

Gloss paint ideas - 11 ways designers are using hi-shine to create incredible decor

America's top designers share their favorite gloss paint ideas to bring light and drama to these wonderful interiors



Design by Summer Thornton

(Image credit: Josh Thornton)

If you're dreaming of a room that truly shines, look toward the luxe realm of gloss paint — dramatic finishes with an elegant sheen that lend your space a jewel-box effect, or a glint of romance around the edges.

Levels of sheen range from semi-gloss (some shine) to high-gloss (serious shine), but it's the latter that tends to steal the spotlight when it comes to [paint ideas](#). "People often use the term lacquer when they refer to high-gloss, and they're referring to the aesthetic but it's actually a different material," says Martin Kesselman, a Farrow & Ball ambassador and color expert at NYC's [INCOLOUR](#). With an effect similar to lacquer, a high-gloss paint surface can appear almost like glass.

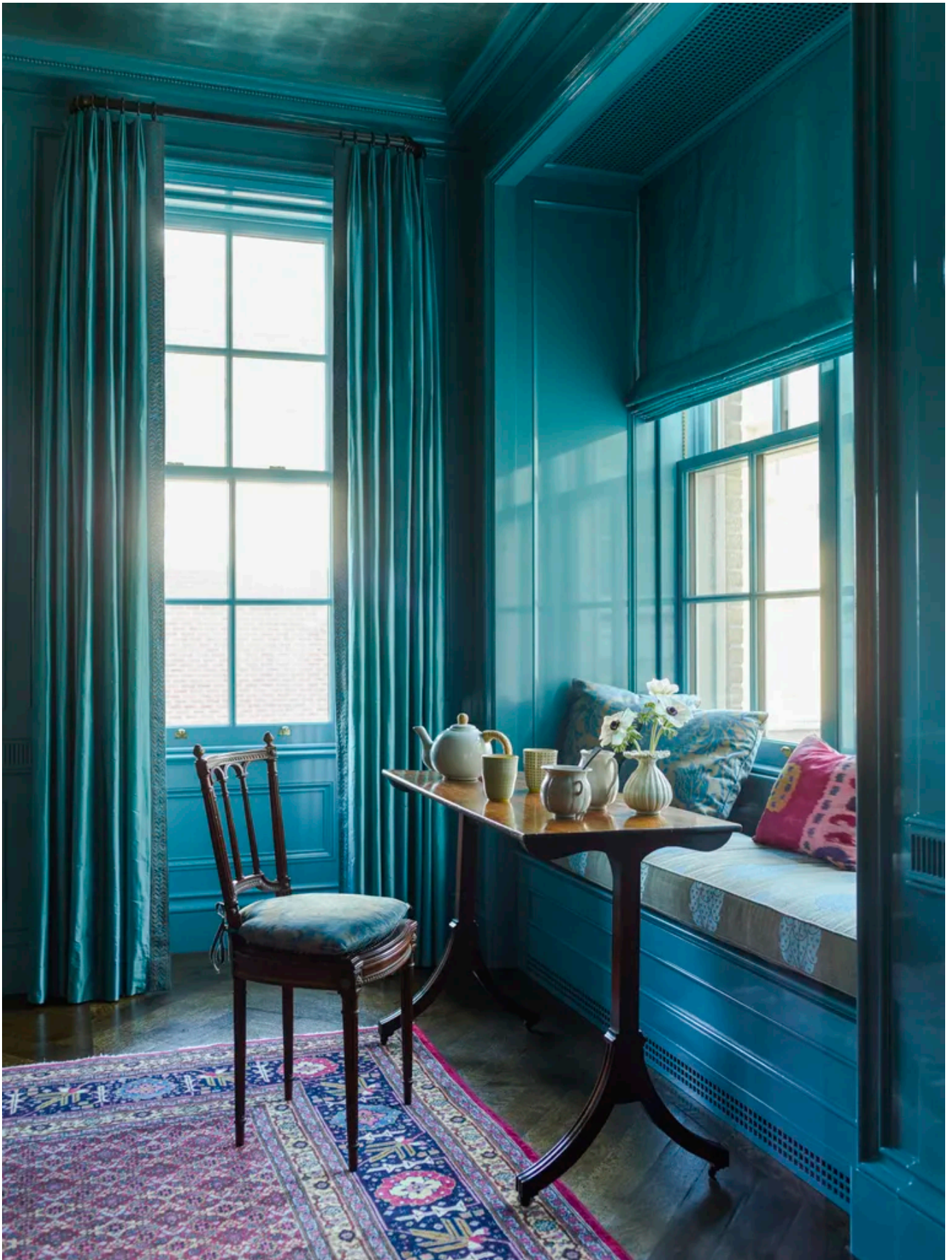
"Gloss paint is essentially more reflective, or has a higher level of sheen than other finishes," says Cameron Carcelen, owner of Connecticut's [Ridge Architecture](#). "So you'll get dramatic highlights and shadows depending on the way light hits the painted surface."

How is it used? Gloss paint takes a shine to millwork, mouldings, trim, and any architectural detail worth highlighting. And while the end result can be showstopping, the process takes serious effort.

"When you use a flat paint, it hides the imperfections of not only the surface but the work," says Kesselman. "But when you use higher finishes, and especially a high-gloss, you'll see everything—every brushstroke, every roller mark." This means that, when using gloss paint, preparation is the name of the game; if you're hoping for a perfect shine, your surfaces must be perfectly primed (or, if you're aiming for high-gloss, hire an artisan painter to make it a guarantee).

Looking for ways to brighten up your space with a touch of color? Take a look at the brilliant gloss paint ideas below from expert designers around the world.

1. PAIR WITH AN EQUALLY SHINY CEILING



Interior design by Katie Ridder Inc and architecture by Peter Pennoyer Architects
(Image credit: Eric Piasecki)

If you're going for glamour, high-gloss [paint finishes](#) can bring serious *ooh la la* sensations to any room, but especially if your space has interesting millwork, moulding, or trim that's begging for a dramatic accent. This means it's a particularly smart choice for [dining rooms](#), a room designed for entertaining guests, and a space that truly warrants some wow factor.

In the Upper East Side dining room above, [Farrow & Ball's Stone Blue](#) paint, complete with a high-gloss finish, sets the mood. "The client wanted high gloss lacquer walls and with the high ceilings and the function of the room, it was decided to silver leaf the ceiling to add some warmth and a soft glow at night" says NYC's [Katie Ridder](#). Digging into the drama, other luxe materials (a crystal chandelier, blue silk curtains, tobacco leather chair) serve serious elegance from breakfast to dinner.

2. COLOR DRENCH THE ROOM IN DIFFERENT SHEENS



Design by Ridge Architecture with architecture and construction by Old Town Barns

(Image credit: Nicholas Venezia)

If you're keen to make a statement, few [interior design trends](#) are bolder than the color-drenching trend. Seen in the corner office above, the idea is simple: a single color is used on every surface, from the ceiling to the walls and trim (often the floor, too). Of course, it's not as easy as picking up one bucket of paint from the store; designers often pick different shades and sheens of the same color for different surfaces in order to add dimension to the monochromatic look.

"This [home office](#) is 'color drenched,' meaning we used a single color for every surface, but in different levels of sheen," explains Cameron Carcelen of Connecticut's [Ridge Architecture](#).

Making the most out of [Benjamin Moore's Gentleman's Gray](#) paint, Carcelen chose a semi-gloss finish for the ceiling and millwork and a satin finish for the walls. "I find the variation in reflectivity while keeping a consistent color can really animate a space without overwhelming the palette," she adds. "And it can feel authentic in both modern and traditional spaces."

3. SOFTEN THE SPACE WITH A SEMI-GLOSS



Design by Leanne Ford Interiors with styling by Hilary Robertson

(Image credit: Erin Kelly)

If you're looking for a more subtle color drench, and not ready to fully embrace this [paint trend](#), you can also lean heavily on semi-gloss paints. Compared with using a high-gloss finish, the effect of semi-gloss paint is less dramatic but still gives your space a beautiful, lightened sheen.

In the warm and neutral space above, Leanne Ford Interiors made the entire room shimmer with a semi-gloss treatment. "I used [Behr Crisp Linen](#) in a semi-gloss finish on the floors, ceiling, trim, walls, cabinets, steps—everything," says [Leanne Ford](#). "The combination of one color going everywhere and the shine of the semi-gloss finish is what makes it feel so vast, the two create one beautiful lightbox."

4. ADD A CHEERFUL SPLASH OF COLOR



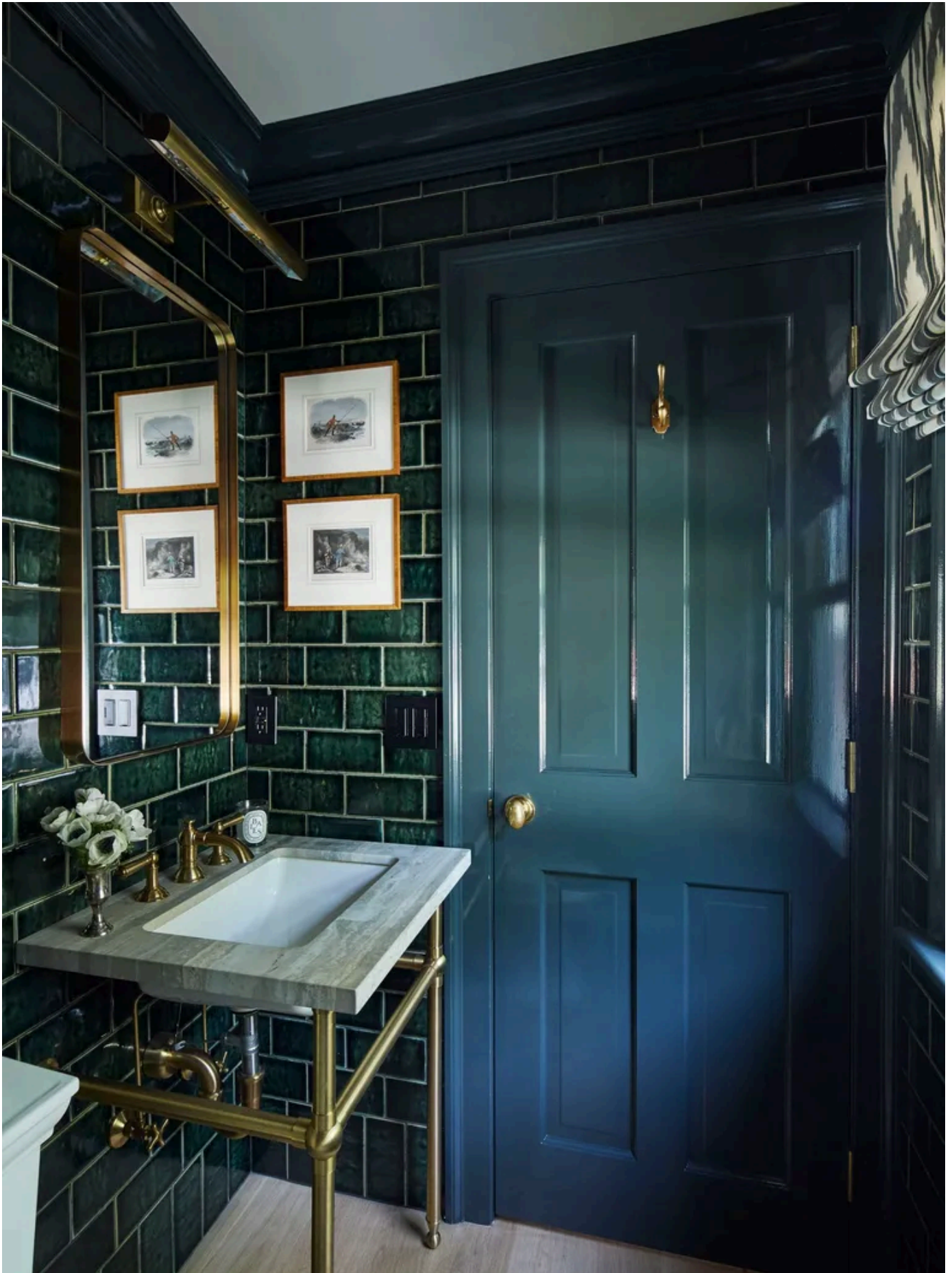
Design by [Sarah Jefferys Design](#)

(Image credit: Morten Smidt)

Looking to make bright colors even brighter? The shiny nature of gloss paint gives the surface a little more luster, which means you can really play up oranges, yellows, and other happy paint colors that boost the overall mood of a space.

In the above interior, the home's cabinetry gets a vibrant orange burst of color. "I love to use high gloss paint for a colorful [accent wall](#) and custom millwork," says NYC's [Sarah Jefferys Design](#). "The high gloss paint is reflective, creating a more expansive space. I especially like to use high gloss paint with pops of cheerful color. The gloss provides another dimension of depth."

5. LET YOUR DOOR SHINE INSIDE AND OUT



Design by Brittany Bromley Interiors
(Image credit: Annie Schlechter)

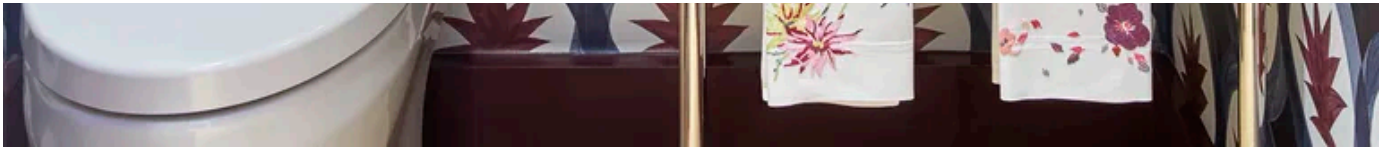
One of the more traditional placements for gloss paint - especially high-gloss paint - is the front door. Popular in European cities on townhouses, it gives the home an extra *something-something* when you spot it from the curb (it's worth noting that a proper high-gloss finish is extremely durable, which means it's a lasting beauty). But that same look shines on the inside, too, on pretty much any door you choose.

In the home above, the [bathroom](#) door's handsome, glossy finish works with other shiny details (tiled walls and metal accents) to create an overall luminous space. "We always use Fine Paints of Europe's [Hollandlac](#) formulation," says Brittany Bromley, owner of New York's [Brittany Bromley Interiors](#).

As with when it comes to [how to paint a wall](#) of any sort, how you start off is key. "[Prep] is the most important part, and done correctly the final results will be very durable and last for years to come."

6. BALANCE GLOSS WITH LESS SHINY TEXTURES





Design by Colleen Simonds

(Image credit: Emily Gilbert Photography)

Sure, gloss paint can really stand out, but what if you're hoping it plays well with other elements in the room? In order to create balance, experts recommend incorporating visual texture and a variety of finishes into your space to ensure your glossy surfaces don't outshine other worthwhile features.

In the [powder room](#) above, gloss paint used on the ceiling and trim gets tempered by other materials throughout the design. "In any room, you want to mix up your finishes and textures—don't make everything one note," recommends [Colleen Simonds](#), a designer based in Pittsburgh, noting that everything else in the space doesn't need to be so shiny.

"You want matte finishes, other textures, and maybe more organic materials to balance things. Like in this powder room, the wallpaper isn't shiny, and the mirror works well because it acts as the organic, more 'rustic' element with the rattan—that helps bring things down a bit."

7. PAINT WOODEN FURNITURE FOR A GLOSSY ACCENT



Design by foley&cox
(Image credit: Tim Lenz)

Like a painted nail or a bold lip, a little accent goes a long way. Not just for walls or [how to paint a ceiling](#), you can gussy up any room simply by giving a single piece of furniture a glossy, eye-catching finish.

Taking inspiration from the bright red cabinet above, a high-gloss (or lacquered) makeover will make even old pieces pop. “We love how gloss and lacquer paint finishes bounce light and bring life and great energy to furniture and entire rooms,” says Michael Cox, owner of NYC’s [foley&cox](#). “For a tired, old cabinet we completely reinvigorated it with a glossy autobody finish in a vibrant shade of coral to live in a Hamptons home.”

8. GO RED - REALLY RED



(Image credit: Josh Thornton)

If you want to make a statement, gloss paint can take any color up a notch. But if you’re really hoping to make an impact, there may be no color more classic yet daring than bright red.

In the above interior, Chicago's [Summer Thornton Design](#) didn't hold back. "High gloss, when applied in a bold color, amplifies its intensity," says Thornton. "If I'm trying to create a space that's especially striking, really attention-grabbing, the gloss finish takes it one step further than the color. The color is bold, but with the gloss it is bold-on-bold. It makes it dreamier, more iconic, more graphic. This specific red we chose to emulate a London telephone booth. It's attention-grabbing and simple at the same time."

9. GO DARK FOR A HEAVY DOSE OF DRAMA



Design by North Shore Nest

(Image credit: Michael Kaskel)

Bold doesn't always mean bright when it comes to gloss paint. Picking a darker color or shade is also a brilliant way to add dimension and mood to your interior. "We think high gloss in both light and dark colors can work well depending on the space," say Melinda Cahill and Suzanne Glavin, designers at Illinois' [North Shore Nest](#). "Darker paint colors add drama, and the high gloss finish adds light because of the reflective surface."

You'll see this in action above, where the designers drenched bookshelves and cabinets in a deep blue gloss. "We chose high gloss because we wanted a contrast to the matte stone walls," add Cahill and Glavin. "High gloss adds light to a space because of its reflective quality while adding dimension and additional interest, which we love."

And just like in [navy living rooms](#), the dark gloss brings drama. The contents of the shelves bring warmth, texture, and contrast - there's nothing like the spine of an old book to lighten the mood.

10. PAINT WITH A BRUSH FOR A RUSTIC FINISH



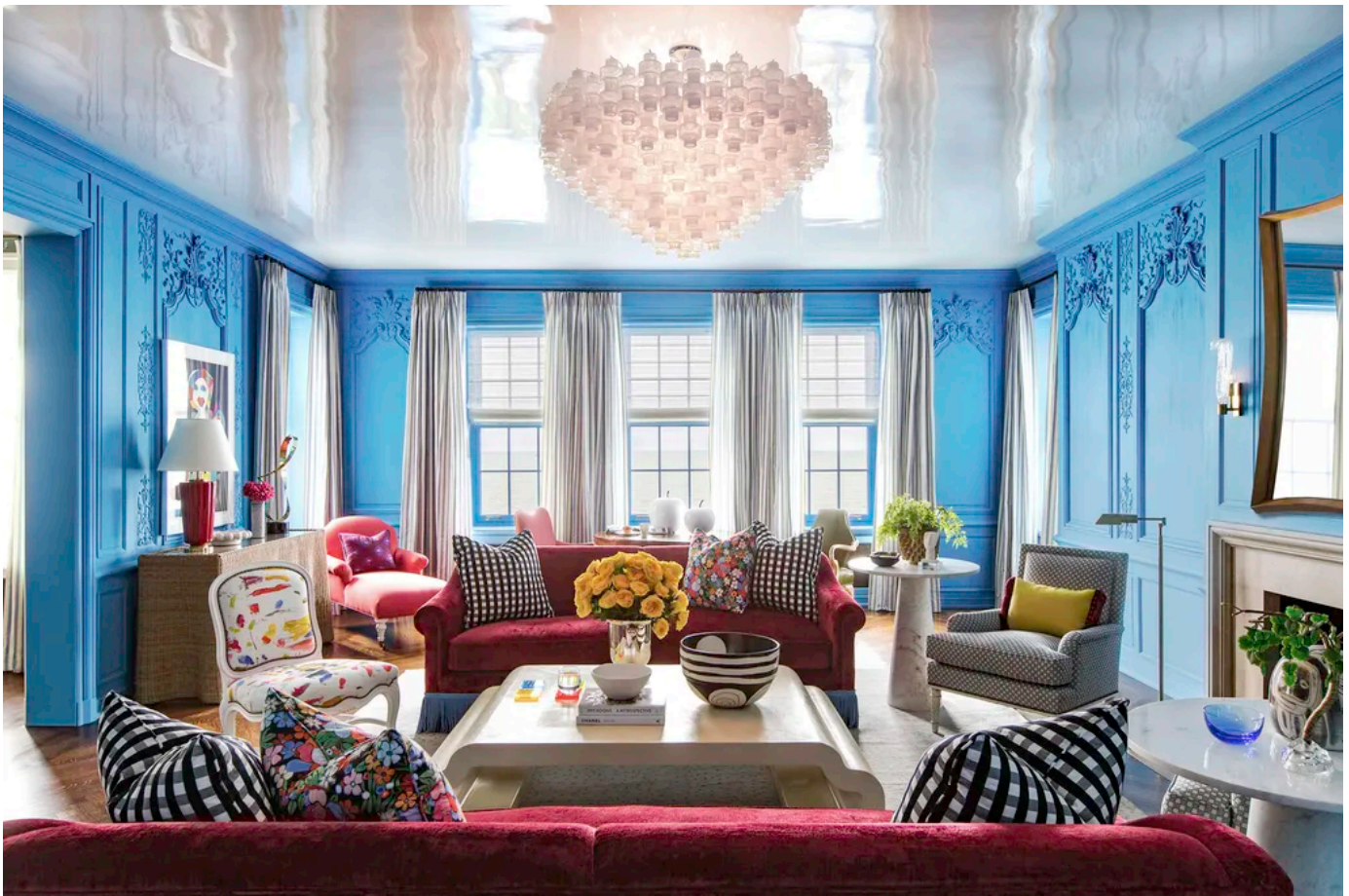


(Image credit: Farrow and Ball)

Ask any designer about gloss paint and they'll respond with a warning: it has a knack for highlighting every surface's imperfections. But we're not ones to knock a rustic look when it makes sense - especially in older homes where you can get away with highlighting some charming, age-old character.

In the above [kitchen](#), part of an 18th-century cottage at [Deans Court](#), a high-gloss Farrow & Ball paint actually highlights the charming, timeworn architecture along the wooden interior door and its trim. "As far as application, it's easier to apply a high-gloss to wood than it is to walls and ceiling," says Martin Kesselman, an ambassador of the paint company. "The entry into high-gloss—putting it on your trimmings, on your woodwork—levels out a little easier, and it's a little more forgiving than a wall or ceiling surface."

11. GIVE THE CEILING SOME SHINE



Design by Summer Thornton

(Image credit: Josh Thornton)

If you're wondering [how to paint a ceiling](#) with a showstopping look, gloss paint will steal the spotlight with an almost mirror-like effect. While it's a painstaking process and one of the hardest applications to pull off (a proper high-gloss ceiling can result in dozens of steps, best performed by an artisan painter and usually sprayed instead of brushed), it creates visual interest where you least expect it while reflecting natural light throughout the room.

In the above living room, a glossy [Paints of Europe's Hollandac](#) ceiling brings another level of elegance to the chic interior. You can achieve this look by using lacquer or high-gloss paint (high-gloss will give more depth to colors), both of which should be applied by a trained professional.

"I use lacquer on ceilings when I want to bounce a lot of light, and particularly where there are opportunities to reflect something magical," says the room's designer, [Summer Thornton](#). "In this room the views overlook a large body of water and the lacquered ceiling creates both a mirrored and watery effect that looks like it is like liquid, like it is still wet. We did that to carry the water from the outdoors into the space. Plus, it is dramatic!"

IS GLOSS PAINT STILL FASHIONABLE?

Gloss paint was a stalwart of the 1960s, but has come back round to be in fashion again right now.

'We started seeing it about 10 years ago, being used on dining room ceilings,' says Livingetc's editor Pip Rich. 'At night, soft candlelight bounced off it charmingly, making it a wonderful setting to entertain in. Then it moved about five years to being used on the lower half of walls, creating a picture rail effect, with the same color in a matte above it. Now? Now it's everywhere, and I love it. Gloss paint adds sparkle and drama and fun to a room, and what's more in fashion than that?'

Keith Flanagan 

Keith Flanagan is a New York based journalist specialising in design, food and travel. He has been an editor at Time Out New York, and has written for such publications as Architectural Digest, Conde Nast Traveller, Food 52 and USA Today. He regularly contributes to Livingetc, reporting on design trends and offering insight from the biggest names in the US. His intelligent approach to interiors also sees him as an expert in explaining the different disciplines in design.