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Introduction

Why would I want to write a book about color when there are so many great books out there with beautiful pictures, charts, combinations, explanations, and observations? Almost everything has been said. Almost is where I come in. I encourage you to read as much as you can about color theory and look for color ideas, but when you’re ready to go further, this book is about the almost part that is generally not discussed.

It is not what you know about color but the way you see it and feel it that makes its meaning important, because beautiful colors together resonate with your psyche and feed your soul. You were born to receive this gift. Here is how this gift works. You have eyes that allow you to see, but color enables you to understand the world around you. Color is a constant that is channeled through your eyes and into your brain. You are then able to translate that information into an understanding of beauty.
When we see color in perfect relationships, we all understand the experience. Nature teaches us that color relationships are meant to be in beautiful combinations that we can all understand. It is called beauty.

You can instantly recognize when perfect colors sing. When you see a sunset from your dining room window blazing in or look at the rich, deep, endless blues in the ocean or get lost in the details of color splashes on a canvas, you become enraptured. It’s almost a moment of transcendence, when you’re not just seeing individual objects, but feeling the fullness of life. That is the connection that color brings, one that gives you instant peace.

I know what it is to see and feel color outside, but what I want is to change your mind about how you see color inside your home so you can begin to feel the same mesmerizing magic of color relationships. Your indoor world is just as important as the outdoors and the same color combinations are possible.

This is probably one of the few times a book has been written about color essentially in black and white. I couldn’t think of a better way to talk about the way we see color without the distraction of color images. And this is what we need to do, talk about color so we can start changing our minds about how to see it.
By the time you finish this book, you will have developed a greater understanding of how you see color and how to put colors together so that your world rocks you as much as when you see a perfect sunset. I believe that making those changes will bring the things you love into focus by allowing everything — the colors in your new furniture, old furniture, brickwork, appliances, tile, rugs, woodwork, and especially your artwork and collections — to work together perfectly.

At the end of this book I have a reference to my “color web peeks” at www.devinecolor.com/colorpeeks/ where you’ll be able to experience the concepts I’ve discussed. When you go to the site you will be able to gaze upon gorgeous pictures of different color relationships, most of them taken from our natural world. These pictures represent the six colors of the rainbow giving us the best nature has to offer. But first, let’s start talking about color in plain black and white.
In a Perfect World . . .

T**hey say the definition** of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. We live in a world full of things we can’t change or won’t change and some things we have more control over. How we go about change keeps us preoccupied and takes up a big chunk of our lives. The one thing for certain is that no matter how complicated this world gets, there is always the undeniable beauty of nature and its perfect color. Color is one of the elements in our lives that can change our perceptions of reality.

The phrase, “Well, in a perfect world...” implies that the world is not perfect. Since I don’t have a clear vision of what this perfect world is, I can only tell you about what my perfect world would look like. I would want to be in

Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins? Distinctly we see the difference of the colors, but where exactly does the one first blendingly enter into the other? So with sanity and insanity.

~ Herman Melville
charge of everything and everyone would think like I do. Somehow I don’t think this would be exactly perfect for other people. This is what makes the world so challenging for us! We all have our own versions of perfection.

True, while we are at the mercy of nature, relationships, opportunities, circumstances, information, education, economy, and the universal forces that control us everyday, no matter what, our daily journey always ends at the front door of our homes. When we walk in and leave the bigger world behind, we enter a personal sanctuary where we have gathered our belongings and created our own small world— a world we share with our loved ones, our families, and our neighbors. This is the world I want to talk about.

The gift of nature with its perfect color provides us with immeasurable pleasure and gives this world of ours the spoonful of sugar that makes the medicine go down, so to speak. Nature has already taught us it can be done. Nothing is more flexible and forgiving of change than the splendor of color outdoors—the changing seasons, the moods of the sky, the individual personalities of plants and flowers. This is what I believe in—color can make relationships between all things, making them ap-
pear perfect, no matter how new or old.

My knack for making perfect color has to do with making color relationships out of what people own and that means having to really look at what is there. How hard is this? Well, everything in our homes tells a tale of love, hate, beauty, history, worship, neglect, or regret. It’s that change thing. You have things that can and can’t change. It’s an emotional, confusing, and very personal task.

Having people explain how they feel about their possessions tells a lot about how they feel about their lives. Regardless of what they have to say, I always bring to light the one true resource they have in front of them to make their home what they want it to be. Color. Color is what turns their life inventory into absolute, pure, unadulterated pleasure. If you look at your belongings as beautiful as well as purposeful, you accomplish two things, a reason for them to be part of your life and a reason to love them. You can then think of them without apologies, regrets, needs, or wants — just beauty.

Just as we view the beauties of nature, I want to leave everyone crazy in love with what they see and not with what they own. In nature, when your eyes
are so busy loving all the colors, you think of them as one big color palette. Color does not live in isolation, so it can’t be about a decayed color on a shrub or an extraordinary color on a flower. How color in nature gets to be perfect is through an illusion of color relationships that lets your mind rest and gaze upon a world where you wouldn’t want to change a thing.

What if you felt you didn’t have to change a thing? How would you feel if you lived with a perfect combination of colors that made your home stunning? Well, we are about to find out. By the time you finish this book I would like you to believe in one thing: when perfect color sings, it is going to make the difference between what you can live with and what you cannot.

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Inside our homes we all seem to have some major unfinished business. We have couches with colors we like along with ugly tile we hate in the bathroom. There are things that have reason, but also things that have no rhyme. Believe it or not, that is exactly how nature is. Even the most pristine mountain or rough coastline has undesirable colors, yet is stunning to see. Why not combine stunning color with your old carpet?

The more “behind closed doors” I was let into, the more I found people apologizing for what they had. So
many times I kept hearing comments such as, Well, don’t look at that because it’s not going to be there next year, or Ignore the couch because we hate it, and the one that surprised me to no end: I’m not attached to anything! How did people end up with all this stuff and not care about half of it?

So let’s talk about homes that are all coordinated, where everything matches. Their owners have endless design talent and resources, extra time, and most of all, money. It’s enough to make anyone jealous. It shouldn’t. That twinge of envy comes from most of us believing that those people live in a perfect world. Things appear to be done, finished, and there is no need to change. So when we hear about a divorce, or their kids doing drugs, we are shocked because that is not how perfection behaves. In a perfect world, things should be as perfect as they look.

Whether a 5,000-square-foot home with brand-new furniture or a three-bedroom ranch with old furniture, homes are the means by which we meet our needs to cook, sleep, sit, and read, as well as nurture ourselves and our families. Everyone has a love-hate relationship with what they own, and this book is about finding joy and beauty in the midst of constant change.

Artists can color the sky red because they know it’s blue. Those of us who aren’t artists must color things the way they really are or people might think we’re stupid.

~ Jules Feiffer
own, and this book is about finding joy and beauty in the midst of constant change. I gained a lot of practice at injecting color harmony and excitement into homes and neighborhoods where the up-and-coming executives came and went while building their careers.

Nothing says change like the corporate ladder, but there are many levels and types of ladders in people’s lives. We live in a world where everyone seems to want to climb upward to feel like they are on the road to somewhere. And of course, this means change and forward movement can make you absolutely dizzy if you’re not careful.

Corporations have a way of keeping their employees moving and shaking with company transfers. I was hired a lot by couples in these transitional times, since I have a way of helping these families stay grounded. Their homes were neutral-colored houses in neighborhoods known as “transfer row.” Companies transferred their new employees to town and these were great places for them to land while they waited to be transferred again to bigger and better opportunities.

Everyone was on the same path: one career, one homemaker, 2.5 kids, and a pet of choice. They had neighborhood regulations that included landscaping restrictions along with an exterior color committee to
make sure your color was not offensive. It was as perfect a world as you could live in considering the working world of the corporate ladder.

I received a call from one such client who was ready to set down some roots while waiting around to see where she and her family would end up next. She was ready to make a change and create a new environment inside her own front door.

As always I had to talk about what we could or could not change, otherwise known as the “right now.” With everyone having a foot in the future, it was really hard to say to them, “I’d rather you have one year of perfect beauty through color than ten years of waiting to live a perfect life!” We knew the colors in her woodwork, tiles, and other permanent surfaces were not going to change and therefore they would have to become part of the color palette.

But what about the things that were subject to change and weren’t nailed down to the floor? Whenever I talked about including the colors of her couches, chairs, or accessories sprinkled throughout the house, she asked me to ignore them, or to overlook them. These were all a reminder of how many times she had replaced her furniture to fit the new environment, or how many times she had packed...
the same things that now looked like misfits in this newest house. Everything was functional, most of it completely impersonal.

So I walked over to a small art piece on a huge wall looking all lonely and said, “I love this, it’s perfect. Let’s bring it into the mix!” She looked astonished and almost embarrassed. I couldn’t tell what she was thinking, but I knew this was beautiful and personal to her.

This was the only thing she had kept from a time when she was single, before she had kids and had settled in “transfer row.” She had given up on this little glimpse of herself. She couldn’t believe she had ignored all those amazing colors swirled in that small piece of art. Those colors had sung to her long ago and the song was loud and clear again. This piece was not perfect, or important, but the colors made it beautiful. That beauty was undeniable to her when she first purchased it and to me when I saw it. That is what I mean when I say that perfect color sings.

I pointed out that, among all the impersonal things, it seemed like a world that was so bright and exciting, but regrettably the total opposite mood of her home. We had to get her out of the “regret” mode right away.

So why do we regret? It is always something we should have done, could have done, or didn’t do. In other words,
were there things left to do in this woman’s life that were on hold? I don’t know, but what I did know was that taking the colors in that art piece and helping her live out loud with them would make her feel like she was in the moment, as a matter of fact, in her moment. Isn’t a perfect world one that does not need to change, at least for right now?

We took those colors and built her whole house around them. The first thing was to find out which color had the most in common with all the colors existing in the home. Then we created combinations with these colors that looked beautiful, and finally placed them where they belonged. All the other existing colors in the home surrendered to her color palette, becoming transformed into her own version of perfect beauty, inside the less-than-perfect world of her perfect neighborhood.

Your Turn

Take a moment right now and choose one thing (if there are many, be selective by taking the most colorful ones) from each room in your home that you absolutely love to look at or that has a deep connection to your past. Make a pile of them in front of you. Name the colors out loud. There are differing shapes and textures, but most of all, it’s all about color! These are the colors your eyes love to feel and the colors that have followed you throughout your life changes.

This is what this book will show you: how to see the magic of color in everything you own and how to make relationships out of color that will make it all look beautiful and personal. Most of all, you will hear it sing.
MYTH

“THAT COLOR WILL BE TOO DARK”

TRUTH

OF COURSE IT WILL UNLESS YOU TURN ON THE LIGHT

Let me shed light on this matter. Color does not produce light. It is a reflection of light and therefore needs light to be seen. People paint a room white if it lacks light because they want the room to appear light. Actually, to have it light, they need to turn on the lights.

Sure, one of the reasons I did this whole “Color Therapy from the Northwest” was because we were a little light-deprived, and as a result, this made us cranky sometimes. It is not only the cloudy or partially cloudy nine months out of the year that cuts back on sunlight, it is our soil, so rich that every shrub grows to be a tree and we have a ton of trees blocking light. We love our trees and this leaves us a little in the dark inside. I created these amazing colors that I felt had great purpose and a relationship to light so they would go with what we all had in our lives.
So when our paint partner was looking to hook up with a manufacturer on the East Coast to bring this great concept to everyone’s lifestyle, their marketing team felt that the concept was strong but didn’t understand why they would need to “import” color therapy from the Northwest to the East Coast. They knew Colonial, Historical, Cottage, Cape Cod, but Northwest?

Here in the Northwest we are more like pioneers in our approach to style. Our style is all about lifestyle — the one we experience through our great Northwest cuisine, our micro brews and world-class wines, our coffees and teas and great outdoor sports such as biking, windsurfing, hiking, skiing, golfing. We spend most of those rainy days creating things that are representative of our lifestyle.

For me, it was all about indoor color. The inspiration of all the names of my colors came from the amazing lifestyle the Northwest offers. This is why I have colors like Devine Cabernet, Bordeaux, and Ale. When you look at them, you want to live them.

My rainbow is inside Cool Grasses and Evergreens, Valley Vineyards and Spices, Natural Blondes, Desert Lights, Silver Skies, and Ocean Tide Pools. My neutrals are in Pebbles and Creams, Espresso Blends, and Pacific
Trail Mix. I am among many entrepreneurs who have translated our lifestyles into business.

John Hampton said, “Art is good business.” And to me, so is color.

They say it takes three years to get used to the rain, and then you love our mild seasons and cozy weather. A lot of people from California have sacrificed a little bit of sun for an amazing lifestyle.

This typical couple from this very common circumstance had just made the move into a new home, a new life, and brand new furniture for their new Northwest lifestyle. They had just moved to Oregon from California and had spent their first winter here. The dull gray skies during winter had made their home look dull and gray. They knew that their white walls looked cold so felt they had to do something about the color. They thought that by making all the colors light, it would be bright.

Wrong assumption.

This was very typical of what I first encountered as a color consultant. My clients had lived with “builder white” and were ready for color — as long as it was more white. They were afraid that anything else would be dark and make their home even darker when it was already dark enough because of the clouds and shrubs. So they were cranky.
When suburbs exploded here in the eighties, the builder market boomed and the suburbs were blanketed with builder white. It was a clean slate, a blank canvas that everyone could start with and most of all it was light. The problem is that when you start filling up a white canvas without covering all of it, it can look like you missed painting part of the picture.

The husband was adamant about his office being some shade of white. I said it was not a problem as long as he recognized that it was not really ever going to be white; it was always going to look gray. What did I mean by that? Well if you looked at this office, it was not really white; it was about 30% gray. The small window in the den was really making the white walls look gray. There was not enough light in the room for it ever to be white. Well, he was afraid it would be too dark with any other color, he said. So the question became what color could make a light-deprived room lighter, other than white?

What do you think? I think, how much whiter than white can you get? Where there is little light, there is a lot of gray and that is what shows up on white walls. Your options are very simple. It is rich color that your eyes can see through little light. You need a favorite color that won’t remind you of how much gray there is but how much you love that color. How dark a color is
has to do with it being relative to how dark or light the other colors around are. Color does not live in isolation so it is very clear that in these relationships, color can be looked at almost like a gray scale where if 1 was white and 10 was black, all the numbers in between can fluctuate due to the relevance of what is around.

The most important thing in light-deprived spaces is to have contrast between light and dark colors, because you’re not going to be able to see anything if all the colors are the same value of light or dark. That is why you need evil to see good.

If all the colors are too dark, you can’t see. If they are too light, you can’t see anything either. Call it the yin & yang or the antagonist and protagonist; having opposites only sharpens differences and lets you see which side you are on! Let me give you a little tip, if 1 is white, and 10 is black, try going around your room to see what kind of contrast you have going on between things. Too many 5’s, drab! Too many 2’s with 7’s, severe.

The way to see light colors in low-light rooms is to put darker ones next to them so you see contrast. This den had light
cherry furniture, so we ended up contrasting the cherry wood with white Devine Icing moldings and the walls with Devine Almond, a soft, medium blue-green that contrasted with the warmth of the wood. All of a sudden the red popped out of the cherry because the blue-greens were creating contrast. The cherry was a 6 and the Devine Almond a 4. The white trim being a 1 was a crisp focus that you could even see if the lights were off!

It was his favorite room and he hung up all these beautiful coastal prints that made him feel right at home. Go ahead and make your own light in a room with color. You can make a room clean up its dirty cast with good contrast, bright rich color, and the right color partners. If you just want more light, call the electrician.

All those California clients, or out-of-town transplants like them, picked up the phone and told their friends in other parts of the country, and soon Devine Color was not just “Color Therapy for the Northwest,” it became “Color Therapy from the Northwest.” The word of mouth spread like wildfire.

What did everyone have in common? This color line had become an amazing solution during a time of change. After all,
Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder
So Start Beholding…

As long as you have eyes and a brain, you are all beholders. This means you all want to see and understand, and only then can you have beauty in the eye. This is why in nature, we all behold and understand all the color combinations with our eyes and our minds, and therefore we all agree on the beauty that we are beholding.

**Remember:** Taupe, beige, and cream are not really colors because they are not in the rainbow.

It should be as simple as remembering that everything is a color and that there is no taupe in the rainbow. The reason why things sometimes look neutral or without real color has to do with colors canceling each other out when they bounce off each other.

But if you look closely, a color will fight itself to the surface and claim its right. Oak wood has lots of yellow, red, and green tones but in the end, you can call it orange. The tan coat you
own is really a light khaki greenish yellow, making it a green-yellow when you wear a yellow sweater with it and yellow-green when you wear it with a red blouse.

If you surrender to the fact that taupe, beiges, browns, and gray colors are all really neutral forms of color that love to be with each other, your reality just got more exciting and interesting.

**Remember:** *You think it is about that color, but it is not.*

The sooner we realize it is about colors together we like and not just one color, the better decisions we will be able to make. Colors cannot be alone. Like people, no man (and no color) is an island.

We have seen it in so many couples. They bring the best or worst out in each other. Either way, we love being around the great couples and avoid the bad ones.

The troubled ones are in constant conflict while others bore themselves to death. Then one day you see half of the bad couple with a new partner. Suddenly the one who seemed so argumentative now seems very witty and the life of the party. The one who seemed so boring is now insightful and thoughtful.

I am not talking here about people; I am talking about color. But like people, those around them influence them. Opposites attract as long as they understand
each other’s needs. The color you love needs to allow all the colors you love.

The story often goes like this. A color begins to stand apart from everything else you thought you loved. At first you try to reason with it, compromise, and then you realize you made a mistake because having that color means not being able to have the colors you love around.

Colors that play well together stay together, they say, or at least I say.

You shouldn’t purchase a color unless you know where you are going to put it. You buy color to put it in its place. Top or bottom, tie or socks, couch or drapes, walls or trim. There is a reason for not buying blue lipstick. It is not the right place for that color. This logical reasoning gets totally ignored, and nowhere is this more evident than in wall color.

Colors in other industries are assigned to objects. Some colors hold their position throughout time. For example, red lipstick lands on lips throughout the centuries because it creates a healthy look. Blue for denim is the American way. Black leather is a classic sexy staple.

However, with paint, people are under the impression that anything goes anywhere. Here