

# L I F E I N C O L O U R

THE 'COLOUR AFFECTS' SYSTEM CLAIMS TO HAVE MADE RADICAL CHANGES TO PEOPLE'S LIVES THROUGH THE SIMPLE USE OF COLOURS FOR DECADES. LOUISE QUICK VISITS THE UAE'S RESIDENT COLOUR CONSULTANT FATIMA AL SHIRAWI, AKA THE GRACIOUS F, TO DISCOVER WHETHER SHE'S OUT OF SEASON

**T**he minute I tell people I'm a colour consultant they don't know what to think: 'do you deal with paint? Do you do hair?' It's difficult." After almost five years on the job Fatima Al Shirawi is used to explaining her profession.

"I often tell people I'm a colour psychologist, it's a bit clearer," she tries. Fatima is in the business of colours – a business that recently moved into an appropriately bright and colourful office in Dubai Design District. In D3, she says, she's finally found a home suited to the unusual nature of her company, The Gracious F.

If you've ever wondered why you've always loved wearing navy blue or why a certain shade of red feels great on you, Fatima can tell you. What's more, she can create a personalised palette of complementary colours and tell you how to use them to bring out your best self.

The idea of finding 'your colours' might bring to mind memories of make-up laden women at department store counters trying to flog you a new shade of lipstick. Fatima, however, is adamant that her work is more than skin deep and while she covers fashion and, indeed, make-up there's more to it than simply matching an eye colour to the latest blusher.

"That's more superficial and not very

accurate in my opinion. Just because you have dark hair and brown eyes doesn't automatically make you an autumn," she explains. "It's very specific to your personality and personal energy."

For those who are more cynical, the mention of phrases like 'personal energy' may set off alarm bells, so it's good to know that Emirati Fatima earned her credentials at London's Colour Affects institute. Started by colour psychologist Angela Wright more than 30 years ago, Colour Affects is a well-known consultancy that's advised businesses large and small, including the likes of Lancôme, The Body Shop and oil giant Shell, on how to use colours to their advantage – think feng shui with colours.

It's this consultancy that Fatima represents in the GCC – her only competition is in Bahrain – and she has some big hitters of her own, including jewellery companies Van Cleef & Arpels and Vinaya, as well as several local designers and shops. She's helped businesses identify their style, the colours, materials and stones they should use, and even advised on shop layout: "We can design each section [of a shop] to relate to a personality. When a customer comes in, say they're an autumn, they're automatically drawn to their section."

Beyond the corporate, Fatima also works with individuals to guide them in reinventing their wardrobes and make-up drawers depending on their colour 'personality', which falls into the four seasons, winter, spring, summer and autumn. ►

IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES



According to the Colour Affects system, knowing what colours to wear and when to wear them can help us be at the top of our game, improving control and balance in our lives. It all comes down to how the colours make us feel – and how people looking in respond.

Walking into Fatima's vibrant new office, it's clear that every colourful rug, sofa and decorative frame has been thoroughly critiqued and it's no surprise she feels the pressure to look presentable.

"Every day I have to analyse myself before leaving the house because I'm under the spot light," she laughs. But when the one-on-one consultation starts it quickly turns out that she's not the only one under the spotlight. As she asks about childhood dreams, friendships and hobbies, it starts to feel more like a counselling session and I reveal more about my deepest ambitions than ever intended.

Fortunately, this is normal practice and Fatima says people have had a range of reactions as a result of the consultations, from breaking down to making major life changes, such as breaking up with long-term spouses and starting new business ventures. In a city packed with young professionals, it's little surprise that most people in Dubai come to her when they're looking for a change or improvement in their job.

"At the beginning it was a bit of a shock," she explains when asked whether she always intended on doubling up as a pseudo life coach. "I thought it would just be about colours and I'd style the clients, but I'm a people person and I'm very good at analysing people so I got into this naturally."

While the question-and-answer session is surprisingly soul cleansing, what does it have to do with colours? Fatima uses her



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A B O U T C O L O U R S  
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P E O P L E P E R S O N A N D  
I ' M V E R Y G O O D A T  
A N A L Y S I N G P E O P L E  
S O I G O T I N T O  
T H I S N A T U R A L L Y ”



insight to decipher our colour personality (turns out I'm pure spring), add personal touches to the final report and work out what it is people really want to gain from the consultation.

Knowing your colour personality, she then narrows the palette down further by testing colour swatches on you while you wear something resembling a hairdressing cape.

Fatima says to leave colour associations at the door, this is about how the colours feel and how my skin tone reacts – but memories of three years in a brown and mustard school uniform are hard to shake. Nevertheless as she layers colour after colour it's fascinating to see how certain colours bring out a warm glow in my skin and a pinkness in my cheeks, while others feel physically heavy and drain all colour.

A few days after the consultation The Gracious F sends out my handy colour guide, filled with little samples of my very own complementary colours, sorted and categorised from the professional basics to the dramatic impact-makers.

It's joined by the final report, which explains more about the individual 'colour personality' with added tips on the fabrics to avoid – although steering clear of raw silk seems like good advice for everyone – as well as advised accessories, hair colours, make-up, perfume types and even career choices. Despite reading slightly like a horoscope, it gets me thinking about ways to revamp my style.

Equipped with the new-found knowledge of how powerful colours can be, confidence from the consultation as well as my handy colour guide surely, if anything, this is a brilliant excuse to shop. Next stop, the mall. ■

ACCORDING TO FATIMA, "EVERY COLOUR HAS A POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SIDE, YOU JUST HAVE TO USE IT IN THE RIGHT WAY." SO IF YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT TO WEAR TODAY, HERE ARE A FEW COLOURFUL TIPS...



**WEAR BLUE**

**FOR: A MEETING**

Blue may be a professional colour, but it's also great for encouraging communication so wear it when you have an important discussion. Make it more feminine with light blues.



**WEAR RED**

**FOR: A WORK OUT**

Wear red when you want to lift your energy. For example, when you have activities that you have to be full of life for, like sports. It's also great for those moments you want to stand out in a room.



**WEAR YELLOW**

**FOR: CREATIVITY**

Like blue, yellow is good for communication, but it's friendlier and encourages creativity. Wear it when you're planning a fun day with the kids.



**WEAR GREEN**

**FOR: A STRESSFUL DAY**

Green is relaxing so when you have a long day at work and there's no escape wear green, it'll keep you mellow.



**WEAR BLACK**

**FOR: A PRESENTATION**

A very sophisticated colour, wearing black will mean you're taken seriously so is ideal for when you want someone to listen to you. But it's not great for two-way communication.