

GETTING THE COLOR RIGHT?

Do you have a favorite color? What is the dominant color of your wardrobe, for instance? Your attitude to color says a lot about your personality, because our likes and dislikes stem from subconscious reactions. Our cultural background, upbringing, personality and life experience can all figure into those likes and dislikes. Color symbolism affects nearly every area of our life from clothing to cars, interior design to computer interfaces, product packaging to corporate identity. The significance of some colors is universal, while other colors have meanings that shift between cultures.

Though our reactions to color can vary as a result of all the factors previously mentioned, there is a broad consensus. Reds are active, dynamic, exciting, aggressive, and passionate. Pink is almost always associated with the feminine, it is youthful, happy and light-hearted. Orange is hopeful, positive, vital and happy. Yellows are alive and joyful, encouraging and cheerful, the color of optimism. Greens are passive, pastoral, soothing and restful, while blues are generally restful, serene, dependable and quiet. Many a film-maker, including Walt Disney, has used subtle shifts in color and lighting to subliminally convey the mood of a scene.

These are all generally accepted psychological motifs but in particular associations, they can morph into connotations that convey very different overtones. Skin tones that are yellow or green are seen as unhealthy and blues can be melancholy. Browns can be rich or autumnal or just plain dirty; purples can be funereal. It is easy to see that the *prediction* of what will be a fashionable color in any particular year is fraught with pitfalls. The right color sets a mood, conveys an image and can add profitable dollars to the price of something, not to mention increasing the volume of sales, but it's a high-risk bet that no manufacturer or fashion house wants to get wrong.

As trends and events in the world wax and wane, so, apparently, do society's opinions and feelings about the color of everything, from our clothing to manufactured goods of all kinds. At least, that is what the major prognosticators of color tell us. Color predictions for the year ahead used to be set solely by the influential Color Marketing Group (CMG) that was formed in 1962. This is a members-only, not-for-profit entity that conducts local and international workshops with its many members to discuss all aspects of societal development from significant innovations to social change, technological development to nature. From these meetings, emerging trends are noted and a consensus reached about what color or color ranges will best mirror the mood of society in the light of those trends. According to CMG, their members "interpret, create and select colors to enhance the function, salability and quality of manufactured goods."



Pantone's Colors for 2016

The other major force in the color world is Pantone, formed in 1963, whose color matching systems dominate printing and have spread worldwide to include other color-critical industries, like digital technology, textiles, plastics, architecture and paint. Since 1999, Pantone have also ventured into the treacherous waters of forecasting color trends, presenting their ‘Color of the Year’ each December for the following year. They arrive at this by a process of consultation just as CMG do. Such is the reach of Pantone, that manufacturers and the fashion industry now eagerly await their predictions, also

So, what did these companies predict would be the colors for 2016? It is an interesting comparison. CMG selected as its North American keynote color “uni-Blue,” a darker blue somewhere between cobalt and navy but cooler than both. They say that uni-Blue “is the new uni-sex blue that celebrates all genders and generations ... it balances the difference between genders, as well as cultures and generations.” I won’t quote the rest of the flowery talk or we will run out of pages.

Pantone, predicted two colors for this year (a first): Rose Quartz, a soft pink, and our namesake, Serenity, a mid-tone cobalt blue. Leatrice Eiseman, Executive Director of the Pantone Color Institute, said “The colors reflect a gender blur as it relates to fashion. Joined together Rose Quartz and Serenity demonstrate an inherent balance between a warmer, embracing rose tone and the cooler tranquil blue, reflecting connection and wellness as well as a soothing sense of order and peace.” Several fashion houses followed this lead in their collections.

Both companies also develop a range of colors that key to the premier colors selected, so that designers do have a color range from which to choose, in addition to the color(s) of the year. CMG identify different keynote colors and related color ranges for different geopolitical areas of the world. This echoes the changing significance of some colors in different cultural contexts.

Brushing aside the hype for a moment, the interesting thing is that both companies chose blues, a color both calming and reassuring in the face of today’s stresses and uncertainties; a move away from the more intense colors of former years. One cannot know whether these companies have become so influential in the field of color that their predictions become self-fulfilling prophecies; a sort of chicken and egg situation. For over a decade, Pantone have hedged their bet by sponsoring New York fashion week and also with a marketing savvy collaboration with Sephora Cosmetics, who have, for several seasons, launched a line of make-up, based on Pantone’s color prediction.

So, what will be next year’s keynote color? We will have to wait until December for Pantone’s prediction, but perhaps CMG are trying to get a jump on the market by publishing their 2017 keynote color for North America well in advance. It is a color they call “Thrive,” a mid-tone olive green. “Green is a color of growth and of wellbeing,” they say, “symbolizing a balanced, energized future for North America for 2017.” Is this a return to the avocado-colored bathrooms so popular in the 70s that we’ve all spent time and money trying to escape? We shall see! Anyone trying to predict anything in the present national and global turmoil might be riding for a fall. Doubtless we shall need all the soothing qualities of both blues and greens to carry us through the next years.

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