

Knowledge of color is essential if you want top-notch results.

*But success depends more on your own creativity than it does on any text book rules or preconceived notions. So as you delve into this wellspring of useful information, bear in mind that here's one important footnote attached: **Express yourself!***

THE COLOR WHEEL

The traditional color wheel has three primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. In technical terms, it organizes colors by the length of their light wave (red is the longest, violet is the shortest). But for those of us who aren't astrophysicists, it's easier to think of the color wheel as a slice of the rainbow stretched into a circle. Or maybe just a cool device that allows people to see the relationship between colors.



Black, white and gray are called achromatic colors — but don't dismiss them as chroma-deprived serfs in the kingdom of color—they add a powerful sense of dimension when used with the basic colors.



PRIMARY COLORS

RED, YELLOW, BLUE

The three colors from which all other colors are made and which cannot be made from any other colors.

SECONDARY COLORS

ORANGE, GREEN, VIOLET

Obtained when two primary colors are mixed together.

INTERMEDIATE COLORS *

RED-ORANGE, YELLOW-ORANGE, YELLOW-GREEN, BLUE-GREEN, BLUE-VIOLET, RED-VIOLET

These colors occur when an adjoining primary and secondary color are mixed.

**also called "tertiary" colors, especially when attempting to confuse someone you don't like or impress a hot date.*

TIP

THE WORLD WON'T FIT IN A COLOR WHEEL.

You'll never find a purple static that matches the purple on the color wheel. So what? The color wheel is just a guide. Adapt it to the materials you are using, and leave the concept of perfection to the likes of Plato.

DESCRIBING A COLOR

Ever try accurately describing a color to someone else? It can leave you feeling completely ineffectual, a mumbling bumbling mess who desperately blurts out phrases like “grasshopper green” or “a fun, Barney-esque kind of purple.” But armed with three basic terms— Hue, Value and Chroma— you can avoid this rather embarrassing fate.



HUE

The descriptive name of a color. Hue defines a specific spot on the color wheel. Red/violet is a hue. “Passionate purple,” on the other hand, is not a hue. The terms Color and Hue are interchangeable.

VALUE

The lightness or darkness of a color. The value of a color is altered by adding white, gray or black (your trusty trio of achromatic buddies). These combinations are called tints, tones and shades. The Value Scale for a color is similar to a Gray Scale.



The value scale goes from white to black.

TIP

A ONE-DERFUL CONCEPT

If you surround a pure color with tints, tones and shades of that color, the pure color loses brilliance, while the tints, tones and shades gain visual vitality. This is the power of monochromatic design. Skeptics should check out the work of Jasper Johns.

TIP

Design Master Bridal Veil is a great tool for adjusting the value of color. If that yellow looks brighter than a solar flare, a light mist of bridal veil will save your arrangement (not to mention your corneas).

TIP

FROM CANVAS TO CARNATIONS

In paintings, if the same color is used in both the upper and lower halves of the canvas, the color on the lower half will appear to have more color weight (the eye simply causes this to happen). It's a phenomenon straight out of the X-files, and it may also hold true for a mass floral arrangement.

TIP

WEIGHT WATCHING

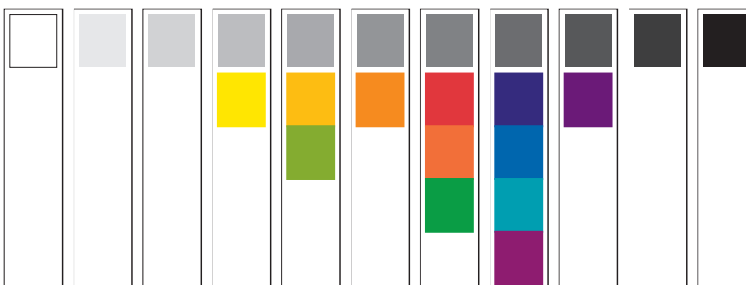
Darker colors have more visual weight (a color's visual weight is determined by its value). So placing darker colors lower in the design adds visual stability. But if creativity should lead you to do otherwise, by all means—go for it!



Yellow is yellow, right? Notice how each flower has a different degree of chroma.

CHROMA

The brightness or dullness of a color. The chroma decreases as you move in either direction from the pure color. Translation: lighter doesn't always mean brighter.



This comparative chromatic scale (Oh no, another scale! Drop that mum and run for your life!) shows the relation of the pure colors to the gray scale. Take the pure colors from the color wheel and make a set of playing cards. Arrange them like a game of solitaire. Squint your eyes as you find a color's match on the gray scale. When you have played your hand of 12 cards, chances are it will look like our scale. Not surprising, yellow has more chroma than violet. But red, red-orange and green all share the same degree of chroma. Hey, it's an equal opportunity scale. Check it out. Play a game of Chromatic solitaire with assorted paint chips, scraps of ribbon or even flower petals.

CLASSIC COLOR HARMONIES

Sometimes, a proven formula is the best way to go. A few cases in point: Mozart, milk and cookies, the reclining chair.

As luck would have it, the world of design has a few equally dependable concepts— the five classic color harmonies. These are specific ways of grouping different colors. And like Mozart's Symphony in G-Minor, if they are well executed they never fail to deliver.

MONOCHROMATIC



Tints, tones and shades of any one color. Perfect for the obsessive/compulsive who just can't do enough with red.

ANALOGOUS



A key color (primary or secondary) along with the two colors that border it on the color wheel. Particularly suited to power-mad dictators who advance at will into neighboring countries.

TIP

MATTERS OF THE HEART

When properly sequenced, analogous harmonies have an emotional quality. They are either warm and active (like a mariachi band) or cool and passive (like a slow sax solo).

TIP

INDECISION IS THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP

In any color harmony, it's important that the key color be dominant and the other colors enhance it. Select a clear key color and stick with it. Otherwise, your arrangement might look like it was designed with a hand grenade.

COMPLEMENTARY



Two colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel. Classic Felix and Oscar.



SPLIT COMPLEMENT



A key color and the two colors on either side of its complement. Felix and two of Oscar's friends.



TIP

CHRISTMAS IS BORING IF IT COMES EVERY DAY.

Designers often fall back on traditional holiday complements like Christmas red and green. Shake things up a little. Consider using any colors that are opposite of each other, as well as any tint, tone or shade of these complements.

TIP

YOU CAN'T FIGHT FLOWERS.

The natural color complexity found in flowers and foliage will often produce a naturally occurring split complement harmony. Don't fight this (you'll lose). Use it to your advantage and you'll end up with incredibly refined color expression.

TIP

SHAMELESS PRODUCT PLUG

In this photo, DESIGN MASTER Orange was misted on the millet to give color rhythm to the arrangement. Please hold applause.

TRIAD



A combination of either the three primary, three secondary or three intermediate colors, all of which are equidistant on the color wheel. Basically an "all-you-can-eat" buffet for the human retina.

TIP

WE'RE ALL JUST FLOATING IN A SEA OF GREEN.

When using the primary triad of red, yellow and blue you can express a playful directness. Even tints, tones and shades of these colors lend an unsophisticated charm. But when using secondary or intermediate triads, remember that because we are constantly surrounded by green (trees, grass, the occasional Volkswagen Bug), the eye will often only recognize it's absence. This phenomenon may mean you've ventured into triad territory without even knowing it: Counting the green foliage, an arrangement of Peach accented with Lavender is actually a triadic harmony. Learn to be aware of the omnipresent green.

COLOR INTERACTIONS

Like we said before, classic color harmonies are great when regarded as guidelines. But regarded as rules, they can become more stifling than a cell at Folsom Prison. Bust out! Explore the infinite possibilities of color interaction, and thumb your nose at the powers that be.

VALUE OPPOSITION



The greater the separation of a color on its value scale, the more tendency there is to split apart. The deeper color rose naturally separates from other roses.

CHROMATIC OPPOSITION



If colors are far apart on the chromatic scale, they will appear far apart to the human eye. The color separation between red and purple is a mere crack in the visual sidewalk, while the color separation between purple and yellow is more like the Grand Canyon.

TIP

HARMONY CAN EXIST WITHOUT SYMMETRY.

Asymmetrical color balance can make your designs more interesting. Just because you're using a classic color harmony doesn't mean you can't be creative.

COOL-WARM CONTRAST



Warm colors will appear hotter when surrounded by cool colors. As shown in the top photo, you just might set off your sprinkler system using the croton leaves with the hydrangea, while those same croton leaves appear much cooler when used with warm colors like the yellow lily. The same holds true for cool colors. A blue delphinium will appear cooler with purple statice and warmer with red roses. Go figure.



COMPLEMENTARY CONTRAST



Laurel wouldn't look quite so expansive unless he was standing next to the ever-svelte Hardy, and vice-versa. This is the foundation of complementary contrast. Using complementary colors enhances the vibrancy of both colors. And remember: All colors have complements, not just the twelve appearing on the color wheel.

SIMULTANEOUS CONTRAST



The visual alteration that occurs anytime two colors are used together offers infinite possibilities with regard to vibrancy and energy (not unlike that mood ring you owned in your formative years). Here, notice how Carnation Red and Holiday Green produce a high degree of vibrancy, while the same red juxtaposed with Burgundy invokes a much softer result.

CONTRAST OF PROPORTION



Just as David KO'd Goliath with a healthy portion of righteousness and a decent aim, small flowers can often compensate for their size with increased energy, often dominating larger flowers of the same color. In this arrangement, check out the visual butt-kicking being administered by this small round gomphrina. Man, you'd hate to be that red gerbera.

CONTRAST WITH RED-VIOLET

Like Switzerland, red-violet is about as neutral as it gets. In fact, red-violet is the most neutral of all colors, being neither warm nor cool, active nor passive. Almost all colors are enhanced by its presence. If you've got money to hide, call a Swiss banker. If you've got vibrancy issues, get out the purple static.



Sometimes you get so wrapped-up designing, you forget about the space your arrangement is designed for. If your design doesn't work in the environment where it will be placed, it doesn't matter how good it is to begin with. Consider peripheral objects like the vase, the table and the room decor. Your results will improve dramatically.

GLOSSARY

ACHROMATIC

Perceived as having no hue or color. White, gray, and black.

ANALOGOUS

A color harmony developed by three adjacent colors on the color wheel. A key color, either a primary or secondary and the two colors on either side.

CHROMA

The intensity of a color.

CHROMATIC

Perceived as having a hue or color.

COMPLEMENTARY

A color harmony of two colors exactly opposite each other on the color wheel.

HUE

The qualities that distinguish one color from another.
The name of a color. e.g. red, red-orange.

INTERMEDIATE COLOR

Sometimes called tertiary. A mixture of a primary and a secondary color. Red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet.

MONOCHROMATIC

A color harmony developed from a single hue and all its dimensions. (tints, tones, shades)

PRIMARY COLOR

The colors from which all other colors are derived.
Red, yellow, and blue.

SECONDARY COLOR

A mixture of two primary colors. Orange, green, and violet.

SHADE

Determines Value. Hue plus black.

SPLIT COMPLEMENT

A color harmony developed with a key color and the two colors on either side of its complement (direct opposite).

TINT

Determines value. Hue plus white.

TOPE

Determines value. Hue plus gray.

TRIAD

A color harmony developed by three colors equidistant on the color wheel.

VALUE

The lightness or darkness of a color. Tint, tone, shade.



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