



April 2002  
Volume 3, Issue 4

## TREND SPOTTING AND TRACKING – CHART YOUR OWN

By Jacqueline Gikow

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Many artists in the crafts community ignore trends, thinking that what is selling in stores or magazines at the moment has nothing to do with them. However, trends by definition are techniques, motifs, medium, colors, and supplies that grow in popularity over time. Trends that affect today's times should be taken into consideration when creating your crafts to sell because they will influence buyers for a long time.

One of the most important factors in selling handcrafted products is to provide a product that is in demand. There are many artists who have lost sales because their own favorite craft item (which they made 100s of) was simply not in demand.

The successful crafter needs to know how to keep ahead - or at least, abreast - of the ever-changing consumer market. For example, using herbs found in archaeological digs, one fragrance master responded to the current interest in ancient things by recreating Cleopatra's perfume. So look, talk, and listen at health clubs, parks, stores, or wherever people gather. Stalking the next big trend can be fun!

### **Polymer Clay Craft Trends Are Everywhere**

Although around for over 30 years, look at how fast the polymer clay medium has grown in popularity in just 10 years. This popularity can translate into almost any trend, and tracking trends for polymer clay must rely on the same principles of any craft product research.

For instance, how many polymer clay pens have you made that were well received as gifts or as marketable items? Bic pens may have been good enough for the occasional letter in the past, but Montblanc now sells \$350 million in fancy pens every year. The

consumer wants to be unique, and a handmade item offers that opportunity. Pens that make a statement are a trend that will probably continue as long as the high tech/high touch conflict affect our daily lives. Polymer clay-covered pens fit right into this trend.

Polymer clay is fast becoming a staple among established craft media. Some artists feel they have to hide their work in polymer clay by combining it with "traditional" media, but concentrating on producing the highest quality polymer clay artwork seen in other crafts is a much better way of adding our voices to the craft marketplace. An increasing number of craft exhibitions and juried shows include a category for polymer clay or a mixed media category. This is a trend that makes it possible for polymer clay to become visible and educate the buying public of its validity.

## **Tracking Emerging Trends**

Home has become an important center of life. Spiritual and contemplative values are increasing as people become aware of the need for a slower pace. People of all ages now look to arts and crafts as a means for relaxation and self-expression. The craft market has changed dynamically in the past 15-20 years. Today, nearly 75% of all US households participate in crafts.

If you intend to create items for an upcoming holiday, start at least six months in advance. Most shops that purchase crafts will want to reserve their inventory at least 4 to 5 months in advance. If you are selling at a crafts show or fair, you can start a little later and still develop a good inventory.

The Internet has become an important resource to tracking trends. The information, once you distill the wheat from the chaff, is current and immediate. [The U.S. Census Bureau](#), for example, keeps an accessible database with all sorts of demographic information.

## **How Do You Start?**

Well, valuable information is everywhere you look. Track trends by observing current economic events. Trends are current styles, but should not be confused with fads. Trends are long term rather than flash in the pan. Trends influence society, while fads do not.

Start a notebook to keep track of trends. A notebook is better than a file folder because you can open it page by page and compare the information you've collected. Create your own brain trust to test your theories on smart acquaintances of various ages and incomes. Tracking trends is for the long term. Don't just spend a day with a pile of magazines; make this a commitment to yourself and your crafts.

There are two primary ways of tracking trends: 1) direct observation and 2) indirect information gathering.

*Direct observation includes getting out into the world:*

- Attend a trade show
- Talk to kids! They know everything. Who do you think toy companies rely on?
- Walk through a mall or a hip shopping area. Pay attention not only to what the stores stock, but to the people shopping

*Indirect observation includes keeping track of current media and economic trends:*

- Look for new books on trends in library. [Faith Popcorn](#), a well-known trend tracker, maintains a web site with some useful information.
- Newspapers, including trade newspapers, give you first-hand information about trends.
- Read craft trade magazines like the Crafts Report and Lapidary Arts, and consumer magazines about fashion, home dec, cooking, etc. Check back a minimum of six issues in popular magazines and look for items that have been advertised in at least four consecutive issues. These are items that are selling well, and producing a profit for their creator.

## **Color and Design Trends - Why Do I Want My Towels to Be "Zesty?"**

Do you ever wonder why one color-forecasting list differs so much from another? For example, last spring I saw a color trend forecast in one crafts newsletter that was unrelated to a forecast in the Crafts Report. A third set of colors was published in Craft Trends magazine. Even more curiously, the color trends reported by the CMG (Color Marketing Group) varied widely from the Pantone Marketing System forecasts.

I have always viewed this phenomenon skeptically, believing that these "forecasters" were pulling these colors out of a hat. But the answer is more complicated than that.

## **Color Trend Organizations**

The two following groups are the best known for accurate color forecasting, whether it is a logo, shirt, package, corporate identity or environment. [Color Marketing Group](#) (CMG), founded in 1962, is an international, not-for-profit association of 1,600 professional Color Designers. CMG members forecast Color Directions one to three years in advance for almost every industry.

Since 1985, [Pantone Marketing Systems](#) has advised the world's largest companies on color choices for branding and demographic positioning. Pantone makes trend presentations to companies such as Nike and has developed custom colors for them.

## **Beware the Expert Opinion**

But Todd Blumenthal, Nike's global merchandising director for footwear, subscribes to 15 color-trend services, in addition to Pantone. Subscribing to a color-trend service can be either market savvy or suicide, he reports. Even with recommendations from trend organizations, many companies customize the palettes suggested. Blumenthal subscribes to 15 color-trend services, in addition to Pantone. He reports that subscribing to a color-trend service can be either market savvy or suicide.

[InfoMat](#), a trend search engine, reviews a list of the top 35 trend sites. This will give you an idea of the complexity of choosing a trend organization to rely on.

## **Color for Fall 2002**

For Fall 2002, American designers are going classic. In the first collections since world events disrupted the Spring 2002 shows in September, color is being used as a symbol of strength, familiarity and pride. Through the use of classic shades, designers are drawing on a sense of American heritage and tradition in collections of elegant simplicity and fortitude.

Designers are taking a more practical and introspective route, presenting palettes that are approachable, unpretentious and above all, comforting. Deep reds, strong blue-grays, and soft neutrals inspire a feeling of patriotism rarely before seen on the runways.

## **2003 Color Directions**

According to the CMG, the ailing economy is the primary influence on the 2003 Consumer Color Directions Palette. Full chroma hues will lift our spirits and provoke our senses. Technology will continue to open doors to new colors and to special color effects, which allow



old colors to look new.

The defining color of this century will be blue, according to a number of market-forecasting companies. Blue provides a sense of limitlessness, peace, and hope. It is also viewed as the "post-green" color for companies wishing to convey their commitment to the environment.

This fall color palette is from the Color Association of the U.S. (CAUS). CAUS is the oldest color forecasting organization in the U.S.

Pantone's client companies have just received their forecasts for the spring and summer of 2003. Their prediction is a wide array of neutral tones in cool and warm gray, clay, taupe and pale brown and a new wave of soft pale colors led by aqua and true lavender in response to consumers' desire for serenity in their environments.

### **So, What Trends to Track? — Quick, What Did You Have for Breakfast?**

Don't let trends and trending overwhelm you. If you spot a trend that is popular in Europe, you may find yourself out in the cold if you start incorporating it into your work. It often takes a few years for a European trend to come to the United States, and longer for it to be accepted. I watched orange emerge as a color trend in Italy, taking five years to be featured in American magazines and used in products. However, orange, for some reason has never been a popular color in America, whether in style or not. If you noticed, the original orange iMac was not around for long.

Trends let you know what is happening in the big picture. They are to be used as guides. Trust your instincts when incorporating new trends. Keep on top of the world of trends. Stay aware of upcoming trends and those that might be winding down.

Remember to track locally as well as nationally and internationally. All trends are not popular in every location. For example: southwestern themes never fly in Florida and seashell motifs rarely work in Iowa.

*Jacqueline Gikow holds a wealth of experience in retailing and wholesaling crafts, including six years as the display designer for Rolex Watch Co. and U.S. Shoe Company. She is the author of Illustration in Black & White and Polymer Clay: Creating Functional and Decorative Objects, and the Editor of the National Polymer Clay Guild newsletter.*

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