"Color does not add a pleasant quality to design – it reinforces it."

– Pierre Bonnard
Introduction

Color is an underrated design tool. When used correctly, it can make a website sing. When I was a beginner designer, I often used too many colors in my designs. This section will help you avoid that mistake. It will also help you approach your color choices methodically. You’ll have tangible reasons for why you picked that dark purple or that candy apple green. Most importantly, all your colors will work with your website’s concept, brand, and style to tell a cohesive story.

In this chapter we’ll discuss:

• What influences your color choices
• B&W + One Color
• Analogous
• Complementary
• Split Complementary
• Triad

What influences your color choices

When thinking about colors, you should keep in mind the following three things:

Concept (Chapter Two):

If your concept is water-related, using lots of red probably won’t work well. Water & the color red live in different worlds. Your colors should support your concept. Or at the very least, not conflict.

Brand (Chapter Three):

Say you’re doing a site for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC. That’s a very serious subject. The tone of any war memorial is respectful and serious. So your color choices should reflect that. Bright happy colors would feel out of place, in the same way that someone selling balloons near the memorial would feel tacky.

Also, respect the client’s brand guidelines. If you’re doing a microsite for Ikea, it’s likely you’ll have to use their signature blue and yellow.

There are some instances when the site experience is so far removed from the brand that you can use other colors. But before doing this, make sure you clear it with your creative director or the client.

Style (Chapter Ten):

Here’s where your personal tastes can have a voice. What style(s) are you considering from the style section? Your color choices should support that style. Design trends can be considered too. As you explore the color options on the following pages, imagine what colors might work well with the design style you’re considering.
This first style isn’t a part of color theory like the rest of the chapter but it is a simple and effective approach that can work well.

**POSSIBLE USES:**

- To make dissimilar images cohesive
- To bring attention to conceptually important colors
Necon


This is a portfolio site for an ad agency. Necon has executed dozens of projects for clients with various photography and art direction styles in them. This is problematic because showing multiple projects in full color on their site could make it feel disjointed. They solved this by using a coral color as an overlay on top of all the images. It makes the page cohesive. When every image has coral in it, they have a common denominator that anchors them. You can still hover over an image to reveal a full-color screenshot of a project or click through to view the individual project page. I think the color coral was a stylistic choice rather than a conceptual one, although it's hard to say without knowing the background of the project.

BLACK AND WHITE + ONE HIGHLIGHT COLOR
Giventory

http://www.ginventory.co

This is a promotional page for a gin recipe app. The yellow color comes from the concept. Gin is a pale straw color, so it’s a nod to that.
Beoplay/Rapha Headphones

http://bit.ly/1QwCemQ

This is a cross-promotional product page that Beoplay made for their ‘Rapha’-style headphones. Rapha is a company that makes cycling clothing and accessories. Pink is their signature color, so Beoplay wanted to highlight it, rather than use their own colors and photography style.
COLOR STYLE TWO

Analogous

Analogous colors are near each other on the color wheel. This style works best when three or four colors are used. Often there will be one dominant color which the other colors defer to.

POSSIBLE USES:

- To convey a harmonious mood
- When the content of the site is friendly
Mambo Mambo

http://mambomambo.ca

This is a portfolio site for a creative agency in Québec, Canada. I think the tropical aesthetic here is done ironically because Québec is awfully cold! The green and yellow creates a happy and friendly feeling.
Concept Car Site
http://bit.ly/1QwCkuO

A homepage mockup designed by Vivek Venkatraman. The blues and blue grays here create a pleasant and consistent mood.
Cereal Magazine

http://readcereal.com

This site uses a lot of grays throughout. Because these grays are neutral, it allows you to put just about any style or color of photo you want over it.
Complementary colors are on the opposite sides on the color wheel. Complementary colors should be approached with caution on the web because they create a lot of tension. If you have large areas of the page with these colors, it can hinder communication. The examples below are a few examples that work ok.

POSSIBLE USES:

- When you want the page to pop
- To create excitement if the content of the site is dull
Sonor Design

http://radium.ro/?page_id=530

Here he uses a muted red/orange and a light blue/green. In fact, there’s just a hint of blue in there. The design works because the colors aren’t too intense.
Orange PR & Marketing


The use of color is leaned upon heavily in this design, more than any other example shown. It works well here because the colors aren’t fighting other elements for attention.

Enlarge
Specialized
http://bit.ly/1OUUqo9

From the designer: “The design itself was largely inspiring by the angular shape of the frame which is translated through the cutaways and diamond shapes throughout the design.”
Financial Claims Made Easy

https://financialclaimsmadesimple.co.uk

Notice how they use the purple sparingly. It allows the lightness of the yellow to come through.
COLOR STYLE FOUR

Split Complementary

Split complementary colors are nice because they combine the pleasantness of analogous colors with a bit of spunkiness that complementary colors have.

POSSIBLE USES:

• Almost anywhere
Spina
https://spinanyc.com

Spina is a flower shop in NYC. You could almost say this color scheme is complementary because the greens and pinks are so dominant, but I think there’s enough yellow sprinkled throughout for it to be split complementary.
Drug Addiction PSA

http://www.addiction.mobydigg.de

This site explores what causes drug addiction. The purple and red are very bold and impossible to ignore. Notice that the green has a little blue in it, that’s ok! I bet they started with a more normal looking green but then tweaked it to feel more dangerous and drug-like.
El Burro Mexican

http://elburro.no

This site is for a Mexican restaurant in Norway. Notice how the colors also appear in photos of the food. That helps hold the composition together. And it was possibly the inspiration for the pink, orange, and green color scheme.

¡Bienvenidos!

El Burro is a casual burreria that serves authentic Mexican streetfood in the heart of Frogner, Oslo. At El Burro passion is the most important ingredient, and we bring you the beauty of Mexican flavours in every bite.
**Guess**

http://bit.ly/1p3Drf1

Here the designer wanted people to focus their attention on the spring / summer line, so she used colors from the actual products and photo shoots. Notice how muted the colors are - it makes the contrast between the colors less intense, thus allowing MORE color to be used. If the colors were not muted, the page would likely be too intense.
COLOR STYLE FIVE

Triad

Triads use three colors, all equidistant from one another. Triads create a more mature kind of variety of color, as opposed to energetic split-complementary colors. If split-complementaryies are the lively 1963 'She Loves You' Beatles, Triads are the more mature 1970 - "Let it Be" - Beatles.

POSSIBLE USES:

• To create variety without much drama
• To convey a sense of strength
This is the online portfolio of an art director / designer. Online portfolios can use just about any color scheme, so perhaps he just liked how these colors looked.

My name is Lorenzo Verzini, Italian designer & art director living in London, working in the field for more than 9 years. I create digital branding experiences for small and big companies.

PS: I am currently available for work. Get in touch at l@lorenzoverzini.com.
Antoine Laoun makes stylish glasses. Personally, I have mixed feelings about this design. I like the colors and the layout, but it’s unclear why each pair of glasses was designated that particular color (besides the blue pair). So in this example, the colors and concept aren’t quite working together.
Triplagent

http://www.triplagent.com

Triplagent is a website and travel app. The rich colors on the page pull you in.