

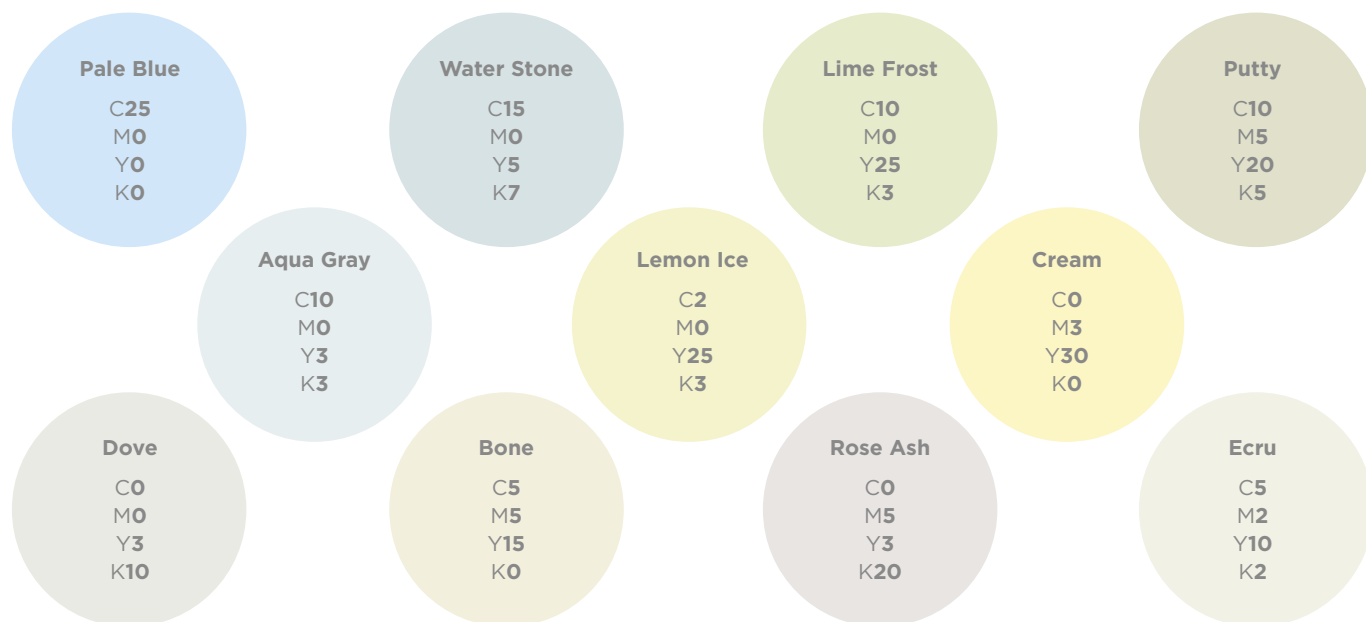
# Fast Forward:

## 6 Palettes for Tomorrow

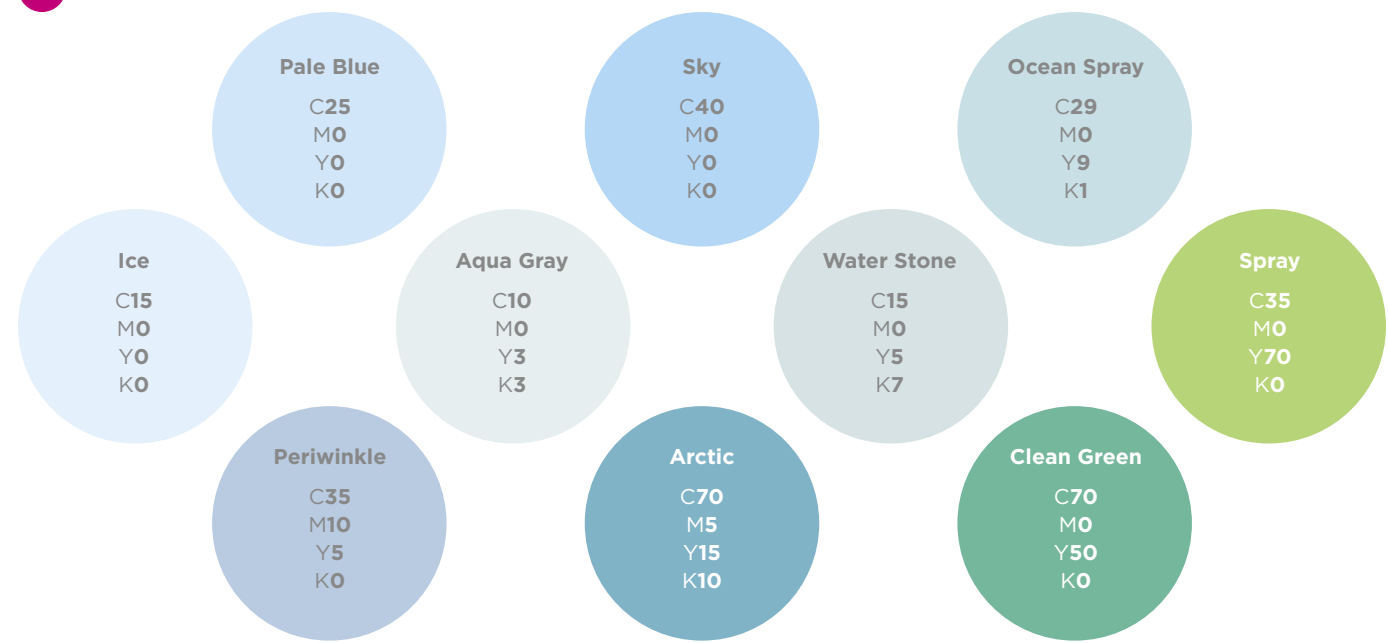
by Paul Wharton

Why do color preferences change? Why did the deep, muted tones of the 1930s and '40s become the bright pastels of the 1950s and early '60s? Why are cool blues and neutrals in vogue now? Can we forecast color trends?

### 1 Un-Color



### 2 Cool Pool



Color is intrinsic to what designers do. We cover insight into the future. After all, color is a critical factor in how our clients buy and sell. It can make or break shelf appeal, which drives profit or loss.

#### Who's in charge?

Designers like to believe that we set color styles and preferences. Certainly, as visual leaders we recognize new directions before others. But the real factors driving color preferences are socioeconomic rather than aesthetic. Color trends actually have more to do with Afghanistan than Milan.

#### Science, art, or myth?

Color forecasting is at once science, art, and intuition. Color response touches our most basic emotions. Consequently, color preferences are influenced by both social and personal events.

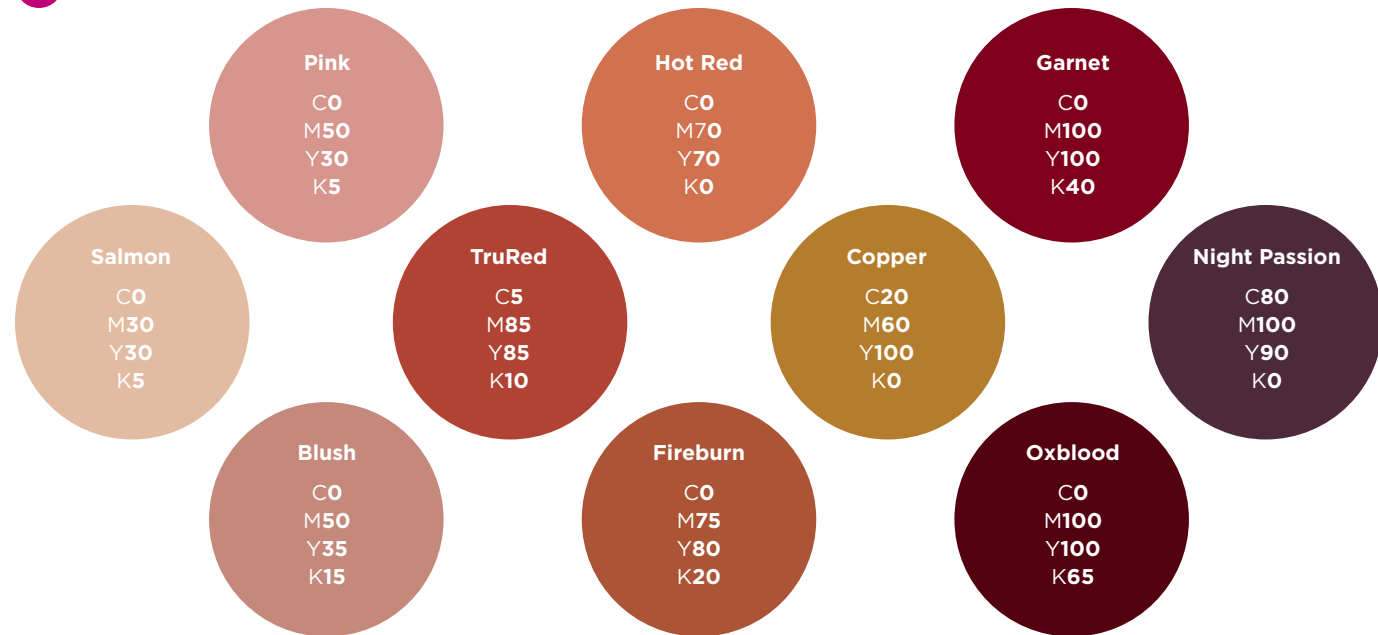
Today, color forecasters review environmental, social, political, and economic conditions to predict future color preferences. They look for catalysts that drive taste.

Environmental influences such as climate, seasons, and terrain, as well as cultural values and religious customs, create an emotional and philosophical lens that affects our choice of colors. Macro sociopolitical trends such as accelerating globalization affect color preferences. Cataclysmic events—wars or acts of nature—can change our color preferences. Economic conditions affect consumer spending, our sense of well-being, and color choice. To further



Wausau Mosinee 2002 annual report  
(All projects by Larsen Design Office,  
Minneapolis, www.larsen.com)

### 3 Haute Reds



complicate matters, colors acquire symbolic meaning over time, further influencing perception.

All these factors—filtered through our age, sex, race, and status—determine why we prefer certain colors at certain times. How we choose color reveals as much about state of mind as aesthetic judgment.

As our world becomes increasingly interdependent, it's interesting to note that color forecasts around the globe exhibit an uncanny consistency.

#### Keeping up with color trends

Color trends are simply emerging patterns of color preference and use. As with weather patterns, forecasters are usually more accurate when making short-term predictions, generally two to three years in the future. Colors change more rapidly in style-conscious or developed markets, but otherwise follow a gradual four- to seven-year cycle.

As with all behavioral trends, colors grow to acceptance and widespread use, then gradually decline and transform into a new trend, following a continuous bell curve. Just when we thought we were really being cutting-edge, we find that color preference is cyclical. Our ancestors were just as affected by droughts and disasters, booms and busts, war and peace as we are. Not surprisingly, color preferences repeat. The color trends of the Victorian era (1890-1910) compare closely to recent preferences.



Deluxe Financial capabilities brochure



Wausau Papers Astropaque promotion  
Titled "Toast of Every Occasion," the promo demonstrates the paper's printability and features wine labels and gift tags.

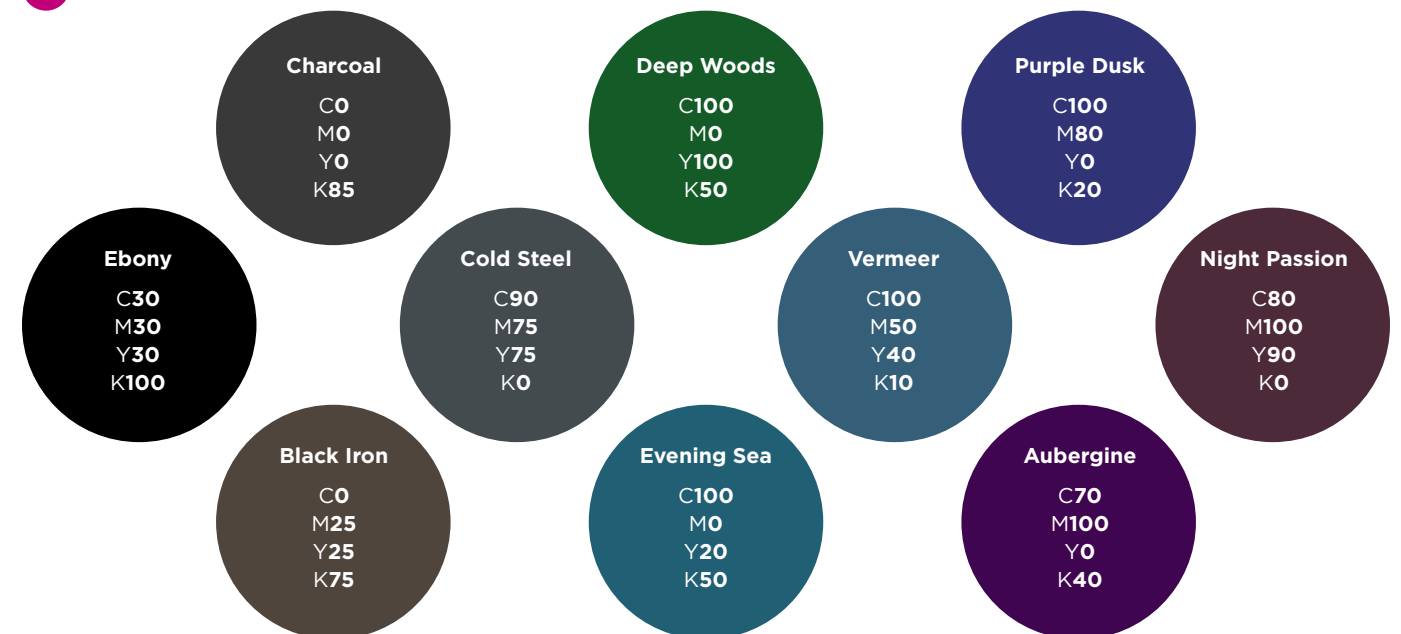
#### What's next?

With so much riding on tomorrow's color choices, we need to design today with the future in mind. Here are forecasts for color directions.

**Textural Color** (palette not shown). Today's techno colors are evolving into tomorrow's textural colors. Technology is now helping us create interesting variations with more complex tones—from iridescent and multitone metallics to holographic, opalescent, and glittered colors. But the metallic techno colors and some of the interesting shimmering opalescent colors we've seen for the last three years are no longer new news. Techno colors now begin to evolve into textural colors. The latter are complex colors that imply texture as well as the use of many colors together simultaneously, creating a color blend à la the paintings of Georges Seurat.

**Un-Color** (page 48). With world unrest and uncertainty, we have a desire for simplicity and safety. Look for neutrals in home decorating and furnishings, and in graphic communication as well. White shares the stage with pale blue, aqua, green, phosphorus, yellow, and ecru. Gray is tinted toward blue, green, violet, and rose. Khaki, tan, and dried grass tones are abundant. Bright notes that complement these neutrals will be intense reds, oranges, and spring greens.

### 4 Shades of Black



**Cool Pool** (page 49). Grayed-back aqua and ice blues will be the most dominant hues in graphics, homes, and fashion. Combined with blue-toned greens and lemon, these clear, transparent colors reflect a desire for tranquility, honesty, and fair play.

**Haute Reds** (page 50). While cool blues and natural neutrals dominate, there is still a desire for the warmth of red. A return to tradition—as well as ethnic influences—fuels this affection. The current interest in pink reds will shift toward the violet range, and more earthy yellow and orange-tinted colors will return. Look for red with brown undertones, red with coppery aspects, and nearly black violet red.

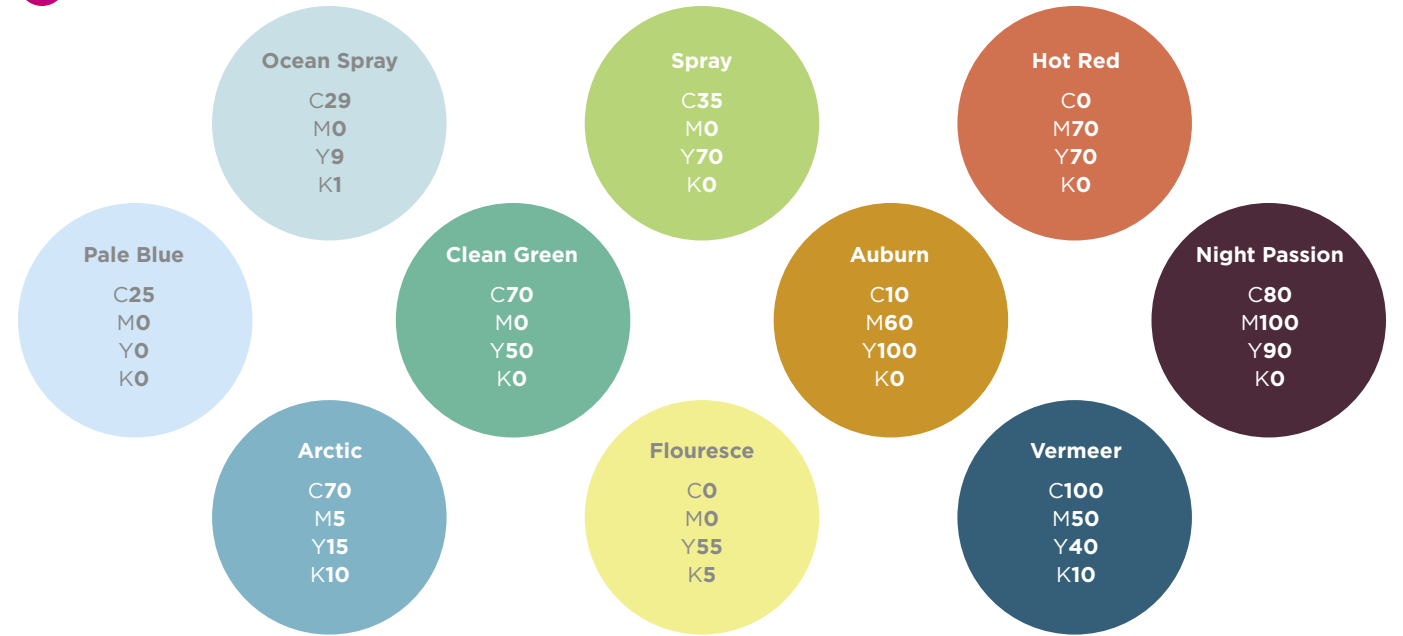
**Shades of Black** (page 51). As designers, we may need to rethink our standard uniform. Black, of course, is an eternal standard. But straight black will transform into very deep colors. Black/brown, the color of cola, as well as black/teal, black/purple, and midnight blue/black will find their way into products, automotive fashion and graphic communication. Black with iridescent color or metallic undertones will offer an interesting option. These very deep tones contrast nicely with soft neutrals and brilliant splashes of color.

**Traditions** (below). Conservative colors are in: navy, burgundy, forest green, sable brown, black, gray, and ivory. Sometimes they take center stage,

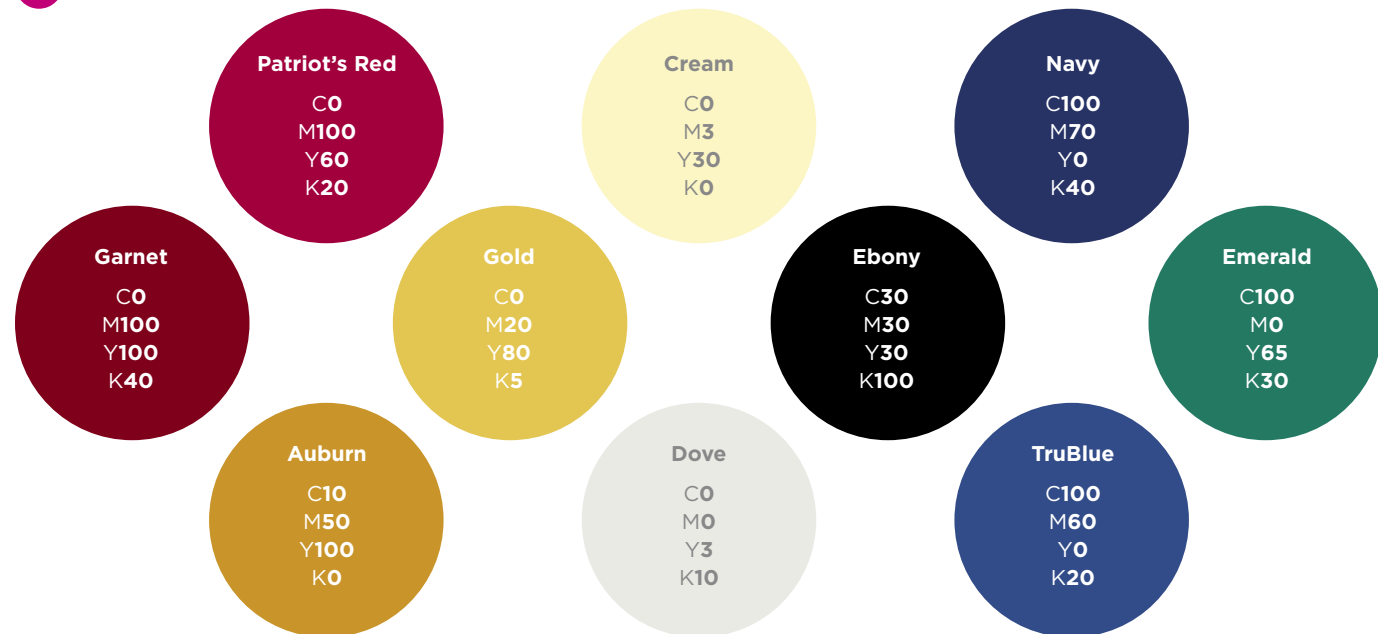


Banta Corporation 2002 annual report

**6 Integrated**



**5 Traditions**



Minneapolis New Central Library Capital Campaign  
A system of materials soliciting donations for the Cesar Pelli-designed building

at other times a supporting role. Today's conservative attitudes, fueled by economic and political uncertainty, will most certainly bring classics to the forefront, especially in corporate communication.

**Integrated** (above). Select colors from forecast palettes and add accents to form a new palette.

As designers, we can use color forecasts to help guide our clients to greater economic success. Of course, color forecasts are neither axioms nor absolutes. As the saying goes, "It is difficult to make predictions—especially about the future." ☺

Paul Wharton (p.wharton@larsen.com) is a creative director and vice president at Larsen Design Office in Minneapolis. He has helped several clients, including major manufacturing and retail companies, develop trend-sensitive product lines and brands. Wharton has taught color theory, is a member of the Color Marketing Group and the Color Association of the U.S., and is a former president of AIGA Minnesota.

**Resources**  
(all books available at booksellers)

- *The Symbolism of Color*, by Ellen Conroy, \$16, Kessinger Publishing Company
- *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, by John Gage, \$45, University of California Press
- *Living Colors: The Definitive Guide to Color Palettes Through the Ages*, by Margaret Walch & Augustine Hope, \$29.95, Chronicle Books
- The Color Marketing Group, [www.colormarketing.org](http://www.colormarketing.org)
- The Color Association of the United States, [www.colorassociation.com](http://www.colorassociation.com)