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BUYING INTO COLOR THEORY

HOW DOES COLOR CHANGE HOW WE FEEL AND WHAT WE BUY? THANKS IN LARGE PART TO THE PANTONE COLOR INSTITUTE, COLOR THEORY IS LEAVING ITS MARK ON A RANGE OF INDUSTRIES, FROM RETAIL AND FOOD TO HOSPITALITY AND TRAVEL. **BY DERRIK J. LANG**



Martin Kesselman wanted to curb his son's *Fortnite* habit while still maintaining his status as a cool dad, so instead of simply powering down the PlayStation, the interior designer and color consultant from New York painted his teenager's room a more soothing shade of blue. That's right: He used color to dissuade his son from playing video games. "It's not necessarily a science, but painting a room goes a long way to change a mood," says Kesselman, who, as the founder of the shop Incolour, has created colors for the likes of paint makers

Benjamin Moore and Farrow & Ball. "In that case, more calming waves of blue as opposed to the chillier shades created a more mellow feel than a stimulating one."

It worked. Kesselman's son put down the controller and started playing more with his stepbrothers and sister, Elliyah (for whom Kessel-

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man originally named his scrumptious new shade of white for Farrow & Ball). The artist turned color master has a booming business making such meticulous decisions—collaborating with architects, designers, galleries and homeowners to psychologically craft spaces that inspire inhabitants to see through rose—or pale azure or Veronese green—colored glasses.

“For the most part, my clients are coming to me for good neutrals,” Kesselman says. “That’s the bulk of the work, but there are more and more clients who love and are fascinated by color. They decorate and redecorate. Then they do it again. It’s very different from when I grew up. You’d paint the walls and leave it that way for decades.”

Color, it seems, is having a moment. Make that several moments. A growing number of organizations now crown a color of the year as a way to capture chromatic attention. The tradition goes back to 1999, when the Pantone Color Institute unveiled the sensitive blue cerulean as its inaugural color of the year for 2000. Now, many others are painting by a similar number. For 2020, Benjamin Moore picked a blushy pink called First Light, while Sherwin-Williams chose the brooding blue Naval. Both manufacturers from the \$28 billion paint industry cited the public’s infatuation with nature and wellness as an inspiration for this year’s choices.

Laurie Pressman, Pantone Color Institute vice president, says a rotat-

ing committee made up of individuals from across different industries helps to decide Pantone’s color of the year. For this year, Pantone is spotlighting Classic Blue, a reassuring shade reminiscent of the sky at dusk. They take everything into account when selecting the hue—from what they’re spotting at trade shows to what is happening in the news. “Color is not a frivolous decision,” she says. “There are a lot of dollars that rest on having the right color. You have a consumer today who is very color conscious. They can spot it right away. It’s the first thing we see. You have one moment to make a first impression.”

From inspiration to realization, more than 10 million designers and producers around the world rely on Pantone’s proprietary swatches to help define and control color schemes. Pressman says its colors end up on everything: coffee cups to cars. According to the market research firm NPD Group, Pantone’s colors have at times appeared on half the garments sold in the United States.

The notion of color theory—that colors affect our everyday lives—is actually ancient. Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci were writing about it back in the 1400s, while Sir Isaac Newton developed the first color wheel in 1704. The difference now is that, thanks to social media, color trends change faster than an apple falls from a tree. “There’s so much information out there—from Pinterest to self-proclaimed color experts on Instagram—that consumers don’t know what or who to trust,” Pressman says. “We’ve lost many of the creative directors and people who are schooled in this field, so [Pantone] has become especially vital.”

Traditionally known as a B2B organization, Pantone itself has become a brand in recent years. The New Jersey-based company has partnered with Japanese clothing maker Uniqlo for a collection of cashmere sweaters in Pantone’s signature colors and teamed up with Universal Pictures and Illumination Entertainment to

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design Minion yellow, a color based on the lovable creatures from the *Despicable Me* animated franchise. Pantone now sells its own products, including color of the year merch.

The expanding appetite for a taste of every piece of the rainbow doesn't necessarily mean the market is oversaturated. In fact, Pressman says it's forced manufacturers to become more intentional. "Years ago, before the 2008 financial crash, you might have seen Nike do a different red for men, women and children," she explains. "Now you're seeing the same red carried throughout because color development is expensive." Instead, Pressman notes, brands are introducing different colored product lines throughout the year to keep up with the demand.

The tinted frenzy even has extended beyond established industries such as fashion, beauty and home

goods and into areas such as travel, hospitality and food. Since the rise of Millennial Pink in 2018, Disney has been unleashing food and products at its theme parks in colors such as Potion Purple, Arendelle Aqua, Briar Rose Gold and Belle of the Ball Bronze, to name a few. And the recently opened Angad Arts Hotel in St. Louis is the world's first hotel to allow visitors to choose a room based on one of four colors: green for rejuvenation, yellow for happiness, red for passion and blue for tranquility.

"Blue is by far the most popular color," says Angad Arts Hotel general manager Mark Aipperspach. "When people are looking online, I think that's the safest color. What's really interesting, though, is that when they arrive, guests often shift. When they're here and interacting with the staff and hearing about the different options, they realize the color

of the room can really change how they feel—and that means different things to different people."

For 2020, Pantone has partnered with fragrance maker Firmenich, audio branding agency Audio UX and luxury tea blender TeaLeaves to bring Classic Blue to smell, sound and taste—senses where color isn't traditionally a top factor.

For his part, color expert Kesselman believes designers and other creative types must continually pay attention to the Zeitgeist. In the end, however, it doesn't matter. Color is a personal decision—whether that's a milky white or a game-over blue. "I've probably painted the kids' rooms like four times since then," Kesselman says of his subliminal video game-suppressing color strategy. "My son actually just started high school. Forget about color of the year. I need a color of the day." ▼

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