

A positive impact on people's lives

With the majority of us having taken on some form of decorating or DIY project in the last 12 months, we're all more aware than ever of the positive impact improving our homes and gardens can have on our living spaces, our lives and our mental health. It's the combination of the injection of positivity and the pride we feel every time we walk into the newly decorated room we have created, that makes all the difference.

Although the transformations we all achieve in our homes and gardens are hugely satisfying, our industry has the ability to achieve so much more and to impact positively on the lives of individuals in many ways that we may not even be aware of. During the Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Action Week, I intend to highlight areas in which our industry can reach much further and have a greater impact in improving the safety and comfort of people's lives.

Dementia Action Week

Led by Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Action Week is a national event that sees the public coming together to raise awareness and take action to improve the lives of people affected by dementia.

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe the symptoms that occur when the brain is affected by a number of conditions, most commonly Alzheimer's. Symptoms of dementia include loss of memory, mood changes and communication problems and people affected will typically experience a decline in the ability to talk, read and write.

The disease is progressive and a person in the later stages of dementia will have problems carrying out everyday tasks of daily living and will become increasingly dependent on other people.



One in three of us born in the UK today will go on to develop dementia in our lifetime, every three minutes in the UK a person is diagnosed and there will be one million people living with dementia by 2025. This makes dementia care one of the greatest challenges facing our society in the 21st Century. More than half of people with dementia symptoms have Alzheimer's, and it's currently the disease dementia scientists know most about (source: Alzheimer's Research UK, Your Brain Matters).

Our industry can play a key role in making the UK a dementia-friendly place to live and raising awareness is what Dementia Action Week is all about.

How can our industry help?

You may be surprised to know that the Home Improvement Industry, our products and services can have a significant impact on the lives of people and families living and coping with dementia.

In care homes and hospitals and even at home, well-designed physical surroundings are important. They offer a framework for people with dementia to maintain their existing skills, create opportunities for meaningful engagement between residents and staff, and greatly affect quality of life.

A two-year collaborative research project between the Helen Hamlyn Centre at the Royal College of Art and Bupa was published in 2010. The document explored how better product and environmental design can improve quality of life for care home residents with dementia.

Design for Dementia was aimed at care providers, manufacturers and designers with an interest in improving existing care homes. The design ideas and principles that were developed are a practical response to the challenge of cognitive decline and can be retrofitted to existing care homes as well as applied to new developments.

You can read the full document [here](#).

The importance of colour & contrast

Many of the 840,000 people in the UK and Republic of Ireland who are living with dementia may experience difficulties with sight and perception, which can cause them to misinterpret the world around them, further fuelling the confusion and isolation they're already feeling. The use of different colours, particularly those that contrast, has been proven to make life a little easier for those living with dementia.

Dulux Trade offers colour and design advice based on the knowledge that: up to 75% of people over the age of 75 will have vision problems. As our eyes age they become opaque, causing colours to be 'washed out', making it harder to differentiate between substrates (Source: Hilary Dalke, Mark Matheson, Kingston University London 2007).

Two colours which appear contrasted to someone with normal vision may not be perceived well by those with slight deficiencies, colour deficits or dementia (Source: Elizabeth C Brawley, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Publishers 2006).

The choice of paint colour matters

As well as helping to promote better spatial awareness, the paint colour chosen for walls, and the choice of furnishings also has an impact on mood and feelings.

For years researchers have been studying the effect of different colours on the brain and human behaviour. A study by Margaret Calkins, [published in the Journal of Dementia Care](#), takes a look at the impact of colours on individuals living with dementia.

Blue

- Blues are generally noted to have a calming and restful effect
- Often recommended for use in quiet rooms and bedrooms
- Cool blues can make rooms appear larger

Green

- Associated with growth and life
- It can reduce central nervous system activity and help people feel calm and restful
- Similar to other cool colours, it can make rooms appear larger

Red

- Increases brain wave activity and can stimulate the production of adrenalin into the bloodstream, so is recommended for high activity areas and communal spaces where stimulation is required
- It can increase the perceived temperature of a room

Orange

- Being a warm colour, it is closely related to red and shares some of its properties. It is also an earth-base colour and like green, it often produces associations with nature and natural

environments

It's important to note that too much use of any particular colour can be overly stimulating (as in the case of a colour scheme incorporating red walls throughout) or conversely, one that is too under stimulating (for example a space using lots of white, paler hues and neutrals without an accent colour in the scheme). Clearly colour has the power to impact our feelings and emotional interpretation of the environment around us.

How can colour be used to help support people living with dementia?

There are a number of ways in which colour and contrast can be used effectively to make life easier for someone who is living with dementia.

With over 60 years specification experience across a range of sectors and working environments, Dulux Trade understands the way people engage with a building can be directly affected by its colour and design and they help professionals create more than beautiful and functional spaces.

A key part of this is the innovative and unique [Dulux Trade Dementia-Friendly Colour Palette & Design Guide](#). It is based on a set of evidence-based design principles, which Dulux Trade has created by undertaking thorough research to explain how careful selection of certain colours, patterns and materials can help those living with dementia:

- **Way Finding, Navigation and Personalisation** - Colour can be used effectively to create zones and highlight areas of interest. In areas where you want to discourage access, you will need to reduce the contrast between the walls and door to prevent residents from focusing on them and entering. Other doors should have sufficient contrast to be identified by all users.
- **Furnishings, Finishes & Materials** - Remember that furniture also needs to contrast with critical surfaces. For example, chairs, tables and beds are highlighted against the surface they are positioned on or against in order to avoid any confusion and reduce the potential for trips and bumps. For those with visual impairments, very dark rugs or mats on the floor can appear as though they are holes in the floor, and therefore should be avoided.
- **Colour & Contrast** - Within a care home, critical surfaces (walls, floors and doors) should be defined and have contrast between them.

Some care homes are replacing residents' bedroom doors with a door wrap, produced by companies like [Banner World](#), that replicates the residents' original front door of their home. Plain doors in healthcare settings and care homes can confuse some dementia patients. However, bright and colourful dementia-friendly door wraps enhance a patient's environment and help them with orientation.



You can read more about it [here](#).

The BRE Dementia Friendly Demonstration Home

As part of the work to develop the Dementia Friendly Colour & Design Guide, Dulux Trade has been involved in innovative work with partners including the BRE, BRE Trust, Loughborough University and Halsall Lloyd Partnerships, to build a dementia demonstration home.

Located within the BRE Innovation Park in Watford, Chris and Sally's House is a project to develop and test design solutions that are supportive of an ageing population staying in their own homes. The 100sqm Victorian house has been adapted to cater for different types and stages of dementia, with Dulux Trade adding its extensive knowledge about supportive and inclusive colour and design to enable both functional and wellbeing occupant outcomes.



Image – Dementia Friendly Demonstration Home – image courtesy of BRE

Click [here](#) to watch a video of BRE's Dementia Friendly Demonstration Home and an explanation of the colour and design principles.

Occupant Centred Colour & Design Hub

Dulux Trade is furthering its commitment to provide colour and design support to architects, designers and specifiers to enable the step-change necessary in the provision of environments for an ageing UK population and supporting people living with dementia.

The recently launched Dulux Trade [Occupant Centred Colour and Design \(OCCD\) hub](#) showcases industry leading initiatives, piloted alongside industry partners, furthering ideas around the design of accessible and inclusive environments for care.

It was created to inform how expert colour and design application, with the occupant at the heart of the brief, can have a positive impact on wellbeing across a range of sectors, including healthcare and education.

A new specialist section on the hub - Designing for Dementia and Aged-Care - brings together the ground-breaking work Dulux Trade has undertaken over the years to use design to create the ideal environments for dementia care in both healthcare and residential settings.

To find out more, please visit: www.duluxtrade.co.uk/occd.

To help design professionals improve living spaces for people living with dementia, the hub offers practical safeguarding measures that can be used in the home or in residential care spaces, including colour and design advice geared to prevent trips and falls and help with wayfinding. In addition, through use of a personalised colour scheme approach, the hub encourages exploration of ways to promote and preserve self-identity and enhance wellbeing.

OCCUPANT CENTRED COLOUR AND DESIGN HUB

CREATING HARMONY BETWEEN SPACES & PEOPLE



Dulux Trade is launching the new addition to the hub to coincide with Dementia Action Week, taking place from May 17 to May 23, which encourages people to take action to build a more dementia-friendly society.

Karen Wilkinson, Marketing Lead at Dulux Trade, said: "In the UK, someone is diagnosed with dementia every three minutes. This growing rate of dementia diagnoses requires a radical change in thinking and, to achieve this, we have been committed to supporting inclusive design for a number of years to help improve the wellbeing of people living with dementia.

"Building our Occupant Centred Colour and Design Hub to further support design for dementia and aged-care is one of the ways we are supporting the industry to think differently about how design can be harnessed to develop truly inclusive care environments."

Conclusion

It's fascinating to see the impact that companies are beginning to have on the lives of individuals living with dementia and the opportunities for brands who understand and focus in this space. As more research becomes available, I'm certain that the use of colour, texture and different materials in homes, hospitals and care homes will develop further as we understand how our surroundings impact

on those coping with this disease.

If you have been affected by the issues raised in this article and need dementia support please call the [Dementia Connect support line](#) on **0333 150 3456** to speak with one of their expert advisers.

You can also join the conversation with other people affected by dementia in the online community, [Talking Point](#). They have [guidance to help you navigate the complex social care system](#), including where to go for further help and information.

