

# Chroma *Chameleon*

A demand from the contract market for a broader range of colours prompted GEORGINA WRIGHT's recent collaboration with leather brand ELMO.

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**'WHEN IT COMES** to leather furniture, many people can't get past the idea of the classic black office chair, and that's a shame,' says textile and colour consultant Georgina Wright. 'Colour can influence lives emotionally and psychologically. Strong colours animate us, while softer ones are more soothing.' Why, she argues, should leather sofas and chairs not benefit from such exciting possibilities?

Working together with Swedish luxury-leather brand Elmo, Wright is on a mission to update the tired monochrome image with a rainbow of new leather colours. Last year she oversaw the Elmosoft Pastels range, a collection of ten sophisticated 'iced' shades. Such developments are a major departure from the black, white or boldly pigmented leathers of the past, as represented by generations of ebony Barcelona chairs and LC3 sofas.

Elmosoft Pastels are intended for the hospitality industry, which has a healthy appetite for fresh tints. 'Colour has become more important in our product offering because of the increase in projects within the contract industry,' explains Jimmy Ahlgren, Elmo's director of sales and marketing. 'A company that produced 25 colours two decades ago now has a minimum of 50.

At Elmo, we have a total of 300 colours in stock, including 70 Elmosoft options. In the residential market, you might manage with a single green, yellow or red, but for the contract market you need several nuances of each colour. It's important that designers find what they're looking for here, without going to a competitor.'

Wright points out that Elmosoft extends the aesthetic possibilities of the company's whole collection. 'These shades combine perfectly with Elmo's other colour ranges,' she says. 'Quiet, subtle hues like Elmosoft's help clients to weave their own interesting colour stories.' Ahlgren stresses that Elmosoft corresponds to the current trend for pastel and natural shades.

For Georgina Wright, who has worked with Elmo since 2000, the process of developing new colours starts with a brief from the company, which indicates the market, contract or residential, and the expected product life cycle. The latter affects how contemporary or trend-driven the colours should be. She cites 'nature, and painters like Matisse and Klee' as the inspiration for her 'gatherings of colour'. Wright presents her work on paper to Elmo, checks the results against existing ranges and makes modifications where »

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## ELMO

Established **1931**  
 Number of employees **160**  
 Headquarters **Svenljunga, Sweden**  
 Sales offices **New Jersey and Hong Kong**  
 Colours in stock **300**  
 Elmosoft options **70**  
 Custom shades **On request**

Developed with the hospitality industry in mind, Elmo's Elmosoft Pastels is a collection of ten iced shades that answers the need for differentiation.

*'Strong colours animate us, while softer ones are more soothing'*



Textile and colour consultant Georgina Wright notices that 'people seem to like a touch of quietness in today's busy, tech-driven world.'

necessary. Once the source colours are perfected, they are transferred to leather, a process that takes from one to three months. 'After adjusting,' says Ahlgren, 'we go for full batch testing before we're ready to launch.'

'Making a new colour range begins with an analysis – of colour *and* sales figures – of Elmo's existing choices,' says Wright. 'We use our knowledge of the market and current trends to introduce new colours. We combine that know-how with personal research and inspiration, and bring it all together in a new concept. Existing colours that stay in the range take on a new identity among the new colours, providing updated ways of mixing the hues in the collection with one another and with – as well as against – other materials and finishes.' The overall development of Elmosoft took about nine months.

Leather is not the easiest material to dye. 'It's a natural product with natural characteristics that make for technical problems,' explains Wright. 'Certain dyestuffs are not predictable, not to mention the properties of the leather itself. Light tones can be difficult

to achieve because of the nature of the raw material. We test colours to see whether they age well. Then, too, Elmo keeps its products as natural as possible, in line with its environmental credentials.'

'Elmosoft is a chrome-free leather, and we only work with water-based solutions in our tannery,' says Ahlgren. 'We have our own water-treatment plant, which reduces chemicals significantly. In the end, we turn our waste water into drinking water.' All the extra attention to sustainability doesn't prevent the company – 'with our 85 years of experience and today's new pigments' – to provide customers with 'almost any colour'. What's more, Elmo strives to 'match the same colour, batch after batch, in order to secure an exact correspondence for future deliveries.'

As a consultant, Georgina Wright keeps Elmo ahead of the game in terms of colour trends. What new developments is she seeing? 'There's a rise in the use of blue, which is both calm and positive, the sort of colour you can lose yourself in. Stronger greens represent a trend that started in fash-

ion, I believe. We are also seeing colours that are quite reduced – almost with a wash effect. People seem to like a touch of quietness in today's busy, tech-driven world, and it looks as if they're becoming braver in their use of colour, which can express individuality in a big way, especially in interiors.'

Jimmy Ahlgren talks about a new development in colour customization. 'Besides the 300 colours I mentioned, we also offer custom shades. It's becoming more common to order small quantities in specific, bespoke colours. I think this trend will gather pace in the years to come.'

Meanwhile, following the launch of Elmosoft, the company's colour development has continued. 'We're working on Elmo's Nordic range, which is also geared to the contract market,' says Wright. 'We're aware of the need for a comprehensive line of products. This is a really exciting field, and Elmo is a great client to work for. Colour is my passion, and colour is how Elmo differentiates itself from other companies.' ●

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