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# Traditions and Trends



By Linda McKendry

## Understanding How Colours, Patterns and Styles Drive Sales

I have been tracking trends in colour, pattern and style for over 30 years and it's a fascinating journey. Colours drive patterns and patterns drive styles. In the case of the floral industry, colour trends will drive varieties that suddenly become popular and in demand. Nature, with a little help from cross-pollination, produces such a variety of colours that there's hardly a colour in the spectrum unrepresented in some flower somewhere.

Trends cycle. The cycles are predictable, but they are cycling at an increasingly fast pace. Technology and consumer confidence are generating this because products are manufactured and shipped more quickly. This is happening as soon as a colour, pattern or style is perceived in the international marketplace as being a major trend. Once sunflowers were established as a trend in home decor, they became popular and drove up sales in flower shops across North America. It tied in with the equally popular trend in rooster motifs and cows as collectibles.

And then the blue cycle was progressing. So, enter blue hydrangeas and the companion floral varieties in the blue/lavender spectrum. Then, because of the popularity of the flower itself in arrangements, it emerged in many different shades to follow the colour trends of the day. We even allowed hydrangeas to be sold in their past-prime faded colours because they fit in perfectly with the neutral tones of distressed painted furniture.

Colours follow the colour wheel from blue to red to yellow. They also cycle from light shades to dark shades. The colour pallet that emerged in 2002 was almost an exact duplicate of what was offered in 1983/84 – a 20-year span. The patterns and styles also cycle because they are driven by the colours. A bride doesn't think about wanting a lavender rose in her wedding bouquet unless she's first been influenced by a bridesmaid's gown or a celebrity wedding featured in the media and, secondly, she believes there's a flower shop that offers such a thing!

When a colour is introduced into the marketplace it is usually seen as an accent colour and in its darkest form. Look back and test this. In home decor, for example, we had black and red Spanish influence before we had grey and dusty rose. We had rust before we had peach and we saw a lot of hunter green before seafoam green predominated. In fact, when Wedgewood blue was popular, it had been preceded by navy! If you want to know what colours are coming, find a popular print and look for the smallest, darkest colour – the colour that is needed to complete and complement the print, but also the colour that would be the least acceptable if there was a lot of it in the marketplace right now!

An interesting phenomenon is that even though the identical

colours cycle back, we will not call them by the same name! For example, avocado in the '70s was called olive nouveau in the '90s. Harvest gold is renamed curry, and good old rust is now called terra cotta. It is also well known that the name given to a colour highly influences the use of that colour.

If you want to use colour names to influence sales, just create arrangements and give them a name on the price tag or in-store sign. For example, an arrangement made with an oriental touch of spiralled twigs and a variety of flowers from the Far East in the dark, currently trendy russet colour could be called "Li Chi Plum Passion," following the colour and possibly reflecting the texture of this popular fruit. You not only target the colour trend watchers but also those interested in following an equally trendy home fashion decorating process called feng shui.

Scientists know that we don't respond to colours emotionally, even though we use emotional terms to describe our reaction to colours. We respond to colours physiologically – this means we physically need all the colours in the spectrum. Colours are only visible because of light. Light contains all the colours.

Colours are produced because of what we see reflected vs. what is absorbed, and we won't go there! It's a huge science in and of itself.

Just a side note here to explain why I, as a merchandising consultant, harp on lighting in store displays. Light is life. Without the right light the true colour characteristics of products, including floral displays, are not appreciated.

Another thing to mention is that in the past there has been a "conspiracy" to withhold the colours from one part of the spectrum in order to make a demand for the missing colours. This was designed for two reasons. One was to create a demand in anticipation of the colours coming next on the colour wheel, because as humans we need all the colours to be present. The other motivation was "planned obsolescence," which is what happens when a trend is suddenly outdated.

This leads to two major problems. The first is psychological – the perception of being old, tired or not with it. The other problem is much worse. If consumers now want to add some items to their established decor, such as towels in a bathroom, or even a silk flower arrangement, they can't find the right colours. In fact, the current colours will usually make their existing decor look even more dated. This can be very frustrating to consumers and to you, the retailer, trying to help them. We are seeing a trend towards colour pallets which include more of the colours on the colour wheel in a given year, opening up more possibilities.

When I refer to colours driving patterns in the floral industry, this translates into two different things. First, it translates to the

(original ads replaced by illustrations suitable for topic)

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species of flower that suddenly becomes popular. When the blue cycle, which has just peaked, was at its height, we saw an increase in the popularity of hydrangeas and other blue/lavender hues in flowers. White is the neutral that makes blue and lavender more fresh and clean looking. We also saw a push towards pewter and silver in the industry, compared to the popularity of gold/brass when we were in a cycle dominated by the yellow influence just prior to this. Copper is the colour that emerges as a metallic complement in container materials when we are in the orange influence, which happens as we make the transition from a predominantly red cycle into the yellow cycle.

Second, it translates into the combinations of flowers and botanicals that make up the arrangements. Style follows both the colours and the patterns or varieties used. By style I mean whether an arrangement is simple, maybe featuring a single flower, or more complex and full of variety with lots of attention paid to detail. One style might focus on a single popular colour while another is leaning towards a more traditional arrangement combining several colours.

The main issue is that you as a retailer pay attention to the trends. Go along with them because it will drive your sales for dry, silk and preserved flower arrangements as home decor or hotel lobby accents. In weddings, the colours, patterns and styles are driven by the fashion industry, which has a cycle that is like a “wheel within a wheel” of the greater trends. This is why you are seeing more colour in bridal bouquets and not just white. As the consumer gets more educated and influenced by the media, preferences become more specific and detailed.

In order to market your products across the entire spectrum, because you have an understanding that a flower arrangement can update a decor more quickly than anything else, all you have to do is combine some old colours with the new ones coming in.

In visual merchandising, I still hold to making displays based on grouping, and spacing according to colour, pattern and style. Make up displays that will appeal to all the colour groups, but make sure they are shown in separated venues or fixtures. Go shopping in home decor shops and check out the entire spectrum of what’s being offered in textiles since this will give you the best clue about the trends. Also, purchase decorating magazines from time to time and try to show in your shop some of the decor elements being featured.

Follow the trends but keep the “typical” elements in sight at all times, since one of the trends is always the traditional! ☐

Linda McKendry of VMPC offers on-site consulting and instruction for retailers, wholesalers, distributors and manufacturers. Linda has presented display seminars at the CMA Gift Show and the Alberta Gift Show. To order her book, *VMP & Display*, call (905) 813-8725, fax (905) 819-8505 or e-mail [lrnckce@attglobal.net](mailto:lrnckce@attglobal.net).



Trends are Predictable!  
Fads are not.  
Trends Take Time.  
Fads Fade Fast.



By creating themes based on color, old, new and trendy items can be shown in the same venue. This allows your products to appeal to more target markets, and sell through items from every season and celebration!

Don't scatter different colors patterns and styles all over the store. Use color blocking and vertical displays.

