

Dear Utopia

March is a pivotal month in the world of interiors, since new collections are launched and there is an air of excitement. This spring, expect the unexpected; strong, exuberant saturated hues take centre-stage. Express your personality by injecting some fearless colour by using shades of red oxide, citrus or spicy oranges that blend seamlessly with ginger and cinnamon browns, accompanied with dark chocolate timbers. Moss and tobacco greens are both tranquil to live with and work well with dark tones of wood. Canary or Imperial yellow lifts subtle shades of misty greys and ebony black from the gloom, bringing a sense of optimism and confidence. Used in small quantities, they can inject life into a neutral setting, creating a vibrancy that resonates and brings a room alive.

I look forward to receiving your questions.

Andrea Mafin is an interior designer, TV presenter, author, artist and design consultant www.andreamafin.co.uk



Star letter

Q I have a galley kitchen leading to double patio doors, and am re-doing the worktops. Please can you recommend some firms who would offer one with a section that pulls out, swivels out or folds down to make a breakfast bar, but that can then be tucked away again. P Roberts, Cheshire

A Having an additional preparation area to work on or use as a breakfast bar can be tremendously helpful, especially if it can be stowed away when not in use. Perhaps what you're looking for is a pull-out worktop mechanism that can be stored away into a drawer, which most kitchen suppliers can source for you. Cucina Alessi offers the Sinuosa kitchen which features a swing-out worktop, mounted on a pole that is fixed into the cupboard below. It swivels out to create extra space and can be moved back into position when not in use. A bespoke kitchen manufacturer or worktop fabricator should be able to template something similar for you. Although you are only replacing your worktops, this element will require careful planning – I would get the fabricator involved at the start of the design stage to get the full benefit of their expertise. Consider playing with contrasting colours for the worktop and the breakfast bar to create impact. An alternative solution might be inspired by the Gimmegi Cucine iRide collection at Living In Style. It includes pull-out units on wheels whose tops then open out into tables.

Do you have a question about your kitchen, bathroom or interior design? Write to Andrea at Utopia, The Old School, Colchester Road, Wakes Colne, Colchester, CO6 2BY or email Andrea at dearutopia@propub.co.uk

E-cloth The star letter winner receives an E-cloth cleaning kit worth £100, delivering highly effective cleaning with just water. It includes the General Purpose E-cloth that is tough enough to remove even the thickest dirt, grease and bacteria from worktops and appliances without chemicals, leaving the surface perfectly clean and shiny. www.e-cloth.com



The ergonomic Sinuosa kitchen by Valcucine for Cucina Alessi features a mobile table that rotates on a pole out of the way when not needed. From £36,000. 020 7193 9264 | www.lacucinaalessi.com

Q What are the best pans to have? Daniel Stirling, Manchester

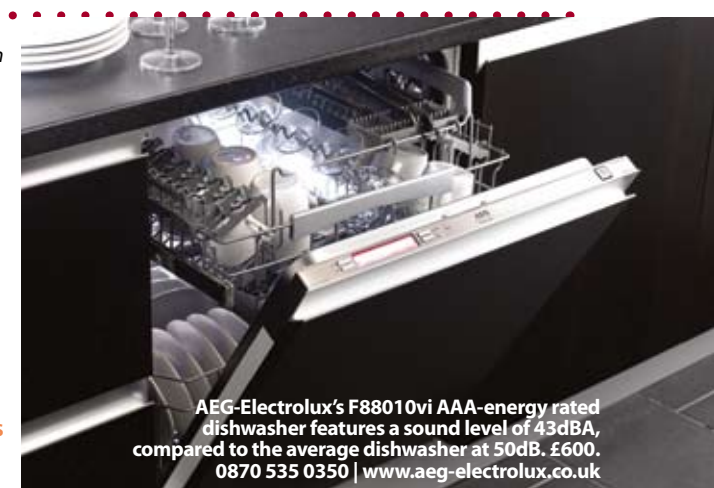
A A decent set of saucepans will last a lifetime and make cooking a pleasure. Spend as much as you can afford and don't worry about a matching set – you may well have different materials for various cooking tasks. The pans you choose will often be dictated by your hob. Any pans can be used with gas. On halogen, use pans with thick bases, as they can be subjected to short bursts of intense heat, and avoid very shiny bases as they can reflect the light, causing the lamps to switch off. Stainless steel is a match for halogen or ceramic. It's easy to clean but the base must have an aluminium or copper core to conduct the heat efficiently. Heavy cast iron might not be suitable on ceramic or halogen hobs as pans must not be scraped along the surface which will scratch. Solid fuel cookers suit heavier pans made from cast iron or with thick bases that can withstand their high temperatures. Perfect for using from oven to table, they retain their heat, but are too heavy for some people and aren't responsive to varying temperatures. The professionals love copper as it's the best conductor of heat and extremely responsive when you turn down the heat, but it's difficult to clean and tends to tarnish. Induction hob pans must be made of magnetisable metal such as cast iron or stainless steel. Copper and aluminium are not suitable for induction. Always check the product information before you buy a pan for a particular hob, because sometimes metals are mixed with others and there are various coatings which can make a pan the exception to the rule. And each will have its own care guidelines too!



Le Creuset's toughened non-stick range features 'encased base' technology making the pans ideally suited to use on induction hobs. From £45 for a 20cm shallow frying pan. 0800 373 792 | www.lecreuset.co.uk

Q Please tell me about the ssSH mark on appliances S Greaves, Peckham

A The ssSH mark is endorsed by the Noise Association (www.ukna.org.uk) and aims to put noise firmly on the environmental agenda. The symbol which is used on white goods was created in response to a growing demand from consumers for less noisy appliances. AEG Electrolux has developed an extremely quiet range of products thanks to improved engineering of water hydraulics and insulation. The company currently has eight washing machines, three washer dryers, five tumble dryers, three freestanding dishwashers, six built-in dishwashers and five cooker hoods carrying the ssSH symbol, aimed to allow you to enjoy a peaceful kitchen environment. To qualify, a washing machine should be no louder than 49dB, a dishwasher no louder than 45dB and cooker hoods, no louder than 60dB. What few of us realise is that a change of 10dB technically halves or doubles perceived sound levels, so remember next time you are shopping for appliances the example that a washing machine of 50dB appears twice as loud as one with 40dB.



AEG-Electrolux's F88010vi AAA-energy rated dishwasher features a sound level of 43dBA, compared to the average dishwasher at 50dB. £600. 0870 535 0350 | www.aeg-electrolux.co.uk

Q My loo seat has broken but the model is discontinued. Do you know where I can find a replacement? R Evans, Warwick

A Firstly I'd try contacting the manufacturer to see if it has any, or even just replacement hinges or toilet bumpers – since these are the parts that often break, rather than the seat itself. Discontinued Bathrooms (0845 621 2223 | www.discontinuedbathrooms.co.uk) and Goodwood (01243 532 121 | www.goodwoodbathrooms.co.uk) stock a vast selection of shapes and sizes from various manufacturers, and the latter will even make to order. Otherwise try www.onlineair.com or www.bathroom-ceramics.co.uk for coloured seats.



The Olympic WC and bidet by Vitruvit Spa with asymmetric shape comes in white or with an abstract linear monochrome decal. Prices on request. +39 076 154 0738 | www.vitruvit.it