

Inside The Greens, where Dubai living is easy [hh7](#)



house &



Don't be afraid of the dark: clever use of black can bring warmth and style to even a compact living space [hh3, 4](#)

going up

Exotic furniture. Dubai's Burlesque Gallery has already whet our appetite, and now Sicis Next Art has launched a collection by Carl Tolomeo that will change living spaces into trendy galleries. Corner of Umm al Sheif and Jumeirah Roads, villa 12



The new black

From wallpaper and paint to furniture and fridges, matt black is a surprisingly versatile new trend, its pared-down, stylish look exuding more quality than its glossier counterpart, writes **Yvonne Courtney**

The festive season usually means sparkles, spangles and shimmer, but designers from luxury houses to high-street stores are embracing all things matt black. The results, however, are anything but dull.

Most design trends tend to emerge from the streets of the world's hip capitals or the fashion houses of Paris and London, but this look has emerged from a more unusual source: the car showrooms of California where luxury carmakers such as Lamborghini and Rolls-Royce are offering various models in a luxe matt black finish. The trend is also being seen in fashion. This season, Hermès unveils its So Black collection. The iconic Birkin and Kelly bags have been given a matt black crocodile finish. The gold hardware has been replaced with sleek black metal – even the zips are black.

But it's in the home that the matt black palette is becoming a growing trend. Although it's no stranger to the world of interior design – black already adorns sofas, desks and accessories – it is also an increasingly popular choice for walls, with bold and stylish results.

"The matt black trend has been playing out for a while now," says the Dubai-based interior designer Mark Marin. "Perhaps it's a response the very noir economic times we've been living in recently... nevertheless, it's something I generally like to try and incorporate."

Nicky Haslam, a top London interior designer, is another fan. "I'm mad about matt black Perspex," he says. "I've just used it in Monaco, for example... I've also done matt black walls with success – although it was a challenge. And one of my favourite fabrics is black chintz. When I lived in [fashion photographer] Cecil Beaton's house, the walls were upholstered in black midnight velvet, and they were terrific. Be bold and brave, I say!"

Graham & Brown's textured black Checker wallpaper, meanwhile, features a geometric relief that, as the light moves throughout the day, provides depth and texture and changes the character of the wall. The British company has also launched wallpaper and paint ranges by fashion-turned-interior designer Barbara Hulanicki that emphasise matt black.

If you're after less-dramatic version of the trend, the designer Abigail Ahern's signature colour palette is built on a base of solid charcoals to inky blacks. One of her design tricks is to paint the floors, skirting boards and architraves in the same colour. The effect is to give the impression of a much larger room because there are no obvious lines to break up the space.

Starting with such a dark base means really strong colours can

be used in the space without overpowering it. One thing to bear in mind when choosing the deepest base tone is that darker colours change dramatically depending on the amount of light in the room.

Matt black works uniquely in rooms large and small – making a small room seem more regal and a larger space more dramatic – and provides a reassuring sense of permanence and solidity.

Dark flooring is another great way of introducing ebony into the home, while black bookshelves, rather than white, introduce the look to a room with subtlety.

When Directive Design Arkitektur of Sweden was given a brief to make a 60-square-metre apartment in Stockholm feel bigger and less cramped, it settled on a deep black. Storage shelving was concealed in the darkness, while a matt black space divider between the kitchen and bedroom created an illusion of depth.

"Mirrors have the potential to duplicate a space," one of the firm's partners, Andreas Ferm, explained to *Monocle* magazine, "but darkness conceals depth and blurs the perception of size. It makes it very hard for the human eye to judge distance."

A striking way to introduce the look to a living area is with a sofa or seating in charcoal or soft black.

BoConcept and Andrew Martin, both of which have outlets in Dubai, have great selections, while many of Ikea's sofas and chairs can be covered in the firm's charcoal Sivik fabric.

For something truly special, look for the Skin seating range by Jean Nouvel, the French architect responsible for the forthcoming Louvre Museum on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island. The range features a sofa, chair and ottoman in double-sided matt black leather with geometric incisions that become structural, giving the pieces

their unique and surprisingly comfortable shape.

The Night & Day lounge system by Patricia Urquiola for Molteni, also in Dubai, includes nifty low black tables and a black leather pouch to drape over the sofa for storing the TV/entertainment systems' remote controls.

Many of Tom Dixon's growing range of furniture and home accessories come in matt black. The designer's Beat lampshades – inspired by the sculptural simplicity of brass cooking pots and traditional water vessels – are made from hand-beaten brass by Indian craftsmen, and their striking form and tactile surface are thanks to the matt-black patina finish.

In a kitchen, matt black can balance and absorb the gloss and shine of gleaming granite and stainless steel and can add drama or a conversation piece – such as a wall of chalkboard paint, which can be used for menus and shopping lists. Alternatively, consider black worktops or even matt black appliances, such as the new edition Smeg refrigerator in matt black.

Bathrooms are a great place to experiment with dramatic tones and among the strong contenders for 2011 trends are matt black sinks and taps. In response, the British brassware manufacturer Samuel Heath – specified by interior designers and luxury hotels worldwide – has launched Xenon Black, which combines clean lines with a contemporary matt finish. The taps, showers and accessories are finished with black chrome to create a dark and dramatic look – whether for a modish bachelor pad or a luxurious sanctuary spa.

"Xenon Black is a bold finish on a design classic," explains Vanessa Allan, marketing manager for Samuel Heath, "reflecting the current monochrome trend in highly contemporary interiors, with a timeless quality."



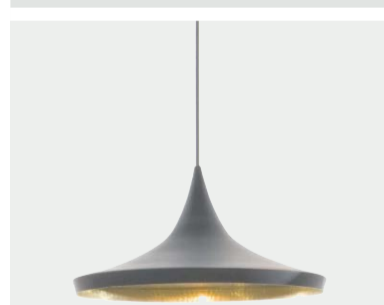
Above,Skulls wallpaper by Barbara Hulanicki for Graham & Brown. **Centre,** a photograph from Abigail Ahern's 'A Girls' Guide to Decorating', published by Quadrille. **Bottom,** black furniture, such as this sofa by BoConcept, can be a striking addition to a living space. Photo courtesies Graham & Brown, Graham Atkins-Hughes, BoConcept



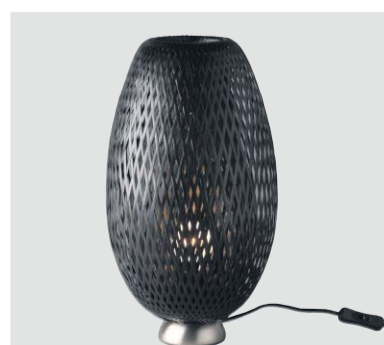
get the look



Viva wallpaper Barbara Hulanicki, Dh347, grahamandbrown.com



Beat Light by Tom Dixon, from Dh1,058, plus shipping costs, www.nest.co.uk



Boja Lamp, Dh142, Ikea



Skin seating by Jean Nouvel for Molteni, Finasi, available to order, price on application, Al Itihad Road, Dubai, 04 297 1777

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