



By Margaret Evans, Editor

There's a lot of painting going on in our neighborhood these days. People painting their houses, I mean.

A brown-stained "log cabin" down the street has just been transformed into a cream-colored lodge with pale turquoise doors and window frames. Meanwhile, the rusty red cottage next door – a work in progress – is slowly going periwinkle.

Here at our house, we just painted our living room interior. The warm palette I chose when we moved in 18 years ago – apricot and tomato red – has been summarily ditched in favor of a light gray-green shade called Sea Salt. And just like that, "warm and cozy" becomes "cool and soothing." I love it – it's just what this moment calls for – but I wonder how I'll feel in the fall and winter, when brown leaves crackle beneath my feet and the smell of chimney smoke once again fills the air.

I'm not exactly sure why everybody's painting. Certainly, part of it's the fact that we're stuck at home, with extra time on our hands. But I wonder if there's more to it than that? I wonder if the trials and tribulations of the past two months have got many of us thinking about changing our lives – longing for new colors, literally and figuratively. Trauma will do that.

When Hurricane Matthew sent a mammoth water oak crashing down on a corner of our

house in the fall of 2016, we took the opportunity to make several long-needed repairs. The work started right after Christmas, and by mid-January, we were a full-blown construction site, complete with a giant dumpster in the driveway.

I spent a lot of time outside that winter, chatting with the builders and pondering what color to paint our house once the new siding was finished. In late January, a large contingent of robins – a “round,” it’s called – began visiting our yard regularly, and I found myself mesmerized by them. Till then, I had never realized what beautiful birds they are.

Watching the robins closely, day after day, I noticed that their “red breasts” matched our russet-tiled roof – it was only a couple years old, and mostly unscathed by Matthew – and also the bricks of our exposed foundation. Their gray-streaky feathers reminded me of bark and Spanish moss, both plentiful in our yard.

I couldn’t stop watching the robins. Every time they touched down *en masse* in one of our trees, or descended into the yard to peck at the grass, it felt like good luck. These understated birds I’d never really noticed – that had appeared like a blessing in our time of rebuilding – they
moved
me. Deep in my heart a vision was born... and I just
knew
. We
had
to paint our house robin-gray.

I had a hard time conveying my idea – my vision! – to my husband and our contractor. They didn’t quite get it; they had not, in fact, even noticed the robins. Frustrated that they couldn’t “see” the poetry of my concept, I looked around our yard for another reference point, and there it stood, shining in the pale winter sunlight . . .

“I want to paint our house *that* color,” I declared with a passionate intensity.
“Dumpster-gray!”

The guys seemed leery. (*You want a house that looks like a dumpster?*) But I was not

to be deterred – and Jeff didn't really care that much. We bought the paint (official name, "Grizzle Gray"), Jeff did the work himself, and our "robin's nest" turned out exactly as I'd envisioned it. We added white trim and a peachy-coral door that reminds me more of a cardinal's beak – female – than a robin's, and I adored everything about it. Still do.

Looking back, I suspect my deep yearning to recreate our home in the palette of a bird – with some inspiration from the trees – was an unconscious reckoning with Mother Nature for wreaking such havoc in our lives a few months earlier. An act of bravado, reclamation, and reconciliation.

Then again, maybe that's pure BS. Maybe it just felt right.

In light of the recent pandemic painting spree here in Pigeon Point, I wanted to know more about color and how it affects people emotionally. I learned that while "color psychology" is a hot topic in fields like marketing, design, and interior decorating, very little scientific research has been done.

"Given the prevalence of color, one would expect color psychology to be a well-developed area," researchers Andrew Elliot and Markus Maier recently noted in *Frontiers in Psychology* Magazine. "Surprisingly, little theoretical or empirical work has been conducted to date on color's influence on psychological functioning, and the work that has been done has been driven mostly by practical concerns, not scientific rigor."

Obviously, I'm not about to change that trend. If you're looking for scientific rigor, you won't find here. But I may have some unempirical dots to connect.

I've been thinking about that "act of God" that disrupted the life of my family four years ago, changing our home forever, drawing my heart to new colors. Like Hurricane Matthew, the coronavirus is a force of nature . . . and the disruption it's caused has been macro-scale, worldwide. Nobody has gone untouched.

And we've all run the emotional gamut, haven't we? Sometimes several times a day. Fear, anxiety, compassion, courage, gratitude, anger, frustration, grief. It's all there, almost every day. It can be overwhelming, fielding all these emotions. All these psychic colors.

I think I've mentioned I'm on a mission to lure painted buntings to my yard. I've been trying for years, to no avail. But this spring, I'm happy to report that I have two females visiting my feeder regularly. I say they're females, but they may be juveniles. Both the female and the juvenile are green and look alike to my untrained eye. What they do *not* look like – at all – is the adult male painted bunting, that dazzling creature dressed in all the colors of the rainbow.

And I am holding out for that bird – that avian reflection of my technicolor emotional landscape. Now, more than ever, my soul longs to see that natural wonder, up close and personal.

But as with a watched pot, so it goes with a watched bird feeder. I can't will him to arrive. So I will play it cool, bide time, enjoy the painted buntings I *do* have.

They're not just green, you know. They're more lemon-lime, with a hint of olive. Very restful and calming.

I'm thinking of painting the master bedroom.

Margaret Evans is the Editor of Lowcountry Weekly. [Read more of her Rants & Raves.](#)