The Power of Color

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Color plays a powerful role in our daily lives. It drives our decisions small and large, from what we wear to the hue we paint our walls. Color psychology provides a guide to how colors affect human behavior, but it is a tricky business. Colors represent a varied range of attributes and emotions for each of us based on influences from society, culture and our individual personalities. Although it is almost impossible to nail down definitions for specific colors, there are themes and trends prevalent in a range of societies and environments that give us a good idea of the powerful influence of color.

The psychological influence of color is so strong that it can reduce crime, affect our opinion of the effectiveness of placebo pills and cause us to drive faster. And in a society where social media has an unprecedented impact, we are color obsessed. Trends sweep across Instagram and Snapchat, affecting industries such as fast-fashion like never before. Colors gain enough mass popularity to receive proper titles like Millennial Pink, which became so popular news organizations such as CNN report on its rise to stardom. Pantone's Color of the Year — Living Coral in 2019 — is another prime example of the craze for color. For the past 20 years, the winning color has prompted strong reactions from designers and consumers worldwide. Once it's announced, it affects product development and purchasing decisions in multiple industries, including fashion, home furnishings and industrial design, as well as product packaging and graphic design.
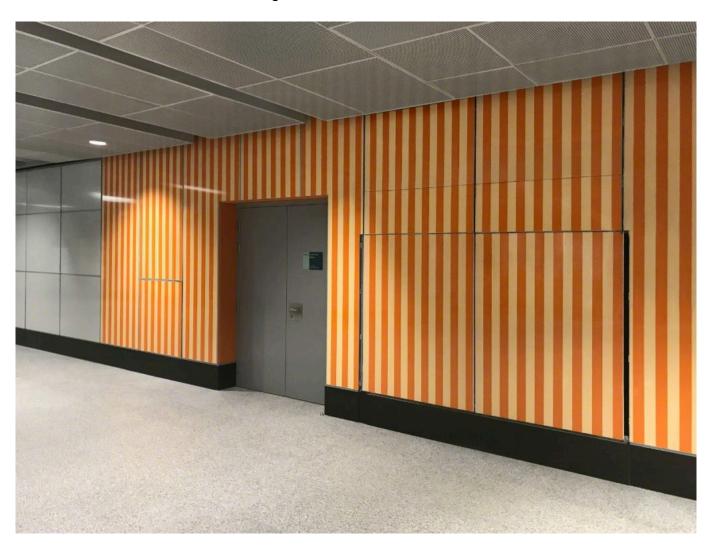
How do we see color?

With its incredible influence on our lives, it's interesting to take a step back and understand how exactly we perceive color.

When we perceive light, it kicks off a biological domino effect. As light hits an object, some of it is absorbed, while some of it is reflected. The human eye receives the reflected light and depending on the light's wavelength, we see different colors. These wavelengths hit your retina at the back of your eye. Cones are tiny cells in the back of the retina that process light and send a signal through the optical nerve to your brain, which then labels the color and releases a

fountain of associations and meanings.

Not all of your cones are alike according to an [article on Live Science](#), "About 64 percent of them respond most strongly to red light, while about a third are set off the most by green light. Another two percent respond strongest to blue light." This is why we react so strongly to the color red and it's used to grab our attention on stop signs, emergency vehicles and warnings worldwide. Greens and blues are the primary colors found in the natural world. The well-known calming effect of these colors is evidenced by the fact that our hunter-gatherer ancestors spent 190,00 years immersed in nature, providing a sign that our receptiveness towards these colors is an evolutionary link to our modern-day traits.

According to a study conducted at the Brooklyn College and reported by [National Geographic](#), the distinction between colors is different for men and women. The study discovered that men are less adept at distinguishing among shades in the center of the color spectrum — blues, greens, and yellows — and that they require a slightly longer wavelength to experience the same hue of color as a woman. Longer wavelengths are associated with warmer colors, implying that colors like orange might appear more red to a man than a woman.

Color is a powerful design tool

These variations in environmental design, among the colors we respond to, the way that we perceive light and the range of emotions we attach to specific hues, influence our everyday surroundings. At work and in educational settings, color is a powerful tool that can be used to boost moods, motivate and spark creativity. On the other hand, inappropriate color selections can have the opposite effect, bringing on unwanted emotions like stress and distraction.

Biophilic design — incorporating elements of nature through multi-sensory experiences like wood surfaces and organic colors and patterns — is one example of how the intentional use of color has the power to provide comfort and spark the flow of ideas. As reported in 360 Magazine, "Biophilic design will help people gain the feeling that they have the places to settle, explore, adapt and be creative. Those benefits lead to stronger connection and collaboration, as well as trust in the ability to rejuvenate at work." Contrary to colors that soothe and rejuvenate, colors like red can have harmful effects. One study found that exposing students to the color red prior to an exam has been shown to have a negative impact on test performance.

When designing for environments, think first about the atmosphere you want to create as a guide before introducing color into the equation. Whether it's a bright, eye-catching graphic or a subtle hint of color along the edges, architectural surfaces, like CeramicSteel, offer a vast range of color options and applications. Tying together colors that are meaningful to the local culture, colors that foster tranquility inspire creativity or colors that evoke natural elements are all ways to leverage the compelling influence of color in everyday design.