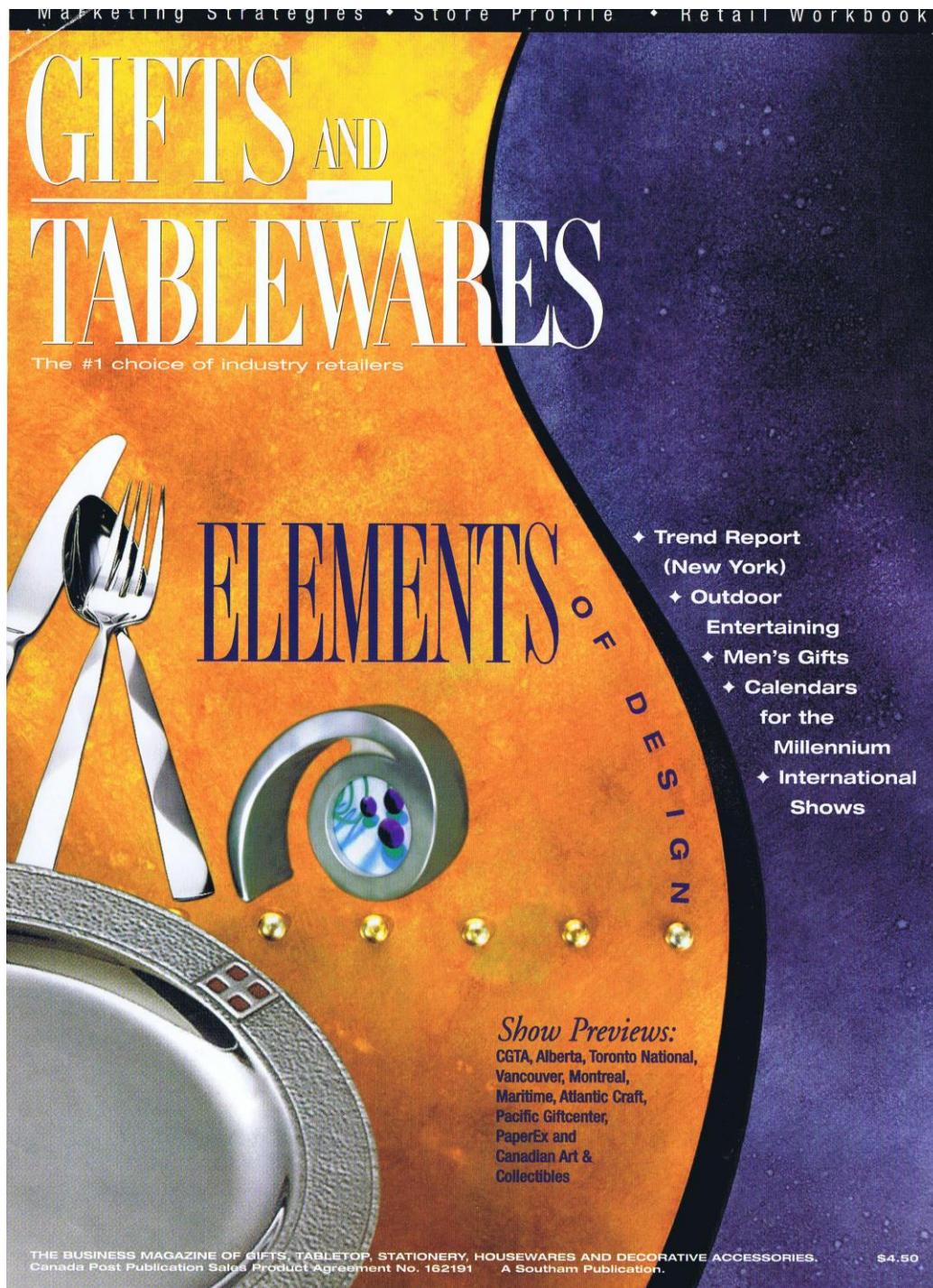


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Opposites



BY LINDA MCKENDRY,
VMPC

Attract

READER QUESTION: Help! What can I do to make my shelves look less cluttered and my displays more distinctive? From a distance all my products seem to run into each other and look the same.

LINDA'S ANSWER: I always get a laugh from my audiences when I tell them that I don't care how fat my husband gets because then I can get fat too and still look skinny next to him. Now the truth is that he isn't fat. I just use that little quip as an introduction into teaching about contrasts. Everything is relative based on where it is placed. What you place a product next to, or in front of, will change how it is viewed. Remember what I'm always teaching: Visual is physical (what the eyes see), mental (what the mind thinks about what it sees) and emotional (the response to what is seen).

Some contrasting elements, just like some people who are opposites, fight and compete, instead of complementing one another. This happens when both want to be in the spotlight at the same time and vie for the position. An example of this is bright red and green stripes, or some black and white checks that appear to be "jumping" or "moving" when you look at them.

Once, when I was merchandising a furniture store a black and cream striped sofa arrived. A customer walked by while I was arranging the room grouping and said, "Oh, what a beautiful sofa but it hurts my eyes to look at it. Imagine living with that!" It was a very high-end sofa. I realized that the only way to stop this visual competition between the stripes on the sofa was to throw something *more contrasting* against the stripes and "break them up." I accomplished this by placing a cream-colored cushion in each corner. It worked. We sold the sofa—with a warning not to remove the cushions!

Therefore, the colors, patterns and styles to put together are those that contrast but aren't "fighting," such as colors with the same intensity. Use contrasts to bring out the best features of each item in a display grouping while target marketing. For example, a little

shiny, ceramic piggy bank looks smoother and shinier standing in front of a cozy knitted outfit. The detail on a sculpted nursery picture frame will show up best in front of a soft, solid-colored baby blanket. A fluffy fleece sleeper may be placed behind a story book. Look for contrasts of *texture* as well as *finish* and *color*. From a distance each will stand out more and make the display more interesting and exciting for the viewer.

I'm always reminding my clients that the three things that catch the eye are *light*, *movement* and *contrast*. But even when the light isn't just right, contrast can make a big difference. For example, items with bright metallic or shiny finishes catch the light and stop the eye. Light-colored materials create great backdrops for darker products, making their shapes and sizes more visible from a distance or through glass.

I was working in a store recently that was disappointed in their handbag displays which were located on a fixture in front of a very prominent window. The shop was inside a building with very little light coming through the glass from outside and no focused lighting on the products in the window. This meant that dark items next to the glass were only creating a black glass effect that was reflecting all the activities going by the shop while hiding the products from view.

In the absence of getting more light into the window, the answer to attracting more attention immediately is in the clever use of contrasts. I recommend a gold brooch on a cream-colored scarf to be draped from a dark leather handbag. Positioning a larger cream-colored handbag, scarf or garment behind the dark bag gives additional contrast and shows off its shape and size. The additional benefit is a cross-merchandised display that will increase sales of other product lines too.

Contrasts also work to "move the eyes" in

the direction you want them to go. Many of you have watched my demonstration of holding my hands up and out and asking you, "How many eye movements to see each hand?" As I watch your eyes jump back and forth from one to the other, I know you will say, "Two." Then I pull my hands together side by side, palms still facing you and I ask the same question. I watch your eyes make little movements from one hand to the other, but you will say, "One."

Then I move my hands slightly apart and ask you, "How do your eyes travel to see both hands?" and you will say, "Back and forth." or "Side to side." I then raise one hand about a thumb's length higher than the other and ask you the same question. Now you will say, "Up and down." I always use this illustration to explain that when we line products up in a row, especially ones that are the same height, we are asking the customer to "scan" the shelf. Scanning is tiring.

When we go to the supermarket and see all the hair care products lined up in a row the only thing that stops our eye will be the color of our favorite brand—the color our eye is searching for. Once we see it, we pick up the item, throw it in our basket, and move on—quickly. However, if there is a gap or an empty spot, our eyes will glance down to that place against their will because of contrast. The eye was moved and stopped. Some shops I work in have too much empty space between shelves and the eye jumps into that empty space instead of at the products displayed. Remember people are drawn to abundance. If you can't minimize this space by moving the shelves then invest in risers to lift the products on the shelf or hang products in the empty spaces to minimize their impact. Bringing products to the front of the shelves is another trick to hide the empty space behind.

Also use contrast of size and height of products to make displays more creative and interesting. If you have purchased a series of items that are similar in color, pattern, and style but have different shapes and sizes, you move the customer's eye around in the display more when they are arranged from back to front so that they overlap slightly, not just lined up from side to side in one row.

I often say "bigger is better" when referring to props or products to be seen from the greatest distance. But I also point out that these massive items should "point to" the department or other similar items that relate to it but are smaller in size and price point. Each product creates a backdrop for the one in front of it and sometimes just the shadow creates enough of a contrast to show off silhouettes and make interesting shapes, textures or color differences more obvious.

Props that contrast are used to attract attention and "whet the appetite of the buyer" the same way that garnishes are used in presenting food. The cherry on the cake or the parsley on the carrots are the finishing touches that enhance the visual appeal, increase the appetite and send a message that special attention has been given to detail. Our feelings about the food and the cook are greatly influenced. Our expectations are high. A little sprig of artificial fruits or berries tucked in a folded napkin fanning out of a ceramic mug not only looks more interesting but will increase sales for every item it is placed with. Imagine this item in the same display as fruit-flavored gourmet foods.

The last contrast I want to point out is that of space surrounding a grouping or display. The edges of a frame or even a fixture are a contrast that pulls the eye into a display and holds it there. It tells the viewer that all these things belong together and are separated from the things "next door" on another shelf, or in another display. When a display is sitting on glass shelves where there are no contrasting borders then the answer lies in creating backdrops to stop the eye at the display. One way is to look for items such as trays, placemats, large photo frames, platters, greeting cards and even greenery or floral arrangements that can act as "foils" or "screens" to separate competing product displays.

Another way is with my favorite display product, foamcore. This board, readily available in craft and stationery stores, comes in a standard size 20" x 30" sheet. It scores and bends or can be cut into all sorts of shapes with just a lino-type knife. Orange circles make pumpkins for backgrounds and props in Halloween displays. Red boards make instant hearts for Valentine's Day displays. White boards make bells and black boards make top

hats for wedding displays. The beautiful hue of blues, lavenders, greens and even the gold, copper, and silver metallic shades work with the new lines of tableware and floral accessories. Primary colors work with toys and carved wooden products for children. Whenever you need a pattern to bring a group of colors together, just glue the paper or fabric that works best in your display as a contrasting background to a piece of foamcore.

Opposites do attract! Especially with props and products placed together in harmony and working as a team to enhance each

other. When they do this right, you will find your sales go up because people will want to purchase the whole team and not just a single player! Remember too, that "one-zy" item you are ready to discount may be the perfect product to team up with a contrasting group. And they'll get along, right into a customer's hands and out the door.

For Linda's services call 905-813-8725 or write to VMD Merchandising Presentation Consulting Ltd., 6567 Highway Drive, Mississauga, Ontario. L5V 1J6.

(original ads replaced by illustrations suitable for the topic)

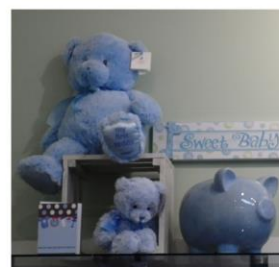


A series of feature displays bring items from different departments to showcase the selection and variety of what's for sale.

Ceramic, painted wood, plush, textiles, and wall decor all contrast in either color, pattern, or style. This attracts attention to more departments, more markets and more buying motivation.



When there are opposites of texture, color, pattern, and style, each one makes the other stronger in it's own right. They attract.



In the world of gardens the most common opposites are plants and containers or plants and sculptures. Each one enhances the other. The pots are a visual anchor and plants soften hard surfaces and edges.