

The interior design "Rūta", submitted by Sofija Pacevičienė to the aforementioned competition for furnishing the President's Room in the Lithuanian Officers Club palace Ramovė in 1936, demonstrated various bluish, grey, green and black shades⁶⁶ that were much softer than in folk interiors (Fig. 21). This colour combination by commission members was evaluated as solid, but "not enough Lithuanian".⁶⁷

Such an evaluation seems convincing, knowing how many folk furniture items (chests and wardrobes) used to be coloured in various intensive bluish shades: many examples are now kept in Lithuanian museums.⁶⁸ In summary, blue is a very serious and sacral colour, having deep religious and culturological meanings all over the world, while in Lithuanian interiors it was not as popular as brown, green and grey shades.

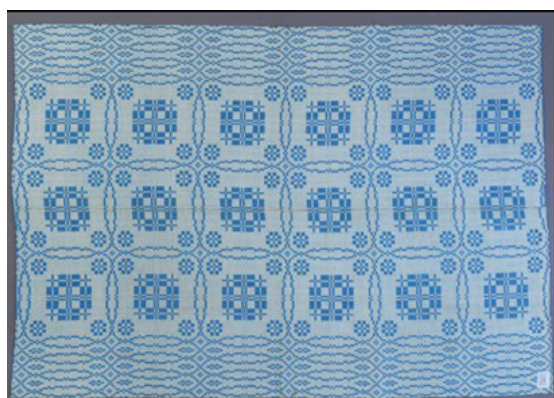


Fig. 20. The bedspread, 1939, in: The Memorial Museum of Lithuanian President Kazys Grinius, Marijampolė, <https://www.epaveldas.lt/preview?id=LIMIS-358420617>



Fig. 21. Competition design for the President's Room in the Ramovė. "Rūta" [Ruta] by Sofija Pacevičienė. Drawing, 1936, LCVA, F. 6, ap. 1, b. 47, l. 8

LITHUANIAN COLOURS TODAY

During an expedition in the summer of 2016, the author of this article visited the oldest authentic residential homesteads in the villages of *Antnemunis*,⁶⁹ in the Alytus district of the *Dzūkija* cultural region of Lithuania. Here, amidst an irreversibly degraded ethnic environment and forgotten traditions, meanwhile all the homesteads preserve handwoven textiles, handicrafts and colour combinations (Fig. 22) so different from the characteristics of contemporary professional modern design.⁷⁰

Lithuanian architects developed a professional understanding of Modernism during the second half of the 20th century; however, during the soviet era all kinds of (ethnic and aesthetic) variations and non-standard choices had been erased from the creative professional mentality.⁷¹ Besides that, soviet period interior design was very poor as regards interior decoration materials.⁷² The soviet economic situation much influenced sparse colour schemes in the soviet modernist apartments, all of which were decorated in limited standard unaesthetic colours (e.g. bordeaux brown, military green and signal white). The same standard colour combinations were used for hospitals, schools, soviet military barracks and new-build residential apartments.

Contrary to the 20th century soviet period tradition (but at the same time – similarly), over recent decades pure white interiors had become very popular in Lithuania, finally moving towards a



Fig. 22. Living room in Monika Šlėguvienė's homestead in Daujotiškių village (Alytus district). Photo by Preišegalavičienė, 2016

combination of white, grey shades, dark brown, and black with light oak colour, which latterly became dominant (even uniform) in most Lithuanian interiors in the recent years.⁷³ These uniform colour combinations in professional design prove that traditional colour schemes in contemporary Lithuanian interior design are now endangered. The Lithuanian folk-aesthetic tradition to avoid too many colourful items in an interior should be preserved, while ensuring the use of different pastel colours as described earlier in this paper. The current trend to revert to Lithuanian interwar Modernist aesthetics provides the opportunity to create a picture of contemporary interior design schemes in much more artistic and wider colour combinations, that can be “attractive” because of their deep historical and cultural roots.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of colour in interior design covers different interdisciplinary fields: proper use of colour (especially in architectural spaces) is a very responsible task offering the chance to achieve great artistic value. A folk-theoretical approach allows us to understand the role of colour in interior design as an object of collective culture: colour in interior design is an artistic value that needs a sophisticated approach. The minimalist aesthetic of interior decoration is deeply rooted in the traditions of Lithuanian folk interior design. Consequently, bold colour combinations or fashionable colours from faraway countries can pose a problem in Lithuanian interior design and, sooner or later, appear strange and dull. Meanwhile, natural wood colours have been a popular choice in various types of Lithuanian interiors for many years.

Modernism (in the form of fashionable colours) should be carefully considered when evaluating local traditional aesthetic tastes, which are often influenced by a country's geographical position, local nature and climate. Ultimately, the choice of colour combinations depends less on human intelligence or artistic education and more on collective culture and memory.

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¹⁴ Realism says that colours are physical properties of objects. Subjectivism says that colours are dispositions to cause colour experiences. Eliminativism says that despite appearances objects are not actually coloured. Dimitria Electra Gatzia, "Colour Fictionalism," *Rivista Di Estetica* 50(1) (2010), 19, 109–123, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/estetica.1795>

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²¹ Anthony Adomi Mbina, Ephraim E. Edem, 86.

²² Keturka, 15.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Black and white colours are visible today's professional interior design, see more in popular internet publications: *Baltas minimalizmas [White Minimalism]*, https://www.interjeras.lt/naujiena/Baltas_minimalizmas; https://www.interjeras.lt/naujiena/Harmonijos_kontrastas; and etc.

²⁶ Mikalina Glemžaitė, "Mūsų tautiškieji rankdarbiai [Our national handicrafts]," *Jaunoji karta [The younger generation]* 16 (1937), 323.

²⁷ "Patriotai, sovietmečiu kėlę Lietuvos trispalvę, bausmių nepabūgo ir lipo ant bažnyčių bei mokyklų stogų [Patriots, who had raised Lithuanian tricolour during the soviet era, were not afraid of punishments and climbed on the roofs of churches and schools]," *Kultūra* (11 03 2020), https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1150244/patriotai-sovietmeciu-kele-lietuvos-trispalve-bausmiu-nepabugo-ir-lipo-ant-baznyciu-bei-mokykl-lu-stogu?srltid=AfmBOoo-XzePCuIuN7otk4s3FAH6FW0QnyJCbT9UX-kLA0AMUC_rXMeC

²⁸ Whitney Smith "Flag of Lithuania," *Britanica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Lithuania>

²⁹ See more: "Lietuvos dizainerė sukūrė trispalvę, kurią galima apsivilkti [Lithuanian designer created a tricolour that can be worn]," *Lietuvė*, (2 Febr. 2018), <https://lietuve.lt/lietuvas-dizainere-sukure-trispalve-kuria-galima-apsivilkti/>

³⁰ Anthony Adomi Mbina, Ephraim E. Edem, 86.

³¹ Ibid., 86.

³² Work documents file of the interior decorators Liudas and Simas Stašaitis, 1930s, in Preišegalavičienė's personal collection.

³³ The Presidential Palace in Kaunas was preplanned on the Parodos / Kipro Petrausko g. in 1939. Competition proposal "Amicus Amico" project. The main hall interior, drawing, 1939–1940, LNM, AKP 541-5.

³⁴ See more: Lina Preišegalavičienė, *Lithuanian Interwar Interiors 1918–1940: Workshop of European Style* (2024), 19.

³⁵ In Preišegalavičienė's personal collection.

³⁶ Interwar telephone and addresses books witness about till WWII operated paints shops, wallpapers and upholstery shops in Lithuania, e.g.: *Lietuvos Respublikos 1932–1933 m. Kauno miesto valdžios ir savivaldybės įstaigų, visuomenės veikėjų, pramonės ir prekybos įmonių adresų knyga "Visas Kaunas" [Telephones and addresses' book "All of Kaunas"]* (Kaunas: Spindulys, 1932); More paint and varnishes shops (till 1940): B. Broido apmušalai ir dažai, Kaunas, Laisvės al. 59; D. J. Klibanskis apmušalų, dažų ir lako prekyba [Trade of upholstery, paint and varnish, representative of Hardkop, Danzig, Poland], Kaunas, Prezidento g. 17, etc.

³⁷ Modernist Kaunas architecture was included into UNESCO in 2023, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1661/>

³⁸ June McLeod, Chapter 2 "A Glance at Ancient and Modern History".

³⁹ Ananda Karmakar, "Colour Beliefs in Various Religions: A Significant Study (A Special Reference to Green Colour)," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai* 96, No. 6(2) (June 2022), 104–108.

⁴⁰ Karmakar, 107.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Furniture drawings, sketches folder No. 5, NČDM, Mg-394.

⁴³ Spintelės projektas į Urbšių namus, Donelaičio g. 2a, Kaune [Cabinet design for Urbšys house, Donelaičio g. 2a, Kaunas, design by arch. Bronius Ellsbergas], LNB RS, f. 13, b. 83, l. 8.

⁴⁴ Keturka, 87.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁶ Empirical observations of authentic historical interiors in Kaunas city by Preišegalavičienė.

⁴⁷ Kazys Mirinauskas. *Viskas iš vytelių [Everything is made of wicker]* (Vilnius: 1992); Kazys Mirinauskas, *Pynimas [Wicker]* (Kaunas: 1939).

⁴⁸ Alfonsas Keturka, *Spalva lietuvių liaudies baldų puošyboje: skrynios, kuparai, spintos* [Colour in the decoration of Lithuanian folk furniture: chests, cupboard, wardrobes] (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1987), 57–58.

⁴⁹ “Pattern for the floor of the Operations Hall of the Tauragė branch office of the Bank of Lithuania, by arch. Mykolas Songaila. Sketch, 1930s,” LCVA, f. 755, ap. 2, b. 695, l. 123.

⁵⁰ “Tile patterns for the Bank of Lithuania, sketched based on the motifs of Lithuanian linen tablecloths, by arch. Songaila. Sketch, 1930s,” LCVA, f. 755, ap. 2, b. 695, l. 240.

⁵¹ Agnė Narušytė, “100 Years in One Month: The Creation of a National Genius,” *Lithuanian Culture Institute* (22 02 2021), <https://english.lithuanianculture.lt/news/2021/02/22/100-years-in-one-month-the-creation-of-a-national-genius/>

⁵² “Liaudies meno dirbinių raštai [Patterns of folk art],” *Sodžiaus menas* [Homestead art] (Kaunas, 1931), Table of colours.

⁵³ Antanas and Anastazija Tamošaitis Gallery “Židinyš”.

⁵⁴ Jonas Vaidelys, “Lietuviškų kilimų paroda [Exhibition of Lithuanian carpets],” *Amatininkas* [Craftsman] 5 (1937), 76.

⁵⁵ Antanas Tamošaitis, *Austiniai kilimai* [Woven carpets], 1935, 5.

⁵⁶ Today they are kept in the Antanas and Anastazija Tamošaitis Gallery “Židinyš”, Dominikonų g. 15-1, Vilnius.

⁵⁷ The designer of the “Anga” [Hole] proposal was determined by the author of this article on the basis of the design file and competition documents for the installation of the President’s Room in the Lithuanian Officers Club Palace *Ramovė*: “Lietuvos Karininkų Ramovės reprezentaciniuose rūmuose Prezidento kambariui įrengti konkurso ir projektavimo byla, 1936 [Competition for the installation of the President’s Room in the Lithuanian Officers Club palace *Ramovė*],” LCVA, f. 6, ap. 1, b. 39, l. 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, LCVA, f. 6, ap. 1, b. 39, l. 46.

⁵⁹ Ansis Čirulis, *Saulės pagalmos* [In Sun’s Courtyards], ed. Rūta Rinka (Ryga: Neputns, 2008).

⁶⁰ Irena Huml, *Polska sztuka stosowana XX wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1978); Anna Kostrzyńska-Miłosz, *Stylistic Trends in Polish Furniture 1918–1939* (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN i Fundacja Liber Pro Arte, 2019).

⁶¹ Раїса Захарчук-Чугай, *Родина Шкрібляків. Альбом* [The Shkryblyak family, album] (Київ: Мистецтво, 1979).

⁶² Gadi Sagiv, “Dazzling Blue Color: Symbolism, Kabbalistic Myth and the Evil Eye in Judaism,” *Numen* 64 (2017), 183–208, DOI: 10.1163/15685276-12341459

⁶³ Gadi Sagiv Hebrew term *tekhelet* explains as associated with a range of bluish hues, among them green, light-blue, dark-blue, and violet shades.

⁶⁴ Anthony Adomi Mbina, Ephraim E. Edem, 86.

⁶⁵ Examples see: *The Beadsread, Lithuanian National Museum of Art*, <https://www.epaveldas.lt/preview?id=LIMIS-20000036299437>; the beadsread by Ona Jankauskienė, 1936, [https://www.epaveldas](https://www.epaveldas.lt/preview?id=LIMIS-20000005398914)

<https://www.epaveldas.lt/preview?id=LIMIS-20000005398914>; See in: *The Memorial Museum of Lithuanian President K. Grinius, Marijampolė*, <https://www.epaveldas.lt/preview?id=LIMIS-358144502>; full digital collection of Lithuanian folk beadsreads see in: <https://www.epaveldas.lt/search?term=lovaties%C4%97&page=23&size=20&order=-1&orderDir=desc&full=false&isMap=false&isDetailed=false>

⁶⁶ “Lietuvos Karininkų Ramovės reprezentaciniuose rūmuose skelbtojo konkurso trys premijuoti ir du pirkti projektai Prezidento kambariui įrengti Lietuviškame charakteryje, 1937 [Three awarded and two purchased designs for the Lithuanian character of the President’s Room were announced in the Lithuanian Officers Club palace *Ramovė*],” LCVA, f. 6, ap. 1, b. 47, l. 8.

⁶⁷ “Reprezentaciniuose rūmuose prezidento kambariui įrengti byla, 1936 [Competition for the installation of the President’s Room in the Lithuanian Officers Club palace *Ramovė*],” LCVA, f. 6, ap. 1, b. 39, l. 25.

⁶⁸ E.g.: Wooden chest, 1868, 67,5 x 117 x 69, LNDM, LM 2767, <https://www.limis.lt/valuable/e/805180/20000004868791?menuIndex=0&digitalObjectId=20000004868826>; Wooden chest 19th c., 77 x 104 x 64, LNDM LM 1112, <https://www.limis.lt/valuable/e/805180/20000004978245>, etc.

⁶⁹ On 20 August 2016, the author of this article visited homesteads in villages of Alytus district: Daujotiskės, Jovaišionys, Margarava, Panemuninkai, Praniūnai and Rumbonys wooden Catholic church and parish centre. See more: https://www.versme.lt/antnemunis_naujienos.htm

⁷⁰ The author of this article published the results of the 2016 expedition in the periodical publication dedicated to cultural heritage professionals: Lina Preišėgalavičienė, “Šių dienų Lietuvos kaimo interjeras: etniškumo praradimai ir išlikimai Antnemunio sodybų interjere [Nowadays Lithuanian Rural Interior: Losses and Remains of Ethnicity in the Interiors of Antnemunis’ Homesteads],” *Kultūros paminklai* 26 (2022), 45–64.

⁷¹ See more: Lina Preišėgalavičienė, “Kultūrinės atminties artefaktai šiuolaikiniame interjere [The Artefacts of Cultural Memory in the Contemporary Lithuanian Interiors],” *Vakarykščio pasaulio atgarsiai* [Echoes of The World of Yesterday] (Vilnius: 2018), 379 (196–207).

⁷² Shortages of goods in soviet-occupied Lithuania were at a very high level – many Lithuanians still remember this phenomenon; see more in: Aurelija Savickienė, Virginijus Savukynas, “Prekių ir paslaugų deficitas sovietmečiu: pirmenybė – išrinktiesiems, kiti sukosi, kaip išmanė [Deficit of goods and services during the soviet era: preference for the chosen ones, others did as they knew how],” *LRT TV, Istorijos detektyvai*, https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1119298/prekiu-ir-paslaugu-deficitas-sovietmečiu-pirmenybe-isrinktiesiems-kiti-sukosi-kaip-ismane?srsltid=AfmBOorQ3I-5Y-QEdEBmvwWmWWT9axiqxl1D-CGeqOF98J_LybRbEX4qk

⁷³ See the participants’ and the winners’ realised projects of the Lithuanian Design Competition “2024 interjeras [Interior 2024],” *Mano namai*, <https://www.interjeras.lt/interjerai>

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NYKSTANČIOS SPALVŲ TRADICIJOS LIETUVOS INTERJERO DIZAINE

Santrauka

Spalvos ir jų deriniai – tai svarbūs klausimai architektams, dekoratoriams, pastatų savininkams ir lankytojams. Architektūrinio projektavimo procesuose diskutuojant ir vedant derybas tai yra sudėtinga užduotis, o dėl skirtingo požiūrio spalvų klausimai tampa estetinių nesutarimų objektu. Diskusijos objektas – nykstančios spalvų tradicijos Lietuvos interjero dizaine, problema – spalvų kultūrinis vaidmuo interjero dizaine. Kolektyvinės kultūros požiūris į diskusiją įtraukia liaudies dizainą ir profesionalų dizaino objektus. Remiantis liaudies-teoriniu požiūriu, empiriniais stebėjimais, archyviniais istoriniais tyrimais, straipsnio tikslas yra apibrėžti Lietuvai istoriškai ir kultūriškai reikšmingus spalvų derinius. Teorinė analizė pataria, kad Lietuvos nacionalinės vėliavos spalvų kompozicija (geltona, žalia, raudona) interjero dizaine nepageidautina, labiau mėgstamos gamtos spalvos – ruda, tamsiai žalia, jūros smėlio, akmens pilka, įvairūs medienos atspalviai, papildyti terakotos (degto molio) spalva, natūralaus molio gelsvai oranžinė, įvairūs pilki atspalviai, juoda ir balta spalvos. Pageidautinos ne intensyvios, bet pastelinės, atspindinčios šalies gamtą ir klimatą. Siūlosi išvada, kad spalvų derinių pasirinkimas tik dalinai priklauso nuo žmogaus intelekto ar meninio išprusimo, visgi labiau priklauso nuo kolektyvinės kultūros ir atminties.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: spalva, lietuviškas interjero dizainas, kolektyvinė kultūra, kolektyvinė atmintis.

Gauta 2025-01-12

Parengta spaudai 2025-07-29

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