

THE SCIENCE BEHIND CHOOSING THE COLOUR OF THE YEAR

By Shannon Moneo
Photos by Breila Rose

Ever wonder how design, fashion or paint colours of the year are chosen? Is there a colour cabal operating in mid-town Manhattan? Perhaps a posse of company bigwigs gather for a Geneva retreat. Maybe behavioural scientists come up with calculations that reveal shades to dye for. Or is artificial intelligence spitting out a ticker tape of tones?

In reality, the process involves collaboration and the long-range study of various trends and happenings.

Montaha Hidefi is an expert in forecasting colour trends. Based in Guelph, Ontario, she's been working in a spectrum of colour-related jobs since 2003 in the Middle East, Europe and now North America. Hidefi is also vice-president of color forecasting for the U.S.-based Color Marketing Group.

When she sits down to determine the hot colours for the coming year, Hidefi has already been observing and analyzing artifacts of daily life. "Think of me as a colour archeologist. I'm always monitoring what is happening," she says. "I examine the past and observe the present to be able to forecast for the future."

Before that annual palette is revealed, organizations, be they a paint company, a design heavyweight or an internal team, have been at work for many months, monitoring trends.

A decade ago, only a handful of companies created colour trends. "Now it's become a trend to come up with a colour trend," Hidefi says. And in the past, the colours for the upcoming year were usually revealed in October at the earliest. Now, companies such as Behr, make proclamations in July.

To get to the point of the big reveal, work begins far in advance.

"We follow a methodology that includes continuous monitoring of the mega trends, long-term, related to society, technology, environment, politics, economics and much more. In addition, we investigate the macro trends and observe how society is interacting with the ongoing events stemming from the big picture," Hidefi explains.

"We then recognize the micro trends, short-term, that are going to play a role in the mood of society and how they will be influencing



people's preferences. This leads to the buildup of trend stories that echo the upcoming moods and attitudes. The trend stories define the colour forecast."

An example would be the environment as a mega trend, the increase of temperatures as a macro trend and then wildfires as a micro trend.

In each organization, a team comes up with three or four of these trend stories. For each story, the team comes up with four, five or six colours that go with the story.

Each organization or company wants to reveal unique colours. They also do not consult one another. Differing opinions on the trending colours are because the forecasters may be monitoring different topics and matters of interest. "Their geographical area, background and industry they do business with, will influence the colour stories and the colour selection," Hidefi says. But she notes, the gap is narrowing because of digitalization and the globalization of information.

Still, because colour represents the psychology of a society, countries or even regions within the same country, different macro and micro trends will drive colour trends and cultural associations with colour, Hidefi notes. Think of orange for Protestant Ireland, red for Communism or red, white and blue for the U.S.

The choice of a muted green as 2022's colour,

by several corporations, is a rare occurrence. Hidefi is puzzled how five paint companies came up with similar opinions. It may be pandemic-related, because COVID-19 has touched every corner of the globe. "Now we want to bring Mother Nature into our houses," says Hidefi.



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The role of colour in our lives often goes unrecognized.

"It's said that over 80 percent of the purchasing decision-making is based on colour. This decision is made unconsciously based on our personal preferences in the first seconds of seeing a product. We need colour to enhance our surroundings, to protect the surfaces and also to increase the resell appeal of our homes. We need colour for the sake of our wellbeing. We need colour to escape from certain mental situations or to enter certain visual atmospheres. Colour is an important element of our lives, even if we don't pay attention to it."