



The successful use of color in a commercial interior is the most vital element in establishing the visual order that gives a space its identity. However, the power of color goes beyond the visual experience. Color can affect emotions and behaviors, evoke memories and contribute to healing. The importance lies in understanding the target audience of a given environment, and how color can impact their attitude and spirit.

From the carpet on the floor to the paint on the walls, how color is used can contribute to image perception, mood, activity levels, and general levels of comfort. Any commercial environment (corporate, retail, hospitality or institutional) has purpose. In corporate, the purpose could be all about a working environment for employees, or it could be a service destination for clientele as well. Both hospitality and retail are always destinations; it is just a matter of identifying the demographic of the customer and their expectations from the experience, whether leisure or more business oriented. Institutional settings are destinations as well, but not always by choice. As schools and hospitals have become more competitive, the interiors and use of color can give an edge to those times when use is optional. Each color family has its own properties that contribute to the emotional experience in a space.



COLORS

RED is a very powerful color. With the longest wavelength and slowest vibration, red has been shown to stimulate circulation. Because of this energy, red is particularly appropriate for areas where activity is (or needs to be) high, such as exercise areas for physical therapy, or in a corporate environment where high energy is projected as part of the image. As an appetite stimulant, red is ideal for restaurants. Too much red can be an irritant, so consider some toned-down shades with some yellow influences, such as rust or terra cotta. With red, a little bit can go a long way; it is, therefore, a useful accent color.

Without question, **ORANGE** is a happy color that combines the stimulating effects of both red and yellow. It has been used to treat depression and promote self-esteem. Orange is appropriate for areas of creativity and high energy, or where that image is so desired. It is a vital component in many ethnic palettes. Children, in particular, react well to orange, making it appropriate for schools, restaurants and retail stores where they are the target market.

YELLOW, too, is happy and stimulating. It has been shown to increase brain activity, organizational abilities and optimism. Therefore, yellow in its many forms is ideal for areas of intellectual activities such as libraries and research areas. In the not-so-primary shades of butterscotch and cream, yellow can project a calm studious environment, with underlying energy.

To the cooler side of the spectrum, **GREEN** brings a refreshing sense of nature to an interior. Green occupies more space in the spectrum visible to the human eye and is so pervasive in the natural world that it is an ideal backdrop for any number of applications. The balance of cool and warm (blue+yellow) does not make us calm necessarily, but lends a stability that is very comforting and familiar. Caution must be used in institutional settings, where "bad" green has been a staple of government issue.



BLUE is widely regarded as a calming color; promoting both mental and physical relaxation. The receding character of blue makes it ideal for small spaces or places for reflection and meditation. The calming qualities can slow down activity and cool down hot surroundings. With darker tones, the association is a conservative, classic color that projects just such an image.

Considered to be a meditative color, **VIOLET** is said to contribute to mental balance and calms fears. Because of these qualities, violets are especially appropriate for places of worship and spirituality. Violet is also associated with creativity and artistic endeavors, such as theater and artist studios. Operating rooms in hospitals often use violet for its calming effects.



PALETTES

In combination, colors assume more power. Familiar associations with iconic graphic design, period interior designs, fashion, technology and other global influences can evoke nostalgia. The effect is very different depending on the demographic of the observer. Younger people have no recollection of Harvest Gold and Avocado Green, which were so pervasive in the sixties, or the ubiquitous teal and mauve of the eighties. But an older demographic has strong feelings about the “dated” appearance of these color combinations. In general, palettes should be assembled with the knowledge of the various colors’ appeal to the target markets.

A **CALMING** color palette, suitable across generations, is comprised of colors with soothing qualities fortified by neutrals that reflect those colors in their undertones. These colors are luxurious in combination: dark brown, purple, and warm, silvery tones; or spa blues with aqua and warm charcoal to conjure up the tranquility most of us find with water. This type of palette is appealing to successful individuals of all ages, and is especially appropriate for upscale environments.

A **CONSERVATIVE** color group consists of classic colors as anchors. These are the colors we know (and wear) and find comfort in forever. Think little black dress and pearls, or chalk stripe suit with dark red power tie and crisp white shirt. These sorts of combinations lend an air of steadfastness and longevity. With some modern elements, the pitfalls of “stodgy” or “un-hipness” can be avoided.

Globalization, widespread travel and technology, as well as immigration, have seen the emergence of the **ETHNIC** palette. These colors are usually associated with specific identities and are generally combinations of warm earthy tones that reflect a certain heritage. Red and orange and brown and gold are strongly represented in these themes that speak to pride and respect for history and culture.

The sustainability movement has inspired an **ECO** palette, reflecting an interest in all things natural: organic colors, heavily anchored in greens and blues with warm undertones, and light, airy neutrals. Mineral colors, such as copper and silver, add a natural luster to this palette that is especially appealing to the devoted nature lover demographic.



TECHNO, represents colors inspired by computer games and graphics, and consists of cartoon-like bold colors: bright whites, vivid blue and yellow, and stark contrasts as attention-getters. This is the palette of energy and the way forward as we immerse ourselves in IT, the Internet and masses of information at our fingertips. Generation Y has grown up with these colors, and finds them familiar and energizing, whereas older generations may find these colors intimidating and harsh.

Of course, there are endless combinations of colors. These are just some of the many influences at work today that inspire how products and environments are put together. Product designers spend vast amounts of time trying to stay ahead of the curve in color trends, while never losing sight of the practical aspects of a given product.

When considering a palette, think of planes of color - floor, ceiling and walls – and calculate the contrast among the elements and how available light interacts within the space. Carpet is almost always the largest textile in a space. Consider making this choice first, and building around this selection.

While color trends are continually emerging, there are not really any “new” colors. What is new is how we look at them and ultimately use them in a space.



REFERENCES

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The author, Judith Ingalls, is Vice President of Style and Design for Fortune Contract, commercial carpet manufacturer in Dalton, Georgia. Fortune Contract combines form, texture, color and balance to create innovative products with both aesthetics and structural integrity. Judith is the career recipient of three IBD awards, including Best of Competition, and ten Solutia DOC Awards. Judith has created a broad range of award winning designs and continues her success with Fortune Contract's wide array of products.



706.279.3669 fax: 706.279.3668 800.359.4508 fortunecontract.com
P.O. Box 2287 Dalton, Georgia 30722