

ColorProse™

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Communicating Color Expertise To Color Professionals Worldwide

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The Whimsical, Technical -- Sometimes Confusing -- Language Of Color

Opinion and judgment about color swirls throughout the textile/apparel supply web, from the designer to the mill to the consumer.

And rightfully so, because perhaps the single most important factor that draws a retail garment customer across the store to examine an article is its color.

Design teams invest hours of research and development creating just the right palette of colors for just the right population of consumers at just the right time and season for maximum retail competitive advantage, sales and earnings.

On the surface, it seems simple enough. Only three basic things are needed to "produce" color. First, a source of light, second an object illuminated by the light source, and third, an observer. At times, instruments rather than people may actually be the "observer" at various points in the supply web, but always, the final consumer is the ultimate observer.

The light source and the object itself, of course, have tremendous impact on what the observer sees. But the human observer brings a complex personal interpretation of color to each situation. For all of us, color is not just

a physical translation of wavelengths, frequencies, illumination and reflectance (as it is to a spectrophotometer,); it's also psychological. Color to people is a "psychophysical phenomenon."

Ever been so angry you were

"seeing RED?"

Ever **"felt Blue?"** How about

"GREEN with envy?"

The way we feel about color is often as important as what we see.



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A classic example is the color of meat at the supermarket. Ever notice how it's illuminated with a slightly pink-colored light? Think the store could sell as much of the same meat if it were presented in a display having a slightly green-colored light?

The meat would not have changed, but its color would appear grayish rather than reddish, implying to our human interpretation that it couldn't be fresh.

At Archroma, we often hear the whimsical side of color communication throughout the apparel supply web, and we see the frustration it occasionally creates.

Sometimes we know what the psychological suggestion for color adjustment means. When someone says the shade needs to be "dirtier," we are usually safe in interpreting that to mean it needs to be duller.

And more often than not, "warmer" means a little redder or yellower. But what does it mean for a color to "be more romantic?" What about "make it more 'bubble gummy,'" or "can you make it happier?"

Whether engineering standards or dyeing fabric to match the standards, the dyer's only color tools are the dyes he has commercially available.

Dyers make physical adjustments to meet psychophysical requirements in the three dimensions that can be affected by adjusting the dyes: Strength, Shade, and Brightness/Dullness.

Instead of "the shade isn't happy enough," a dyer may think of it as "5% weak, slightly dull and a little red. One thing is certain: no dyer has a drum of "happy" to add to the shade!

The language of color can be both fun and frustrating. Regardless of our "language skills," the ultimate objective is to deliver the goods on-shade, on-standard, on-cost, and on-time.