



BY SAM MITTELSTEADT

Healthy HUES

*Harness the power of color
to change life for the better*



Which color springs to mind when you see the word *clean*? How about *cold*? Or *spicy*?

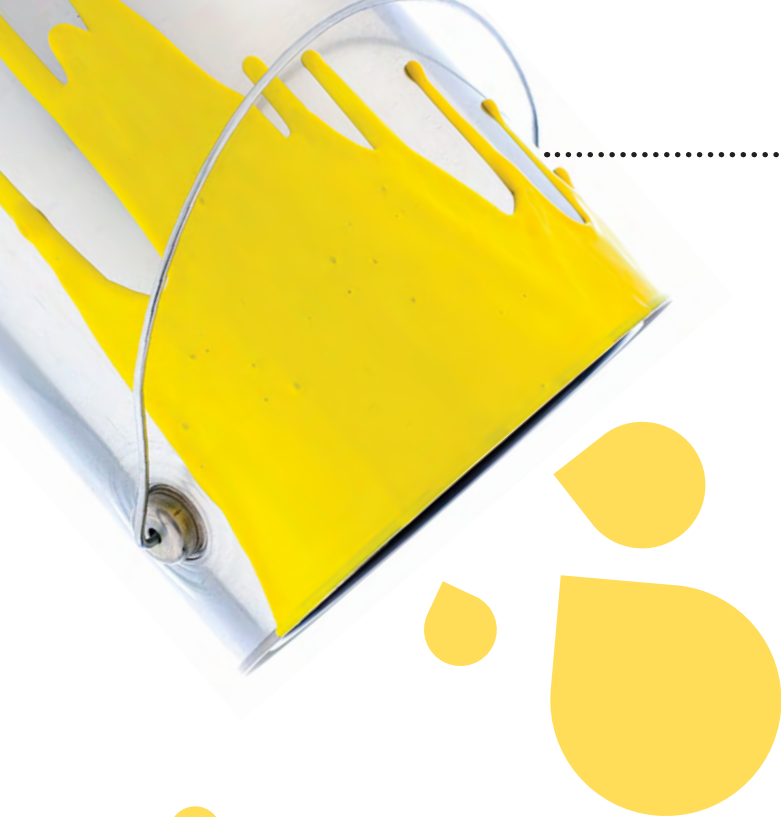
For me, those words connote the pristine white of bleached linens and towels, the gloomy gray of cloud-packed skies and snow-slushed streets, and the fiery orange-reds of chili peppers and threads of saffron. Chances are, your choices weren't too different.

We're conditioned to associate particular colors with concepts and moods. Blue, for example, is often linked to nature, says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. "Blue tells us the sky is clear, it's not going to snow or rain. We can go outside and enjoy the outdoors." As a result, Eiseman says, most people find sky blues to be tranquil and relaxing.

The Pantone Color Institute researches how color influences thought, emotions and physical reactions, then shares that information with clients in industries such as design, advertising, film and education.

"Most people don't pay enough attention to how colors make them feel," says Eiseman, who tracks color trends on her websites, colorexpert.com and eisemancolorblog.com. Once you're aware of how color affects your mood and behavior, use that knowledge strategically in every part of your life—from the color of your walls and clothes to the plates you use—to help enhance your mental or physical health. There's truly a whole spectrum to consider.





YELLOW

Think back to the comfort foods of youth: macaroni and cheese, chicken soup, vanilla and butterscotch puddings, even popcorn and biscuits. It's not much of a leap to see why soft, buttery yellows often trigger feelings of nostalgia, warmth (think: sunlight) and even safety. Eiseman says that after the 9/11 attacks, her clients in the food industry reported that anything packaged in softer yellows "sold like gangbusters" because it was perceived as comfort food. Of course, you'll want to stick with lower-calorie sun-colored foods like corn, butternut squash and papaya.

Yellow is comforting in other forms as well. Studies have found that when the eye takes in yellow, the brain releases more serotonin, a neurotransmitter that has been linked to depression if the body produces too little of it. Incorporate a soft chamois, butterscotch or honey yellow into your living room, entryway or foyer to boost moods—an antidepressant that comes in a paint can instead of a pill bottle. "Especially if you live in a gray environment, you'll walk into a room that feels warm and sunshiny," Eiseman says. "Without knowing why, you'll think that it's good to be home."



WHITE

From ceilings to sheets, towels to table settings, white is "forever classic," Eiseman says. "It's always practical and you can blend it with all the other colors." We associate white with cleanliness and purity—hence its prevalence in bridal gowns—but that can lead to too much of a good thing. Pure white used throughout a house can come off as "super-pristine, and that leads to a feeling of coldness," she says.

Furthermore, too much white in a room can lead to headaches and eyestrain, Eiseman says. To avoid a sensation similar to snow blindness, temper the white with colored furniture or accessories, so that white constitutes no more than 75 percent of the room. Or reduce the brightness to more of a creamy off-white. Your eyes will thank you.



BROWN

Eiseman credits the "Starbucks phenomenon" for the groundswell feeling of change about brown. The color once associated mostly with soil—or, worse yet, dirtiness—has reemerged as a rich mocha, linked to the robust flavors of coffee and chocolate. "Everyone loves chocolate," Eiseman says. Many people who claim not to like brown have beautiful dark wood floors or armoires that have been in the family for generations, Eiseman says. "It's wood, not a pigment, and yet they love that furniture. They just don't realize how much brown they actually have."

Perhaps because of its association with the stability of the earth, brown connotes security, Eiseman says. Use it generously in bedrooms to increase the sleep-inducing sensations of safety and comfort, whether through sturdy, mahogany-colored furniture or rich, sumptuous fabrics for bedspreads and linens.



BLUE

Almost all blues provide a sense of serenity, Eiseman says. The dark-primary blues typical of twilight and predawn welcome reflection and rest, while the sparkling turquoises and aquamarines of tropical waters convey a type of relaxation that comes with more energy and heat. "When the blue sky above you is radiating over a body of water, it's hard to be anxious," Eiseman says. Maybe that's why heart rate and perspiration drop and breathing deepens when people look at blue.

Bath manufacturers have begun to offer chromatherapy tubs and showerheads that incorporate colored lights to maximize the relaxing benefits of a soak or shower.

For a fix that doesn't require new fixtures, toss aqua-tinted bath beads or aromatherapy salts into a warm tub to maximize the beneficial effects of soaking away stress and inflammation that can exacerbate conditions like arthritis.



BLACK

"There's a lot of beauty, elegance and sophistication in black," says Eiseman, who uses tuxedos and the classic ebony Steinway piano as examples. "It's always a strong presence—the ultimate power." But *too much* black is intimidating, if not downright sinister. Its inky darkness evokes moonless nights and the finality of the grave, making it the go-to hue for mourners, Goths and sullen teens alike. "It's not a color I would use on walls," Eiseman says. "If you want the depth, use a deep chocolate brown, foresty green or deep merlot. It's far less imposing and scary."


When discussing colors, those suffering from anxiety and depression name black and its lethargic cousin, gray, as the ones that best represented their mood—and as the colors they're most drawn to. *The Family Guide to Surviving Stroke and Communication Disorders* warns that darker shades in room color can themselves have a depressing effect. To help ward off a lack of energy and banish the blues, limit the black and gray in your life and surround yourself with sunnier tones like yellow.



RED

"Nature has used red generously," Eiseman says. "It draws our attention just as it did eons ago." Whether positively or negatively, no color stimulates like red, a hallmark of fruits and berries at their ripest, flowers in full bloom, and even the flushed lips and cheeks of sexual arousal. It's also the color of spilled blood, which may explain the body's involuntary, fight-or-flight-style reaction to casting a glance at the color, including elevated breath and pulse rate and an increase in both adrenaline and perspiration.

"Red has an aggressive nature, commanding attention and demanding action," Eiseman says.

When selecting cosmetics such as lipstick, "be sure you can see the undertone," Eiseman says. Most reds fall into either warm (orange-red) or cool (blue-red) categories, and only the right one will truly flatter your complexion. Research about women and cosmetics has linked self-confidence to looks: If the woman looking back at you in the mirror appears confident and successful, chances are you'll play the role when you leave the house, too. 



A Palette for Your Palate

Eating fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors helps ensure your family gets a full range of vitamins and minerals—and may reduce your risk of many diseases, according to the Produce for Better Health Foundation.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend making fruits and vegetables half of what you eat each day, with a special focus on:

- Dark green vegetables such as broccoli and spinach, which are good sources of vitamins A, C, D, E and K, and minerals calcium, folate and iron.
- Orange vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes, which are high in beta carotene and fiber and low in fat.
- Starchy vegetables such as potatoes and corn, which provide fiber and vitamins C and thiamine.
- Dry beans such as kidney beans, which are a vegetarian way to get nutrients such as protein and fiber.

The foundation's website, **fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org**, offers free recipes, storage tips and an extensive video library on fruits and vegetables from apples to yams.