

# Capturing Color: *Inspiration*

By Maria C. Thiry

**C**apturing color is easy—if you’re not particular about the precise color, that is. Capturing the precise color that’s on trend and that your customers will love...well, that’s a bit more of a challenge. “Designers can’t afford to be wrong about color,” says Tim Williams, marketing manager for color standards provider Color Solutions International (CSI). “Brands must have the right color in the store at the right time. Designers must have the color they designed in that store. The penalty for being wrong is pretty high.”

Today’s designer is not only tasked with coming up with the perfect color, but also with picking a color that can be reproduced reliably on *fabric*. According to Mary Brannon, instructor at the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM), “Trend services put the beautiful colors out there, but don’t guarantee that they’re achievable in a dyehouse. Before designers set their hearts on a color, they need to know: is it achievable on every fiber in their collection? Is it difficult to achieve? Is it expensive to produce?”

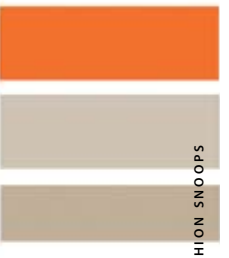
## WARM COLOR HARMONIES



## COOL COLOR HARMONIES



## BASE COLOR HARMONIES



FASHION SNOOPS

**FASHION**  
SNOOPS

**SPRING'12 LADIES COLOR HARMONIES**



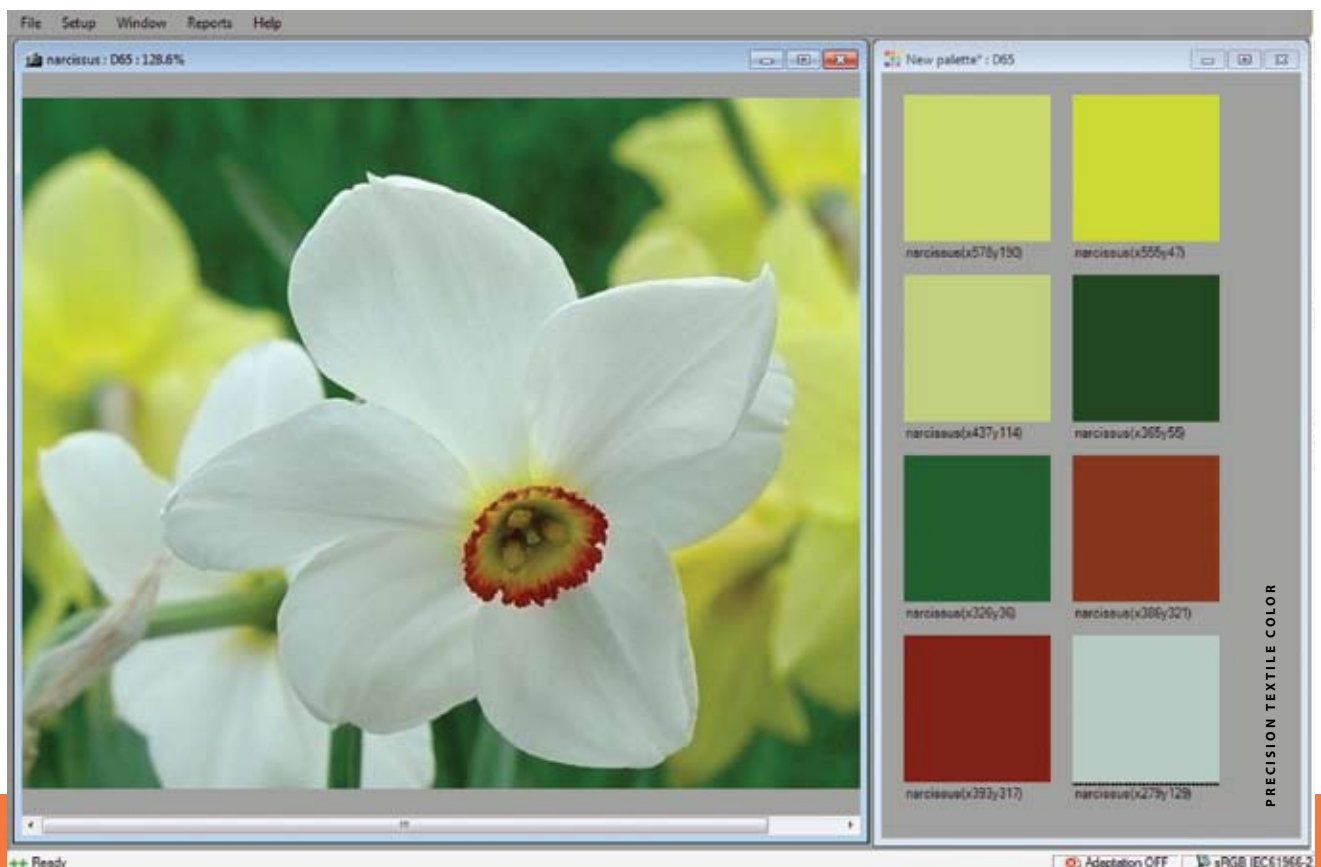
There is an increasing movement to urge designers to use standardized or engineered colors right from the beginning, because it saves the brand money, and shortens the color development cycle. New tools and services have emerged to make this part of the design and color development team's job easier.

"Placing more tools in the designers' hands at the concept stage," says Mary Vigeant, Mary Vigeant, president of Precision Textile Color Inc., a provider of color standard services, and director of international development for ChromaShare Ltd., gives designers "the ability to know in advance [if] the inspiration color needs to be tweaked prior to production, allowing the designer to decide whether the integrity of their design can withstand the change."

## The Internet Has Arrived

The internet has brought a lot of new resources to inspiration- and trend-gathering that had not been available to designers before, says Williams. Today's designers are very technology-driven, notes Brannon. "Online sources like blogs, Facebook, and YouTube are growing sources of inspiration," she says.

It's not a question of whether digital technology will affect the way designers work. According to Lilly Berelovich, founder and chief creative officer for online trend forecasting service Fashion Snoops, "The shift to digital has already happened. I don't think that any designer can survive without some online trend support. There's so much to keep up with, there's no way to keep up unless you use technology. The pace for everything is faster. Speed is not just allowed, but demanded. If your competitor is doing it and you're not, you lose."





## Electronic Trend Services

Williams says that online trend services, like Fashion Snoops, WGSN, and Stylesight, “have people on site all over the world, gathering data and doing the legwork for designers. They digest the trend information to category level where designers can more easily use it.”

Berelovich says online trend services like Fashion Snoops do more than simply look for color inspiration and forecast color. “To validate and fine-tune our predictions, we also go to runways, events, and tradeshow, to aggregate and analyze all this information,” she says. “We look at hundreds of thousands of runway images and shows. We have a top view. We have to be everywhere all the time.” Online trend services like Fashion Snoops have researchers in “fashion cities” where trends arise all over the world, like Paris, Barcelona, Tokyo, London, Rio, Milan, and New York.

“Many designers won’t give up a physical inspiration altogether. But no way can they physically be at hundreds of runways and shows and make sense of it without our help. We can validate what they see,” says Berelovich. “Our customers have very little time to look, learn, and make decisions. Our goal has always been to give them practical, useable answers.”

Berelovich says online trend services allow designers to track trends at a daily level. That way, she says, designers “can choose whether they want to lead, follow, or get off the trend.”

## Standard Colors

Designers’ color inspiration doesn’t just come from trend services, but from physical objects in the world around them. Laurie Pressman, vice-president of Fashion, Home + Interiors at Pantone, says that color inspiration can be varied and range “from the color mix of a sunset sky, to the flowers and trees that surround us, to the foods we eat.”

## Timing Inspiration

Because color is important, color trends are important. “Colors play a significant role in how we view products and designs as consumers, and its value as a marketing asset cannot be underestimated,” said Doris Brown, vice-president of marketing for color software and instrumentation specialist Datacolor.

“Design and color trends are not conjured up in a crystal ball,” says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. “They are the result of much observation of the surrounding natural world as well as the influences that will impact the world of the future. They include lifestyles and playstyles, pop culture, the economy, technology, entertainment, diversions, social issues, international affairs, and of course the needs, moods, fantasies, and aspirations of consumers.”

“In their role as industry influencers, trend services translate these observations into design trend predictions containing the appropriate styling, colors, and color combinations for their audience,” notes Laurie Pressman, vice-president of Fashion, Home + Interiors at Pantone.

Being on trend is a little bit of a herd mentality, says Tim Williams, marketing manager for color standards provider Color Solutions International. “You want to stay where the majority of your brand’s consumers are,” he says. Designers want to know where the trend is going so they know where their brand’s part of the trend will be.

The importance of staying abreast of color trends is why designers sign up for more than one trend service, and look for more than one source of inspiration, notes Williams. “Knowing exactly how and when to introduce a new color trend greatly impacts its financial success,” says Pressman. “As color can make or break a sale at retail, the key to a successful color trend is having the right product in the right color on the selling floor at the right time.”



However, the colors inspired by non-fabric objects may not be easily reproducible in fabric form. “When an inspiration piece can’t be realized in fabric form, it is critical to have the designer select a technically sound color standard that best represents what they are going for,” says Brooks Tippet, vice-president of manufacturing at Pantone. “This can be a challenge and may not be an easy discussion, but transitioning to a color standard at the beginning of the process will avoid settling for something completely wrong later in the process. Also, this saves a tremendous amount of time and money in the overall development process.”

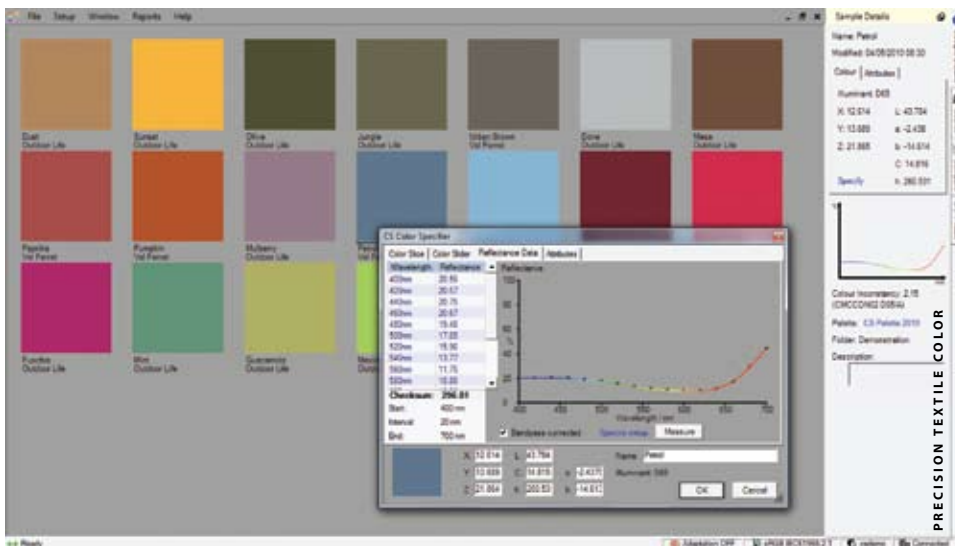
and ultimately happy designers, products developers, and suppliers.”

“With color communication increasingly reliant on digital technology, there needs to be a greater reliance on using color standards in the upfront creation of color trend palettes,” Tippet says. “It has become much more important that the colors displayed in these seasonal trend palettes be linked to a color system that is a universal color standard.”

Trend services like Fashion Snoops are helping designers by correlating the trends they forecast with the closest color standard offered by the different color services, says Berelovich. She says it

saves designers’ time analyzing the trend and selecting a color standard. “The designer must still make the creative choice to decide what precise shade is right for his or her customers,” says Berelovich.

Williams says that brands save time and costs by moving inspiration colors into standard fabric form faster. He appreciates trend services communicating these standard colors to their custom-



A few companies, like Archroma and CSI, offer customized, standardized, engineered color for brands and designers. Paul Cowell, production innovation manager for bluconnection, says that designers and product developers partnering with such color standard companies can form a “dream team.” “Achievability issues can be identified up front,” he says, and the designer persuaded “to reconsider a color on a certain fabric. Also, core/key colors can be created on the brand’s most important fabric—leading to faster color approval in the supply chain,

ers because they have “a unique way of conveying the key drivers of color.” He says that the CSI Colorwall has 3,800 colors, continually growing the collection on the wall with colors that are relevant and on-trend.

### Going Digital

“The historical process for designers was to take images, clippings of color from various places (samples, trend colors, ribbons, etc.), and place them (tape, pin, or glue) all on a ‘story board’ by

hand for creating a palette of colors. Often they will make several story boards for different clothing lines, and collect them for the entire season story,” says Vigeant. She notes that the traditional process of doing things is not only labor-intensive, it is time consuming. “Concept to consumer, for many organizations, takes 26 weeks or longer,” she says.

Today’s designer is much more digitally-oriented. The digital camera is a designer’s friend. “Color inspiration images can be taken from the internet, photographs, runway images, street-wear images, or trend blogs,” says Vigeant. She says ChromaShare Technology allows designers to create and maintain design (color) integrity, in the digital space, through to production. Vigeant claims the software uses platform-neutral web services, working with existing systems seamlessly, and integrates “between CAD, PLM systems, and spectrophotometers, all with accurate online color viewing.”

“Utilizing monitor calibration, ChromaShare Technology guarantees accurate color and accurate color reproduction between monitors, providing seamless real-time color comparisons worldwide,” says Vigeant. “In essence, every pixel of the inspiration photo is presented in accurate color space. From each pixel of color, a designer can make a palette, then search and compare that palette to existing color standards.”

“Also important, [designers] can determine if an inspirational color is acceptably reproducible on any given substrate by performing a simple search against other substrates, and make good information-based preproduction decisions,” says Vigeant. “For example, using ChromaShare Technology, you find that a beautifully deep color cannot be done in



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The Pantone Capsure.

cotton, but a lighter shade of the color can be done. The designer can now decide, at the concept level, whether to move forward or not. This ability can save valuable resources for any business.”

### Transforming Analog to Digital

There are several routes for transforming analog color inspiration to digital. “Because our mind’s eye does not have a precise color memory, designers and trend services need a precise way to capture their color inspiration and communicate color information to their audience,” notes Pressman. Pantone recently introduced the Capsure, an LED/camera-based handheld electronic Pantone color fan deck that enables designers to capture the color of their inspiration more precisely, translating the color from

an analog object to usable digital information right from the start.

Around the size and shape of a television remote control, the Capsure allows designers to capture color inspiration anywhere they go—no more clipping fabric for swatches. It can extract up to four dominant colors from an intricate pattern so designers can clearly identify the desired colors, and can store up to 100 color measurements. It also allows voice-recording so that the designer can “tag” a color measurement with a description or more information. Capsure comes preloaded with all the Pantone Color Libraries, including the Pantone Fashion + Home Color System Library, says Giovanni Marra, director of corporate marketing for Pantone.

According to Marra, “the real power of Capsure is its ability to measure the color of any surface, including small, patterned, and multi-

colored textures and textiles (which can confound other instruments because of their textural complexity) and quickly match them to more than 8,000 Pantone colors.”

Capsure is meant to be used as a design inspiration tool to allow designers to swiftly and easily translate inspiration colors into Pantone color standards. It’s not meant to replace a spectrophotometer, the device used to accurately measure color. “In the production phase, fabric mills and manufactures rely heavily on high-end scientific benchtop spectrophotometers, such as the Datacolor 600. These devices actually measure the color sample and offer detailed color values that are critical to the accurate production of the envisioned color,” says Doris Brown, vice-president of marketing for color software and instrumentation specialist, Datacolor.



## Analog World, Digital Pace

Although the race to digitize color inspiration and move it to color standards from the start is on, Williams recognizes that the pace of digital technology is not uniformly moving forward. “Some designers can work from electronic swatch libraries. But many designers still need an analog input. The monitor is a cold and two-dimensional place. Many designers need a physical sample on a substrate close to what they want to see in the end product,” he says. “Designers still want to touch the fabric.”



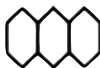
For those designers on the digital bandwagon, Brown says it “enhances designers’ abilities to capture and communicate color inspiration.” However, Brown cautions that designers should be careful to not offer a finished product without first checking to ensure their monitor is calibrated to perfection, as any

discrepancies could result in unhappy customers. Brown notes that Datacolor offers a full line of color calibration devices that can effectively correct a user’s entire workflow, from monitors to printers and camera lenses to scanners. One of their most popular devices, the Spyder3 Elite, quickly fixes on-screen color errors and creates a color profile for the monitor so that it can be color profiled and ready to show off a designer’s inspirations digitally.

For those designers unsure about jumping on that bandwagon to digitize color inspiration, Brannon offers the advice that the technology is merely “a designer’s friend and tool. Some designers may be afraid of technology because it’s ‘expensive,’ but it can actually save money by preventing problems with the color later on. One bad color SKU mistake could have paid for electronic color, which would have saved you from those problems in the first place.”

Pressman says that the real benefit of technology (digital or otherwise) that moves color inspiration

into a standard color is “its ability to enable designers to realize their inspiration and maintain the integrity of their creative vision so their dreams, which had previously only appeared in their minds’ eye, can now become a reality.”



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