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Health, Harmony, Holiday at Institute

Mildred Loomis

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The Owner-Built Home — Chapter 8
Volume III — Form and Function
Light and Color

By Ken Kern

(continued from last month)

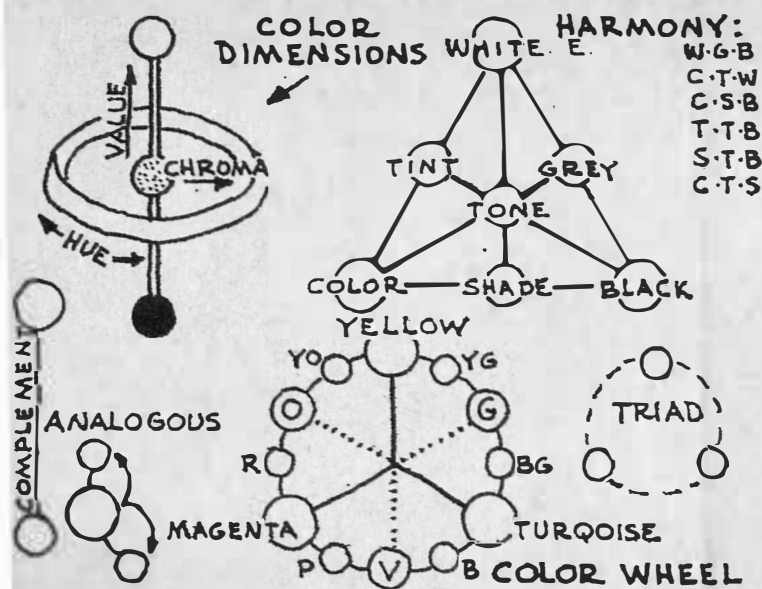
Room colors should be balanced between warm and cool tones, and between active and passive designs. The handling of proportion, pattern, texture, and room-form contribute to the proper choice of color harmony. But primarily, the color choice depends upon what particular function is emphasized. A living room, for instance, is best decorated in warm tones to stimulate a convivial mood. A more formal atmosphere is achieved by an accent on blue tones. Grey is always a good choice for balance and harmony. It is the least distracting of all colors, and most effectively hides dust and soiling. The sense of cheer, comfort, warmth and relaxation so desirable in a dining room is best achieved by the use of warm, light colors. Strong color contrasts encourage early rising. Grey, the "peacemaker of colors," is restful when warmed with an admixture of yellow or red. For the master bedroom a light sky-blue suggests the illimitable together with a rare quality of allurements. Lighter and cleaner hues should be used in bathrooms to give sensations of good health and vigor. White and blue look fresh and clean but pink gives the skin a luminous glow through reflection. Storage or dark areas should be painted yellow or white.

Ever since Francis Bacon, inventor of the first color-wheel, men have speculated about color harmony and balance. This happens to be a highly subjective field of study, so naturally hundreds of color theories and systems have been proposed. Some basic premises have survived the ages, and more recent studies on the subject have arrived at a simplified charting of color harmony.

There are three dimensions to color: *hue* refers to the particular pure color itself; *chroma* refers to color intensity, or saturation, from grey to the pure color, or hue; *value* refers to the light and dark degrees (tints and shades) of a color. By mixing white or black in a color a variety of tints and shades are possible.

Faber Birren devised a neat little chart showing the harmonious relationships among the seven different color possibilities. As per diagram, any straight path between each of the seven forms will lead to concordant beauty.

Basic laws of color harmony call for the use of color in pairs to produce balanced stimulation to the color-sensitive eye nerves. Eye fatigue results from over-exposure to one color; relief will come with the introduction of the "after-image," or complementary, of the color. For instance, eyes fatigued with too much red seek green; when saturated with yellow, they call for purple; when tired of green, they call for violet and red. This complementary relationship forms the basis of our modern color wheel. It is made up of the three primary colors (yellow, turquoise and magenta) and three secondary colors (green, violet and orange). Then six intermediate colors come in to complete a 12-color wheel having pure hues.



The complement, or opposite, color-relationship is the simplest pattern for two-color harmony. Analogous harmony can be achieved by using adjacent colors. Here interest is achieved by contrast of value, using light tints and dark shades of one principal color. A third and very commonly used formula for color harmony is the triad. Here the three colors chosen are equidistant on the color-wheel, forming a "Y."

A desirable color-scheme for any room or area depends much, of course, on its relation to surrounding colors, forms, textures, and patterns. The owner-builder should choose colors with his overall design in mind.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (books listed in order of importance)

- New Horizons in Color*, Faber Birren.
- Lighting Your Home*, Sunset Books, 1963.
- Color Form and Space*, Faber Birren.

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