

FLOWERS

fit for a

FASHION SHOW

Color trend savviness does not belong only to the realm of The Gap, Nordstrom and flamboyant trendoids. Bringing their concepts into your store can help you move product out the door.

By Ken
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Flowers and plants are the biggest single accessory in interior and exterior design — and the most important accessory. Look in any architectural or home design magazine, and you'll see the importance of the focal point of plants and floral materials. So where does fashion end and your industry begin? Color is the crossover element.

A LITTLE RETRO, A LITTLE SPACE AGE

Color today is layered. It has pattern, texture and sheen. We're seeing transparency, translucency, luminosity and colors that have pearlescent pigment in them, giving depth and interest.

Rather than space age trends, we're going retro. That affects nursery sales, because I've seen retro-gardens, retro-colors and people doing theme gardens — colors that grandma had — hollyhock and romantic, pretty things like that, instead of space-age themes.

The Flash Gordon presence is in the way things are being produced today, with complex color that's metallic with light-reflecting sheen, transparent and translucent.

AND THE WINNING COLORS ARE . . .

The blue right now is Chinese export blue. Rather than a shiny, futuristic blue, this is a blue that is hundreds and hundreds of years old.

Purple and violet are very important. Purple/violet is not the biggest volume seller, but it is the most important accent color out there. If you don't use purple in some way in a display in your nursery, then you are missing out. Think of the recessive blue-purple-violet family to counterbalance the warm colors like reds and yellows, which advance. Certainly the longest-lasting color in the garden as the sun sets is white — it has the greatest visibility — but the ones that dis-

appear first are blue and violet. Purple has become an extremely supportive color in small doses and accents. There are two directions of purple: one is decisively blue, the other is more red-violet. Both are equally important.

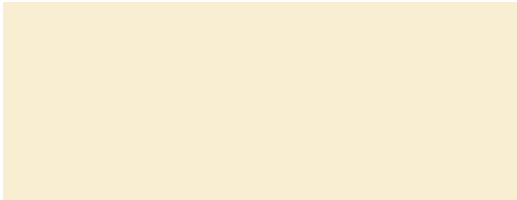
Mauve never totally disappears in any trend. I choose props that say "romantic," things that feel old-fashioned, such as a display with tables and old lace, emphasizing the "prettiness" of this whole color family. And, it's not just rosy-mauvy, but clear up to pink, which is also a very important color. Not just in our industry, but in fashion: right now it's pink and pink-into-magenta.

Red is always a classic. We'll continue with the deep wine colors like burgundy, cranberry and sage (okay, you might as well know: I was the guy who named the colors), but the red that has emerged — at least in interiors and other places — is red-red; red with a vengeance, red that is so red it borders on red-into-orange. Not for everyone! Some people like subtle, but there are also some of your customers who want drop-dead gardens. They're flashy to begin with and want to make a statement with a red-white, high-contrast kind of garden — in contrast to the soft, pretty, romantic kind of garden we spoke about before.

The color of the minute is coral. Orange is all over the place, all over London. Brooks-Brothers did orange in their catalog this year (whatever happened to that conservative, buttoned-up store?). If I were going to feature anything in a store, I would do a coral, white and orange garden. I would put that right up front. Coral and coral-into-orange are extremely important right now (and extremely flashy, too).

Brown and earth-related colors — anything that feels real, anything that feels related to the earth, anything that feels less than phony — has returned. In general, we're seeing anything that has to do with this whole earthy palette — including browns, cordova, earthy reds and leather as a whole palette. It's not just brown, it's many ♦

Top: Pink flowers against yellow-green foliage reflect today's hot colors that will drive sales; Above: Pinks are always a popular color and often inspire nostalgic, romantic feelings. (Flower



things, but they all feel real and tangible and have a tactile sense.

What has happened to lead us down the path to the return of yellow and yellow-gold — amber-like, orange-undertone gold. Watch it return. This time I promise we won't call it harvest, we'll call it something else.

We're also seeing the return of yellow-green, so I'd suggest developing plant material and leaves of yellow-green. You can even do a green-on-green garden with the many shades of green. If I were going to do something featuring green and yellow-green, I would do something complement to the color wheel and make purple and violet part of that. If you're looking for inspirations on that, get a color wheel and look opposite.

We have two kinds of green: dark, hunter green and, within that, a whole emergence of something called black and green. Remember that the yellow and yellow-green family is coming back, but if you put traditional green with it, there are too many blue undertones. What you need with it is a dark green — almost a black — and green with a lot of yellow in it that we call “black forest green.” Speaking of black, we're hung up on it. I don't think it's ever going to end. We're obsessed with it. There's black in everything. Green is also related to the black family and, as a substitute for black, I would choose black forest green.

But I also want to talk about white, because the minute that black became so prevalent, white became important. But you couldn't use an off-white with black, because linen-white against black always looks dirty, so, instead, we need white-white. You can do wonderful, outrageous things in gardens — funky things, like with orange or magenta-based colors — as long as you make white the stabilizer. This choice of no-color in our industry is akin to natural grasses and things that are indigenous to parts of the country.

If you ask me what colors are “not” in, I'd say colors that look artificial or chemically made, like blue mums and carnations. Tactility and essence are very important. With aromatherapy, feng shui and all the choices in lifestyles we have today, don't disconnect from that. And, if you can play up the “essence” in plants, do it.

MERCHANDISE YOUR COLOR

Do you want to sell your plant material? You must take the time to show customers how to get it together. You can't just put your flats out there; you must merchandise the color and show them. If you've done prepotted planters, you know they sell like hotcakes.

The Gap has mastered the art of merchandising color. How do you know what's new at The Gap? You trip over it as you come into the store. They have this barrier featuring all the new, hot colors. Behind that are all the classics — the things they always have: black, navy blue, red and so on. Make your customer trip over “new” colors as they come in your store. Don't be afraid to put up signage: “It's new, it's hot,” whatever. Create a feeling of movement.

And don't confuse reality with color merchandising. Sometimes in color merchandising, you have to beat the customer over the head, overstate something that allows them to pull back and do it a little more conservatively. For instance, go to any bed/bath section of an



Above: Red-into-orange with purple accents. This is a perfect way to showcase your purple flowers while capitalizing on the popularity