

# Sustainable Color Communication: Color Inspiration in Design | Step 1

Textile design as it relates to color is traditionally considered as an artistic rather than scientific discipline. Color is inherently tied to emotion and we look to the artistic and passionate among us to specify what colors our customers will respond to best. Many in the design community are also passionate about improving the sustainability of the products they design. So there is great potential for creating change during the design phase.

The decisions made at the design phase greatly affect the later decisions made by the rest of the supply chain. So, during design, we have the greatest potential for changing the output of the process. To make an impact on the process, designers should begin to think of themselves as not only part of an artistic process, but also part of an engineering process. Most design decisions related to color will result in a chemical decision later in the chain. For example, something as simple as deciding to choose a bright pastel pink on cotton versus a duller shade most likely will result in the fabric being bleached as opposed to simply scoured. Bleaching will require more energy and chemicals and this will have a negative environmental impact.

Does this mean design should be compromised for the sake of sustainability? The answer is *no* for a lot of obvious reasons. However, the point is that if designers are decision makers, they should be informed as much as possible regarding the effects of the decisions they make. Education and consultation with knowledgeable partners will be the key to making sustainable design choices. (1)

## **Sustainable Methods for Color Inspirations**

The inspiration for color comes from many sources: runway shows, traveling globally, nature, current events, street fashion, shopping trips (garments and accessories), and trend services. These are very common methods that are repeatable from season to season. However, how would one take into account the demands of people, planet, and profit of each of these inspiration sources? Fortunately, today, we have information at our fingertips through the use of the internet, which allows us access to incredible amounts of information in minutes. This allows us to save time (reduce travel and carbon emissions), reduce costs (travel) and improve our social awareness by gaining quick access to many different cultures.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples of how one could use the internet as a sustainable alternative for the selection of color inspirations. Runway shows can now be seen live on the internet. The recent Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in NYC was available on YouTube. This has a positive impact on the planet (reduction of carbon emissions due to limited traveling by airplane, car or train) and the profit (saving money on the cost of the travel). As an aside, if you are interested in calculating your personal carbon footprint for travel, a nice free online calculator is available at (3). In regards to the people aspect, you might lose them in personal social networking aspects of attending the runway show, but you would certainly gain a greater cultural awareness with the ability to view a variety of online runway shows from your office.

Most designers consult with professional trend services when they design color palettes. These

trend services deliver the color forecasts in a book type format. The increased accessibility of the internet has led to the creation of online trend service companies such as Fashion Snoops, Style Sight, and WGSN. These online forecasting and consulting services provide inspiring global content to their customers and have a positive impact on the planet: Zero material consumption to create trend books and faster access to global information therefore reducing travel and carbon emissions; profit: Attractively priced annual memberships reduce travel costs; people: instant connection to global trends that allows quick infusion of different cultural styles into the design phase.

The above are a couple of examples of how one can begin to develop alternative sustainable processes for selecting color inspirations. We will continue with Step 2 in our next posting, which will focus on sustainable methods for communicating the color inspiration to the supply chain.

We would love to hear about your sustainable ideas for the color inspiration process.