

Hues You Can Use

Barry Sackin

The palette of your farm-to-table café boasts vivid tomato reds, bronzed yellows, earthy browns and leafy greens. The tactile qualities of the surfaces, like the earthen platter holding fresh asparagus with roasted almonds or the smooth granite countertops with baskets of bright, crisp apples, add visual interest and contrast to the space. Together, these elements convey a sound message: earthy, farm-focused, fresh, natural.

"Everything the customer sees must support and enhance the basic value proposition of your operation," says Arlene Spiegel, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates. "If you're a fresh, natural, organic concept, you can't have pink walls, plastic plates and fluorescent lighting."

Colors and textures play vital roles in merchandising strategies.

An Environmental Focus

"Much consumer reaction to color is subliminal and they are often unaware of its pervasive and persuasive influence," says Margaret Walch, director of the U.S. Color Association, a leading color forecasting group.

While everyone has a favorite color, it is important to understand the rationale behind color choices. The right color choice can create a mood, set a tone or reflect a brand image or message.

"In hospitality, more lavish colors are used generally," adds Walch. "This year, we're seeing a full spectrum approach with dramatic harmonies that convey a sense of well-being."

While such observations may sound philosophical rather than practical, color is nitty gritty, according to Walch. It reflects what's on the mind of the general public. Eco-friendly and sensitive designs are the subject du jour, and it's an interest wellmatched to the two distinct interior color directions forecast for 2009-2010: a group of 16 cool, ethereal colors called Rock Crystals balances 28 warm mid-tones called Vegetable Garden.

The first, mineral-inspired palette features grays, off-whites and slate blues; the second group presents those vivid tomato reds, bronzed yellows, earthy browns, leafy greens, and reddened purples.



WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

At this Eurest account, the food tells the whole story.

Walch says that Interest in metallic finishes will

continue in a more refined way, though with lesser metals of greatest interest. Bronze was singled out to be the most influential metal and as likely to exert a strong effect on other hues as a "bronzing effect."

You Say Blue, I say Grey

The human eye can distinguish roughly six million colors, and not all hues are created equal, chromatically speaking. A blue can be nearly black or nearly green and still be blue. Moreover, ambient light changes everything. Color is a moving target under the best of circumstances. Still, basic rules apply.

"In a servery, you need to pick a palette that is flexible," says Spiegel "The more color you can incorporate into the design, the more flexible it will be in the long run."

Texture is also important. It should be in character with the color and form of merchandise and also relate to the psychological needs of customers. Strong messages are created when all elements in a display support each other. They may be harmonious, or they may contrast.

"Texture can be very suggestive," says Nancy Lane, education account development manager for the Hubert Company. "It can be masculine or feminine, earthy or modern."

"Texture and unusual finishes add complexity to color," says Walch. It's another subtle merchandising tool you can't afford to ignore.

3 Easy Color and Texture Fixes:

1. Try something outside of your color comfort zone. Try serving food on blue plates or paint half a wall to see what it looks like before you commit.

2. Be sure the colors and textures you incorporate align with your operation's guiding principles.

3. You can create visually stronger displays that incorporate color and texture by grouping merchandise by color blocks rather than intermingling different colors. For example, a vertical color grouping can increase impulse purchases of related items by emphasizing a more complete assortment.