Coloured Lives of Plastic: A History of Colour in Plastic Furniture Design

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolving relationship between colour and plastics in furniture design, tracing a trajectory from mid-20th-century innovators such as Charles and Ray Eames to contemporary designers working with recycled plastics and bioplastics (renewable plastics). It examines how the expressive and functional roles of colour have been shaped—and reshaped—by changes in material technologies, cultural aesthetics, and environmental ethics.

Beginning with the 'truth to materials' approach adopted by Eames, the discussion moves through the saturated technicolour, glossy exuberance of Space Age design, exemplified by Verner Panton. Falling from favour during the oil crises of the 1970s, plastics were reintroduced to furniture and reimagined at the end of the twentieth century. More recently, ecologically motivated designers are exploring the new aesthetic experiences offered by renewable plastics. This discussion highlights how designers interrogate both the material limits and symbolic capacities of colour in plastic objects.

The article critically contrasts functionalist approaches with more expressive or politicised uses of colour. It responds to renewed interest in the affective, psychological, and sustainable dimensions of colour in design, and argues that contemporary colour practices in plastics both reflect and challenge traditional theories. The paper concludes by contending that a pervasive shift towards muted palettes across product and interior design has inadvertently overlooked established insights into the psychological impacts of colour, advocating for a reintroduction of more vibrant and emotionally resonant colour applications in interiors.

KEYWORDS Plastics, recycled plastics, bioplastics, furniture design, sustainable design, Space Age design, industrial design

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1. Introduction

This article examines the changing use of plastics in furniture design, with a particular emphasis on the critical role of colour. While plastic's malleability revolutionised furniture form, this paper contends that the strategic and evolving use of colour, driven by both prominent aesthetic movements like Space Age futurism and the psychological impact of hues, has been a central, yet under-researched, element in its design history. This oversight is increasingly apparent in the contemporary context of sustainable material communication.

During World War II, shortages of traditional materials led to significant investment in plastics by both allied and axis powers (Meikle, 1995, pp. 125–6; Stanley et al., 2025). After the war, as commodity shortages persisted, yet plastics remained abundant. Industry adapted to meet the burgeoning demands of returning service personnel rebuilding their lives, positioning the plastics industry to ignite and fuel the consumer economy. For centuries household furniture had been dominated by wood but that was about to change.

2. The emergence of plastic furniture

The first plastic chairs emerged in the late 1930s, made from acrylic glass (Lucite or Plexiglas), using traditional processes to form chairs from rods and sheets (Isaac, 2025, pp. 16–20). High melting temperatures restricted hand moulding, limiting designers to pre-formed shapes. The resultant chairs, with four legs, a seat and a back, resembled centuries-old designs, failing to fully exploit the material's inherent potential.

Wartime advances in fibreglass technology transformed these limitations. Designers were freed from the structural and aesthetic constraints of traditional materials. Anyone with basic woodworking skills could now create moulds. Prototypes could be developed through hands-on experimentation, by layering glass fibres into moulds and applying resin. Designs could then be perfected by making simple adjustments to the mould. This liberated designers to explore colourful, organic curvilinear designs previously confined to imaginations. Chairs could break from their traditional forms and colour restrictions, limited only by their designer's creativity.

Surprisingly, early innovators did not immediately exploit the full potential of colour. For instance, Charles and Ray Eames were committed to 'truth to materials.' Their first plastic armchair, the DAX chair, launched in 1950, left the fibre-reinforced resin fully exposed in its natural colour, highlighting the material's inherent beauty and tactile qualities (Neuhart and Neuhart, 2010, pp. 566–7).

3. The Space Age

The dawn of the Space Age (1957-69), heralded by Sputnik's launch, inspired bold experiments with colour and form. Space Race investment, fuelled by post-war technological optimism, propelled plastics industry advancements (Olatunji, 2024). Injection moulding enhancements democratised design, making products widely available and affordable. Synthetic materials and futurist aesthetics aligned perfectly with the prevailing views on social and technological progress, fostering an optimistic belief in the power of colour, material, and light to reshape human experience.

Danish designer Verner Panton (1926-98) epitomised this newfound freedom. Kenneth and Cherie Ferman wrote:

'Whatever our parents had tried to teach us about good taste and appropriateness was trampled underfoot in our rush to experience colour as it hand never been experienced before. Ultraviolet of pulsing intensity paired with vibrant "acid" green, pink and orange were taken to the Day-Glo edge' (Fehrman and Fehrman, 2003, p. 115).

Panton's plastic interiors vividly exemplify these words. After working with Arne Jacobson from 1950-2, Panton established his own practice in 1955, quickly gaining a reputation for bold colour use, embracing new materials, synthetic dyes and innovative manufacturing techniques. His colour choices contrasted sharply with the muted, naturalistic palettes favoured by Danish mid-century designers (Mussari, 2016, pp. 110–5).

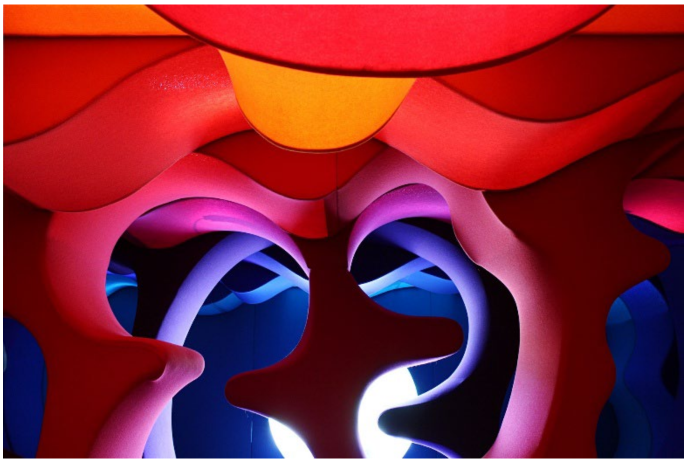

Fig. 1 Exhibition space at Visiona II (1970), recreated at the Vitra Design Museum in 2000, photo: Trevor Patt.

Plastic was ideal for Panton, aligning ideologically and aesthetically with his futuristic ethos. Plastic signified transformation, malleability, and the potential for new sensory environments untethered from historical precedent. He summarised his approach:

'The main purpose of my work is to provoke people into using their imagination. Most people spend their lives

housed in dreary, grey-beige conformity, mortally afraid of using colours. By experimenting with lighting, colours, textiles and furniture and utilising the latest technologies, I try to show new ways, to encourage people to use their imagination and make their surroundings more exciting' (Guimapang, 2019).

Colour and pattern were central to Panton's creations, as seen in fig. 1 showing the Visiona II exhibition originally created for the furniture exhibition in Cologne in 1970. Chairs, walls, floors, and ceilings featured a single, immersive colour scheme creating "total environments." Colours were meticulously chosen for distinctive sensations: vibrant red, ultramarine, violet, orange. Colour was the primary design element, dominating spaces, with warm hues transitioning to cool. Combined with patterns, this created infinite expansion, embodying Panton's belief that colour creates atmosphere, evokes emotions, and instils psychological responses.

Devoid of natural light, Visiona II confronted visitors with an alien, psychedelic, artificial world. Its main attraction was a nearly 50 sq m space of padded foam forms, extending contemporary modular furniture trends. Panton eliminated straight lines and hard edges for curvilinear, biomorphic forms, challenging seating conventions. Synthetic textile-covered polyurethane foam offered complete relaxation.

Among Panton's best-known works are the interiors for Der Spiegel (designed 1969, completed 1974). Conceived as a Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art, these interiors exemplify Panton's commitment to sensory engagement and psychological transformation through colour and light. The project represents the height of psychedelic aesthetics, extensively using plastic in structural and furnishing elements. He used saturated colours to evoke emotional responses and transform how people felt. As Panton asserted:

'The space, the colours, the furniture, the textiles, and the lighting need to be conceived and experienced together. The attractive environment can only be created when one really masters the whole' (Engholm, 2004, p. 41).

Fig. 2. Spiegel-Kantine, Verner Panton, Hamburg, 1969. Now located in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G), photo: Henning Rogge.

Each of the twelve floors had a distinctive chromatic identity. 'Lavender, violet, royal blue, dark turquoise and green' were selected for the editorial offices, as Panton believed these colours 'promoted mental focus and intellectual work' (Engholm and Michelsen, 2017, p. 184). Green and blue meeting rooms featured low-slung plastic seating, encouraging informal postures. Red and orange was used for the canteen, where floors, walls, ceiling, lighting, and furniture were unified through a single, saturated scheme (fig. 2).

The project depended on Panton's expertise with plastics, particularly in modular seating. Injection-moulded or thermoformed units, upholstered with synthetic fabrics and vinyl were sculpted into continuous biomorphic forms, reinforcing spatial logic. Seating, wall, and ceiling merged, dissolving distinctions between furniture and architecture. Seating became integral to the chromatic envelope, amplifying the immersive psychological effect and functioning as a sculptural landscape designed to stimulate and transform.

Panton's success cannot be attributed to colour alone, he engaged all the senses, combining colour with pattern, lighting, texture, and form. The dominant colour was complemented with others to create subtle underscoring (Vitra Design Museum, 2000, p. 159). Gradients and transitions softened or amplified the spatial experiences, creating optical illusions of space and depth. Lighting, often embedded within walls or ceilings, spatially embedded colour. Glossy plastic surfaces, typical of Space Age design, reflected and diffused artificial lighting, enhancing colour perception. These plastic-clad interiors actively shaped mood, cognition, and interaction.

4. Panton's intuition validated

Engholm and Michelsen contend Panton was influenced by the Bauhaus artist and educator, Johannes Itten's colour system, although evidence is lacking (Engholm and Michelsen, 2017). Itten's 1921 theory, one of the first, emphasising subjective experience and emotional resonance. Panton likely encountered these prevalent ideas, as his intense use of complementary contrasts, gradients, and symbolic associations (e.g., red for energy, blue for calm) resonates with Itten's systematic approach.

Despite studying light theory and undertaking a course in colour psychology (Mussari, 2016, pp. 109 & 112), Panton did not cite any specific colour theories. He believed colour could shape mood and perception, with the ability to energize, relax, or stimulate: He stated, 'choosing colours should not be a gamble. It should be a conscious decision. Colours have a meaning and a function' (Vitra 2017 n.p).

His palette often included psychedelic, unnatural colours, reflecting his interest in modernity and utopian futures. His strategic use of colour to influence mood aligned with colour psychology of the time; warm colours (red and orange) for stimulation and energy, cool colours (blue and green) to promote calmness and introspection (Goldstein, 1942). These findings are remarkably consistent with contemporary practitioners (Haller, 2017, pp. 350–2). Panton's canteen (red/orange) likely encouraged sociability, green stairways promoted tranquillity, blue/purple meetings rooms fostered concentration. Although intuitive, Panton's designs demonstrate an understanding of how built environments influence human brain function and well-being.

Despite a 2014 literature review noting a lack of studies on colour perception and psychological functioning (Elliot and Maier, 2014), the profound influence of emotional colour in design has seen recently substantiated by various academic studies emerging from fields such as neuroarchitecture and cognitive-emotional design (for recent summaries Higuera-Trujillo, Llinares and Macagno, 2021; and George and Prakash, 2024). These studies highlight how specific hues, saturation, and lighting can evoke emotional responses, thereby affecting user experience, well-being, and cognitive performance.

Neuroarchitecture research appears to endorse Panton's Der Speigel colour choices, purple, blue, green, yellow, and red are reported to stimulate attention and problem solving (used in the editorial offices). Cold-hued colours (between yellowish green and purple) improve memory. Bright colours (red canteen) are linked to positive emotions and improved perception. In the meeting rooms Panton chose green, promoting satisfaction and comfort.

While statements of absolute certainty about the psychological aspects of colour are often made, these are often based on laboratory testing, often using small chip samples, limiting their real-world relevance (Fehrman and Fehrman, 2003). Research from different countries and design periods exhibits varying preferences for colours used in interiors (Haller, 2017, pp. 366–7; Gjoni, 2022). Similarly, neuroscience findings highlight difficulties in synthesizing results due to diverse colour sources and methodologies (Bower et al., 2022).

The Fehrmans contend that, due to centuries of conditioning, interiors that mimic the natural world, with dark floors, medium walls and light ceilings, are generally regarded as successful (Fehrman and Fehrman, 2003, pp. 103–4). Through his radical use of colour and spatial immersion, Panton challenged these conventional norms, suggesting design could be functional and emotionally transformative. Unfortunately, the sensory overload created by Panton's interiors proved too much for those accustomed to neutral minimalism. This may explain why none of Panton's original large-scale interiors still exist in situ.

5. Plastics in the late 20th Century

The Der Spiegel project was designed in 1969 (coinciding with the end of Space Age) but not completed until 1974, a year after the OPEC oil crisis, a turning point for plastics. By decade's end, oil prices increased over tenfold, disrupting the global economy and placing the plastics industry in crisis (Isaac, 2025, pp. 54–5).

Environmental concerns went mainstream, the iconic Earthrise photo highlighted the precariousness of our existence on a planet with finite resources (Poole, 2010). The Limits to Growth report (Meadows and Club of Rome, 1972) underscored these concerns, while Victor Papanek accused design of perpetuating the wasteful linear economy (Papanek, 1971). Quality issues compounded concerns: early plastics faded, and the seemingly perfect lustrous surfaces of the Space Age quickly abraded, trapping dirt and destroying the promise of enduring perfection.

Plastics went out of fashion. Penny Sparke suggests the 'ecological outcry of the 1970s' led to plastics being considered inferior to natural materials (Sparke et al., 1993, p. 54). Whatever the main driver, glossy, brightly coloured plastic shells, celebrating plastic as plastic, disappeared from homemaker magazines. Interiors reverted to traditional materials and natural colours, preferring 'rustic earth tones (avocado and ochre)' (Tribbe, 2014). A UK revival of Victorian and Art Deco interiors also displaced plastics (Lambert, 2021, p. 170). This trend was not restricted to furniture. Sebastian Conran, an industrial designer, coined the term 'deplastification' to describe repeated requests from clients to make their products less 'plasticky' (Lambert, 2021, p. 104).

The plastics industry adapted. Wooden furniture demand was met economically with wood chips and veneer, held together with polymer adhesives and varnished with polyurethane. Despite a post oil-crisis dip, plastics demand quicky resumed growth. Plastics gained a foothold in homes by stealth, the era of glossy surfaces proudly celebrating plastic as plastic ended.

Plastics made a comeback in home interiors at the end of the last century, notably with Phillipe Starck's collaboration with Kartell, *LaMarie* (1998). The commercial success of this small chair made from polycarbonate was followed by *Louis Ghost* (2002) and other transparent models from Kartell and others. Colourless furniture became a favoured solution for interior designers, particularly in small spaces, as transparency fosters lightness and unobtrusiveness. The vibrant colours of the Space Age were replaced by no colour at all.

6.The new era of sustainable plastic design

Recent years have seen increased concern over the environmental and health impacts of fossil-based plastics. Forecasts predict plastic production to triple to 1.5 billion tonnes by 2050 (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017, p. 24). By that time, the weight of plastics in the sea will outweigh fish (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2016, p. 17). Product manufacturers face increasing pressure to respond to the escalating plastic crisis.

Designers and manufacturers have begun to experiment with recycled plastics and bioplastics (renewable plastics) across many product categories including furniture, introducing new aesthetic experiences and imposing new limits to the colour selection process. Many of these designs overlook the fact that selecting ethically sourced materials is only part of the solution when developing a more sustainable product. Makers need to consider the holistic environmental impacts throughout the product's life cycle: production, transportation, and end-of-life.

Fig. 3. Bell Chair monobloc designed by Konstantin Grcic for Magis, 2020, photo: Magis.

An exemplary example is the *Bell Chair* designed by Konstantin Grcic for Magis and launched in 2020 (fig. 3).

Collaborating with an injection moulding specialist, Grcic developed a monobloc weighing just 2.7kg, significantly lighter than the average plastic chair (around 4kg). The thin, egg-shell shaped seat and back of the chair have been optimised so the injected polymer sets quickly, allowing a chair to be produced in under a minute. Chairs emerge from the automated production line stacked 12-high, ready for efficient transport and are readily recyclable.

Given these credentials, it is unsurprising that the *Bell Chair* can be expected to perform well when its environmental impact is compared with other plastic chairs. However, traditional lifecycle assessment methodologies and eco-audit tools ignore one important detail: if a product fails to sell it simply wastes resources.

Product appeal, though subjective, often hinges on quantifiable criteria. In the case of plastic chairs, and many other products, colour availability boosts appeal, particularly for monoblocs, chairs made from a single material using a single injection moulding process. The more colours available, the more likely consumers will find seating solutions that complement their décor. Colour plays a crucial role in economic success and market viability.

For the *Bell Chair*, the decision to use recycled material was made relatively late in development. Grcic initially planned to use virgin polypropylene, the most economical solution (K. Grcic interview, 2021). However, the injection moulding specialists were also developing a recycled material, derived from waste from their own manufacturing facility. This post-production waste bypasses common issues associated with recyclates, it is of a consistent high quality, having never been exposed to environmental degradation. Grcic realised that using a recycled material aligned with the *Bell Chair's* optimised, lightweight design.

Konstantin Grcic's minimalist approach treats colour as supporting the function of an object, not merely decorating it or dominating its identity. He prioritises form and material, delaying colour selection to enhance usability or clarity. The late material change did not, therefore, negatively impact development or the colour selection process.

The post-industrial recycled plastic used to make the *Bell Chair* is light grey in its raw form (typical of post-industrial waste material), imposing some restrictions on colour choices. Overcoming the base colour to achieve vibrant colours can be technically challenging and cost prohibitive.

Initial production of the *Bell Chair* was limited to three colours, as changing colours slows production and creates waste (fig. 4). Magis wanted a white chair, but Grcic resisted, associating the colour with the (widely disliked) cheap, anonymous monoblocs. A compromise led to 'a very light grey, or slightly creamy muddy' colour called 'high noon'. 'Then we need a dark chair and we didn't want to make it black, so it's a very dark blue, almost purple. Violet like an aubergine colour,' named 'midnight' Grcic explained. These were 'very objective neutral non colours.' Magis, agreed they wanted to avoid both white and black claiming they felt too 'cheap and synthetic.' (It would, however, be extremely challenging to achieve these colours using recyclate). The third colour, 'sunrise,' 'a salmon or terracotta colour' Grcic considered a little strange at first but it proved to be a 'good colour, it can look very elegant, it can look very fresh, it works indoors and outdoors. It may be a trendy colour, but that's not the problem. We can take that colour out in in a year's time and replace it with a new one. So, we were not afraid of a kind of a fashion.' Sunrise has endured, remaining available five years later. Magis has since added a fourth colour to their offerings, 'dawn', a pale green chosen to highlight potential use as an outdoor chair (M. Citton, personal communication, 2025).

Fig. 4. The Bell Chair is available in four colours (top down); dawn, high noon, sunrise, midnight. Colours achieve using masterbatches that account for 3% of mass, photo: Magis.

Experimentation with the material, revealed unavoidable small black speckles, typical of recycled plastics, which often lack the homogeneity and surface perfection of virgin fossil plastics. Designers must navigate these challenges to shift cultural values and make these materials appealing.

Grcic was concerned that the speckles might be perceived as defects, leading to rejection. Unable to eliminate them completely, he embraced the imperfection by adding more speckles for an even spread. Grcic claims this accentuates the appearance: 'and the funny thing is that people like that, because it tells the story of the recycled material, and it makes the material feel and look different to the, the other virgin plastic.' This highlights provenance's significance in promoting renewable plastics. Material imperfections can be presented as endearing, even improving the perceived value of a product (Karana, Elisa and Valentina, 2017, p. 209).

Critics might argue the appearance has been artificially enhanced, but Grcic notes it visually communicates product values, allowing purchasers to see its recycled origins. By working with the marketing team at Magis, Grcic was able to ensure that information to support this message, together with other information about the environmental credentials of the product, was communicated to potential purchasers. Grcic commends Magis for including him, as a freelance designer, in marketing collateral development, an unusual alliance which, he believes, contributed to the commercial success of the product.

The *Bell Chair* is among recent designs boldly celebrating renewable plastics, often using chromatic language to signify waste and reuse. NCP's S-1500 chair, for example, uses recycled fishing industry waste, with each shell featuring a marbleised appearance. Celebrating imperfections introduces a handcrafted aura to mass production, with each chair unique. This non-uniform appearance also creates a visual link to nature, enhancing emotional appeal and sustainability in stark contrast with standardised virgin plastic hues.

With global population expected to peak at over ten billion this century, plastics demand will inevitably increase. Increased virgin fossil plastic production is incompatible with emission targets, so rapid uptake of renewable plastics is essential. Widespread adoption requires academia and industry to identify solutions that are both emotionally engaging and environmentally sound.

Design strategies can transform the sensory experience of renewable plastics. Although colour options are sometimes limited, their heterogeneous character enables distinctive patterns and textures that mass production can emphasise rather than conceal. Surfaces often feel subtly different from those of virgin plastics, opening possibilities for new tactile interactions. By celebrating these unique visual and haptic qualities, designers can create products that stand apart from fossil-based goods and encourage consumers to choose renewable options.

Importantly, these aesthetic and material choices can influence policy and standards. When designers specify renewable feedstocks or champion naturally derived pigments and uncoated surfaces, they demonstrate viable pathways that regulators can codify into ecolabel criteria, procurement guidelines or industry benchmarks. Consistent adoption of such practices can signal to standards bodies and policymakers that lower-impact colourants and recycled or bio-based content are technically feasible and culturally acceptable, helping to shift regulatory frameworks toward sustainable norms.

Ultimately, the designer's task is to "declare the truth about materials." Through thoughtful product development, transparent communication and inventive storytelling—coupled with visible commitments that inform emerging standards—design can normalise renewable plastics, reduce reliance on fossil feedstocks and help steer both producers and consumers toward a more sustainable material future.

By integrating the emotional dimensions of colour with sustainable material innovations, designers can create products embodying aesthetic excellence and contributing to environmental health. The journey demands an informed understanding of neurophysiological responses, advanced material science, and user-centered design.

7. Current interior colour trends

The *Bell Chair's* palette reflects current design trends where 'earthy neutrals are taking center stage' (BusinessCraft, 2025). This source reports that, 'as sustainability becomes a core value for consumers, colors that evoke nature, warmth, and authenticity are transforming homes. From terracottas to mossy greens and muted browns, these hues are redefining modern living spaces (BusinessCraft, 2025). Industry participants echo this, with a representative from Magis stating, 'there's a clear move toward neutral, earth-inspired tones… It's not just about aesthetics—it reflects a deeper cultural and environmental awareness' (M. Citton, personal communication, 2025). These trends are clearly aligned with the palette that can be achieved when working with renewable plastics.

Chromatic restraint, however, is also a common refrain among industry participants in the property industry. 'Earthy neutrals will play a significant role in interior design for 2025. Colors like terracotta, ochre, and sage bring warmth and grounding' (Nathaniel, 2024).

We have become weary of strong colours. Fear of 'getting it wrong' has driven the popularity of neutrals (Haller, 2017, p. 366). For example, fig. 5 is an image supplied to the press by Magis showing the *Bell Chair* in a white interior.

Fig. 5. Bell Chairs displayed in a neutral interior for a promotional image, photo Magis.

Renovation programs and articles encourage neutral palettes to maximise property appeal. For instance, commentators on a popular Australian renovation show recommend painting walls in neutral colours to create a ‘blank canvas,’ noting bold colour choices can alienate buyers. A US survey of 71 ‘top rated interior design experts and home stagers’ found almost half (49 per cent), rated whites as the best exterior colour when selling a home, while 81 per cent recommended using warm neutrals for interiors (Fixr, 2024).

This conservative approach extends beyond private spaces. ‘Neutralised colours are recommended for public spaces and even the common areas of our living spaces’ (Fehrman and Fehrman, 2003, pp. 117–8). Others agree that, ‘architects tend to use very neutral or even monotonous colours and materials when designing common areas in [muti-unit dwellings]’ (Caumon, Zissis and Caumon, 2023). This widespread adoption of muted palettes suggests a prevailing interior design ethos prioritising perceived universality and marketability over colour’s expressive and psychological potential.

8. Conclusion

This article has traced the dynamic relationship between colour and plastics in furniture design, highlighting technological innovation and shifting aesthetic priorities. From the 'truth to materials' ethos of the Eames era, which initially suppressed colour, to the exuberant and psychologically charged chromatic experiments of the Space Age designers like Verner Panton, colour has been a persistent driver of design evolution. Plastics receded into the background following the oil crises of the 1970s, but, often deliberately disguised, they maintained a dominant presence across consumer goods. The current era of sustainable plastic design, exemplified by the *Bell Chair*, has re-engaged with colour, albeit through muted palettes often selected to signify environmental responsibility and a connection to nature.

While designers working with renewable plastics are navigating material challenges there is a concerning parallel trend: a pervasive drift towards muted palettes in interior design. This shift, driven by marketability and a preference for 'safe' neutrality, risks overlooking significant research on colour’s profound psychophysiological impacts. As Panton’s intuitive approach, since validated by findings in neuroarchitecture and cognitive-emotional design demonstrates, colour possesses a powerful capacity to shape mood, cognition, and well-being. The irony is that, despite scientific advancements in understanding colour, its expressive potential is often muted in favour of perceived universal appeal.

As Bower et al. suggest, our understanding of the comprehensive impact of the built environment on human health, including colour, remains limited (Bower et al., 2022). However, existing insights from colour psychology, as explored in relation to Panton’s work, offer compelling reasons to re-evaluate the current conservative approach to colours used in interiors.

The journey towards sustainable plastic must not inadvertently diminish the rich, expressive, and functional role of colour. Incorporating renewable plastics into consumer products will often restrict colour choices. Without advocating for a return to Panton’s psychedelic plastified past, this creates an opportunity to re-introduce more vibrant palettes and emotionally resonant colour applications to interiors. By doing so, we can create products that meet the critical demands of environmental responsibility and create environments that enrich the human experience, stimulating imagination, promoting well-being, and challenging the 'dreary, grey-beige conformity' that Panton decried.

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12. Short biography of the author(s)

Geoff Isaac is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Technology in Sydney. His doctoral project traced the eighty-year history of the plastic chair, focusing on how designers are responding to the environmental emergency by using recycled plastics and bioplastics to replace virgin fossil-based plastics.

Licensing terms

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