

Neutral ground

Resene
Blackjack

Resene
Baltic Sea

Why a soft black might be the grounding element your considered colour palette is missing.

For those trying to ground a paint and material colour palette, black has long been the go-to visual anchor of many. While black is prized for its sophistication and timelessness, the starkness of a true, deep black can sometimes come across as too heavy or absolute for more nuanced colour schemes. For these subtler spaces, soft blacks have emerged as a popular alternative, which offer the depth and drama of a standard black, but without the starkness or severity.

As the demand for atmospheric, tactile and emotionally intelligent colour schemes grows, it's worth reconsidering the role of black in your project palettes. True blacks may remain essential for sharp definition, but in many real-world contexts where light, materiality and human experience interact, softer blacks can offer a sophisticated solution. Resene's extensive range of nuanced blacks open the door for creating richly layered yet highly-livable settings – ones that elevate mood, adapt gracefully across typologies and remain sensitive to the spaces we inhabit. From brown-edged blacks like Resene Black Magic and Resene Diesel to classic charcoals like Resene Zeus and Resene Squall, to those infused with a touch of inky blue such as Resene Jaguar and Resene Blackjack, there's a suitable soft black to strike the perfect balance of rich moodiness and muted refinement.

Here, we showcase more of Resene's beloved soft blacks along with some curated suggestions for harmonious neutrals and expressive accent colours that will pair perfectly for a range of project typologies.



Deep, dimensional and dramatic Resene Baltic Sea is an enigmatic option that, when used across the walls and ceiling in a single space, feels cocooning rather than enclosing. In a boutique bar or upmarket retail fit-out, a statement wall in Resene Baltic Sea makes a dramatic backdrop to a dining area. Complement it with classic, versatile whites and beiges like Resene Half Pearl Lusta and Resene Tua Tua on high ceilings and vertical elements to open the space and use Resene Colorwood Natural to stain timber furniture, shelving or product displays. Timber slat wall and plant pot painted in Resene Baltic Sea, lower back wall and vases in Resene Tuna and pillar (right) in Resene Tua Tua. The floor is painted in an effect using Resene Half Pearl Lusta with Resene FX Paint Effects Medium mixed with Resene Tua Tua applied over the top. Contact your Resene ColorShop for durable flooring systems and information on how to replicate this look on walls, flooring and furniture.

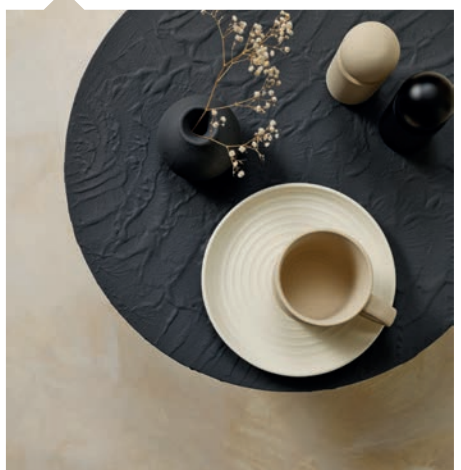


Soft blacks are especially valuable in libraries, galleries and civic buildings where the goal is to create spaces that feel calm, inclusive and durable. Resene Baltic Sea can be applied to ceiling voids and bench seating to infuse these spaces with sophistication while avoiding institutional coldness. Pairing soft blacks with nuanced neutrals like Resene Half Pearl Lusta and Resene Tua Tua helps these hues feel timeless rather than trendy. Background painted in Resene Half Pearl Lusta with Resene FX Paint Effects Medium mixed with Resene Tua Tua applied over the top, table in Resene Baltic Sea, plate and cup in Resene Half Pearl Lusta, vase in Resene Tuna, salt shaker in Resene Tua Tua and pepper shaker in Resene Baltic Sea.



- Resene Half Shark
- Resene Black Magic
- Resene Colorwood Mahogany

In a contemporary commercial office environment, use Resene Nocturnal on feature walls in boardrooms or breakout lounges to add gravitas. Pair it with Resene Sea Fog on ceilings and trim for clarity and Resene Half Stack on general walls to keep the palette cohesive. Resene Black Magic and Resene Colorwood Mahogany on cabinetry or built-in joinery maintains a professional sleekness while accents of lighter Resene Half Shark add depth and dimension. Walls and small bowl in Resene Nocturnal, floor finished in Resene Colour Enhance Japan Black, stool stained in Resene Colorwood Mahogany, bookshelf in Resene Black Magic and vase in Resene Half Shark.



A textured wallpaper such as Resene Museum Wallpaper Collection E307333 adds additional tactile depth when you need a soft black backdrop. Balance this design's brown undertone with gold accents in Resene Gold Dust metallic, architectural accents and furnishings in a neutral soft black such as Resene Bokara Grey and select touches of Resene Galliano for liveliness.

- Resene Metallic Gold Dust
- Resene Galliano
- Resene Bokara Grey



Truer blacks can sometimes appear washed out when exposed to direct sunlight, so it can be beneficial to lean into this visual effect and choose a softer black to begin with so that you can be sure its undertone blends with the rest of your palette. Soft black shades like Resene Nocturnal and Resene Foundry excel in spaces where atmosphere, subtlety and tonal balance are paramount. Walls and small bowl painted in Resene Nocturnal, window frame in Resene Foundry, floor in Resene Colour Enhance Japan Black, stool in Resene Carpe Noctem, sideboard in Resene Half Shark, bowl in Resene Atomic and vase and artwork in Resene Tuna.


- Resene Sea Fog
- Resene Half Stack
- Resene Atomic
- Resene Squall
- Resene Tuna
- Resene Foundry
- Resene Nocturnal
- Resene Carpe Noctem
- Resene Colour Enhance Japan Black



In healthcare or wellness environments, where emotional and physical comfort is critical, Resene Nocturnal can ground communal spaces such as waiting rooms or therapy rooms without feeling too stark or clinical. When balanced with the warmth of Resene Black Magic, a serene blue like Resene Atomic and layered with organic textures, this deep hue goes a long way towards fostering a nurturing, spa-like aesthetic. Timber floor finished in Resene Colour Enhance Japan Black, sculpture painted in Resene Black Magic, small bowl in Resene Nocturnal, large bowl in Resene Atomic and book covers in Resene Nocturnal (top) in Resene Half Shark (bottom).

top tip

Compared to deeper blacks, it can be easier to judge the undertone of softer blacks and ensure that your selected paint colour will coordinate with the rest of your material palette. Always be sure to test your Resene paint colours in situ whenever possible to ensure that you and your client are happy with the colour prior to finalising your specifications so there are no unexpected surprises.



-  Resene Atomic
-  Resene Half Shark
-  Resene Nocturnal
-  Resene Black Magic
-  Resene Colour Enhance Japan Black

Nuanced neutrals

Certain Resene soft blacks have more pronounced or complex undertones and thus have a greater tendency to look surprisingly different as the daylight shifts from morning to afternoon to evening. When used to their advantage, these off-black paint colours can be used to create especially nuanced or dramatic looks:





Resene Jaguar

Moody, modern and magnetic, Resene Jaguar features a whisper of blue that's ideal for adding drama without dominating. When using complex character colours, it's best to opt for companion neutrals that share an undertone in common. For example, play to the strengths of Resene Jaguar by choosing whites or greys that also have a hint of blue such as Resene Iron, a light and cool understated grey that lends understated elegance, and Resene Mischka, a grey blue with a lilac-edge to brings groundedness. As an accent, try a touch of a classic crimson like Resene Pohutukawa for interest and intensity. On timber, opt for a cool neutral grey wood stain like Resene Colorwood Tiri.

-  Resene Jaguar
-  Resene Iron
-  Resene Mischka
-  Resene Pohutukawa
-  Resene Colorwood Tiri

Resene Ironsand

Sophisticated, subtle and smoky, Resene Ironsand stands apart for its gentle brownish undertones, making it an ideal companion for warmer palettes and timber accents. In a contemporary family home, apply Resene Ironsand on cabinetry in kitchens or studies for a luxurious, tactile feel. Pair it with walls in Resene Spanish White for a sense of comfort, and Resene Thorndon Cream on trims and architraves for continuity or opt for Resene Half Tapa, a nuanced greige that plays well with natural materials, on internal doors or large-scale furniture pieces to increase interest without clamouring for attention.

-  Resene Ironsand
-  Resene Spanish White
-  Resene Thorndon Cream
-  Resene Half Tapa

Resene Eternity

For designs grounded in nature or spaces that benefit from quietude and introspection, Resene Eternity – a dusky charcoal with a murky green undertone – is an ideal option. Think reading rooms, study nooks, boutique libraries, wellness retreats and other environments where the sensory volume is turned down and materials are invited to breathe. In these spaces, walls painted in Resene Eternity offer a cocooning backdrop that enhances focus. Try it with Resene Quarter Fossil on built-in bookshelves or cabinetry to introduce subtle warmth and Resene Truffle on trim or internal doors to provide continuity with gentle contrast. To introduce a visual lift or a touch of character, add Resene Kombucha on a statement chair, shelving or a pendant lamp to bring an earthy, human element to the overall palette without disrupting its calm.

-  Resene Eternity
-  Resene Quarter Fossil
-  Resene Truffle
-  Resene Kombucha



Blacks are among the most popular exterior cladding colours. When specifying dark colours outdoors, always ask for a Resene CoolColour formula. A Resene CoolColour looks like a normal colour, but thanks to special pigment technology, it reflects more heat so it doesn't get as hot as a normal colour would. Courtyard walls painted in Resene CoolColour Half Shark, timber slat trellis painted in Resene CoolColour Foundry, patio in Resene Ted, large plant pots in Resene Half Tea and Resene Half Shark and small plant pot in Resene Earthstone.

-  Resene Ted
-  Resene Half Tea
-  Resene Earthstone

top tip

For warranty reasons, many cladding manufacturers limit the LRV (Light Reflectance Value) that can be applied to their materials. If you plan to specify a mid-tone or dark paint colour to any element of your project's exterior, be sure to double-check these requirements prior to finalising your specifications. You can find the LRV of your Resene paint colours on the back of your Resene colour chart, colour card or on the Resene Online Colour Library, www.resene.com/colour.



In outdoor settings, muted greens like Resene Paddock and Resene Earthstone can be used on plant pots or décor in a palette anchored in a soft black like Resene Half Shark. This clever strategy breaks up the starkness of an achromatic colour scheme without being too overtly colourful while also blending beautifully with lush natural greenery from surrounding plantings. Background and matchbox painted in Resene Ted, tray in Resene Half Shark, crate and trowel in Resene Earthstone and pots in Resene Paddock (left), Resene Foundry (top) and Resene Half Tea (bottom). Projects by Amber Armitage, images by Wendy Fenwick. BW

