

'Colour trends hang in the air'



Text

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If you are to forecast colour trends, you need a broad view of the world. You learn from the past, pick up what is happening in the present and direct your eye for the future. As president of Color Marketing Group, Judith van Vliet keeps a sharp eye on everything taking place on the colour market. “Colour often reflects the universal feeling.”

Color Marketing Group was founded in 1961. This non-profit organisation has been making annual colour forecasts that look two to three years into the future. In order to do this, it is, in Judith van Vliet’s opinion, very important to keep an eye on what has happened in recent years. “Some colours come back every two to three years; lime, for example, is one such colour. Other information from the colour cycles can also be used for the future. If orange was important last year, there is a good chance that the colour will continue to play a role, although it may differ slightly in tone.” Those changes often go hand in hand with certain influences. Think of politics or economics. “But sustainability also has an impact on colour. Sustainable materials will never be bright orange, because the background colour of those materials makes that chemically impossible. This causes the orange colour to shift and it then features more grey or black tints.”

Combination of colour and material

For Van Vliet, politics and economy are important indicators of the direction in which the world is going with regards to colour. “In times of uncertainty and fear, populists emerge in politics. You see that clearly in Europe, where there is uncertainty about the economy, a possible Brexit, China versus Trump and the refugee issue. It may sound strange to talk about this when discussing colour forecasts, but the subjects you hear and read about every day have an influence on how we feel. It is not possible to draw a direct line to colour, but you do see it reflected in the purchasing behaviour of consumers. During times when the economy is not performing at its best, people are more inclined to purchase something sustainable that will last a long time. They tend to avoid colours that they might grow tired of, such as bright red, and instead opt for new

natural tints. That is to say: not a standard grey, but a warm grey and all types of beige that are enlivened with patterns and a mix of materials.” During times of uncertainty, Van Vliet adds, people look for warmth in their home. The combination of colour and material plays an important role here. “A trend you encounter a lot at the moment is brown, off-white and beige tones in combination with soft fabrics. Velvet is one such fabric that use to be used in the past for curtains, but which now appears in all sorts of accessories and on sofas. Other fabrics that are pleasant to the touch are also popular. Because the world outside is getting harder. At home, you want to create a place where you feel safe and comfortable.”

The colour of empathy

Color Marketing Group forecasts the trend colours for the coming years by working closely with around four hundred colour experts from all parts of the world. “We organise several workshops in Europe, Latin America, North America and Asia-Pacific. Around forty local members and non-members take part in each workshop. They are colour experts from a variety of industries, from the toppers of Akzo Nobel to designers at Yamaha and from pigment experts to professionals in the world of fashion. Everybody is asked to bring two trends or stories with them which they think will play an important role in a few years’ time. During the workshops, everybody presents their chosen trend. The beauty of this is that it doesn’t matter where people live or what industry they come from: there is always a common thread. That may have something to do with globalisation, but it also shows that a climate or a feeling is often universal.” What strikes Van Vliet is that you not only see that line in colour palettes, but also that certain words float to the surface. “In the workshops running up to 2020 we spoke a lot about empathy.



That is a counterpoint to the hard and individualistic world in which we live. What you see is that people are increasingly starting small initiatives. They are working together more and, for example, take on voluntary work to help maintain society. Empathy generally translates into warm colours. No blue or green, but often pink tones. And they differ very slightly per continent. In Europe they translate into terracotta pink, while in Asia there are always more soft, diluted colours, so they end up with a soft peach colour. You could say they both come from the same family but still differ slightly from each other.”

WARM TINTS AND SOFT FABRICS ARE A REACTION TO THE HARDENED OUTSIDE WORLD

The effect of light



The colour forecasts made by Color Marketing Group are communicated in a flat colour palette, that is RGB, CYMK, Pantone/Munsell, Ras and NCS. It is then up to the user to translate those standards to the material with which he or she is going to work. That can prove quite a challenge, Van Vliet knows from experience. “There is no such thing as pure colour. You often see people fall in love with a colour that they have seen on something transparent, but when the colour is transferred to textile, it changes completely because there is no light. Light works with transparency and gives very beautiful effects, but once you have material that does not allow any light to pass through it, then the colour immediately looks completely different. If someone insists on having a specific colour, you can do two things: try to get as close as possible to that colour or choose a shade that is slightly different, but which comes into its own on the chosen material. This latter option must always be subjected to a test: the chosen colour can act very differently on the final material than the colour you had in your head. And if it proves disappointing, you can start the whole process again from the beginning.” Van Vliet often encounters this type of colour problem at the end of the process because many people only think of colour at a late stage. A missed opportunity, she believes. “Scent is the first information that reaches the brain, followed by design and then colour. So if that is not good, you may very well have a fine product or design, but the chance that it will catch on is, I’m afraid, not very great.”



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Recycling and sustainability

In 2020, Europe is seeing, in addition to beige tones and terracotta pink, the return of lilac. "Officially that's a shade of purple, but much softer than we were used to in the past. This can be combined perfectly with the other trend colour: light-yellow ochre. Both are warm colours that reflect the spirit of the times." But recycling and sustainability are also, according to Van Vliet, going to play an important role and we shall see this translated into colour for quite some time. "Generation Z is playing a pioneering role in this. If young people know that something is not produced in a sustainable way, they simply don't buy it. We've dubbed a red-beige trend colour that arises from a mix of recycled materials - in particular glass and plastic - as 'uglyfull' because, objectively speaking, you could call it ugly, but you are seeing that colour more and more in the world of design. This colour expresses to some degree the rawness of recycled material and the effects that look like flaws: they don't seem completely finished and sometimes you have the feeling that it has been given a colour by accident. It is not particularly refined, but it is a direction we see in interior design and which, at the moment, is being embraced by early adapters. It is cool because

it responds to sustainability and the personalisation of a product." Van Vliet is personally a fan of the family of green tones. Although her taste shifts each year based on her colour forecast. "At the moment, lilac with fluorescent yellow is my favourite colour combination, but it's difficult to nail your colours to the mast when you discover so many new colours each year."

— JUDITH VAN VLIET

Judith van Vliet began her career at Kawasaki Motors Europe B.V. in Hoofddorp, where a colleague suggested that she attend a meeting of Color Marketing Group. That meeting felt like coming home. "Everybody thought and talked the same about colour." Within Kawasaki she started to specialise in Color Material and Finish. A few years later, she ventured into Italy where she has since 2012 been working as a colour designer for Clariant. In addition she has been working for Color Marketing Group since 2015 and in 2018 was appointed president. She is the first non-US president in the history of the organisation.



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