

In Times So Mellow, A Burst Of Yellow

Lindsey Rowe

Institute Serves Up 'Mimosa' as Its Color of the Year

The people vote for change, and color company Pantone delivers.

By choosing Mimosa, a champagne-and-orange-juice shade of yellow as the 2009 color of the year, Pantone promises hope, joy, optimism - sentiments to match the new U.S. president's oft-spoken words.



The following are some products in the same family as Pantone's color of the year, coming to a store near you: Daisy pillow, \$24.95 at www.cb2.com. (Cb2 -)

"Yellow is the color of change, of hopefulness, of warmth and of good cheer," says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. Pantone provides color standards widely used in most design industries, and the Color Institute is its research group.

Each year the institute selects a color based on a general sense of the world's mood. "We chose yellow based on the . . . elephant in the room, the economy," Eiseman says. Why not brown or black to match the malaise? "To choose a color based on gloom and doom would not be very good," she says. Pantone has to consider how the color will translate to products, and yellow has the highest visibility on the color wheel and in storefront windows.

The symbolism of the color, however, isn't all sunshine and tulips. Yellow can also represent cowardliness, sickness, jaundice and the death of leaves in the fall. "No color has a neat, unambiguous symbolism, but yellow gives some of the most mixed messages of all," writes Victoria Finlay in "Color: The Natural History of the Palette" (Random House/Ballantine Books, 2003). The shifting meaning, however, is exactly what ties yellow to the concept of change. Even in nature, yellow flowers mark the transition to spring, while saffron leaves signal autumn's arrival.

When choosing the color (No. 14-0848 for design devotees), Pantone also observed that consumers have embraced warmer colors in the past few years, most notably orange, which indicates that "there's room for yellow, which is next door on the color wheel," Eiseman says.

Peter Zia, owner of Chinoiserie in Old Town Alexandria, says he remembers a customer who once stayed in an apartment with canary yellow interiors. "You just feel like you wake up and the room is full of sunshine," he recalls her saying.

Zia warns that because of yellow's many shades, the color can easily go wrong in homes. The simplest way to avoid yellow angst is to experiment with small accessories, such as pillows, throws, candles and accent plates. Eiseman recommends painting Mimosa in a front entry for

an instant message of welcome. In a recession, accent paint even makes financial sense: "It doesn't cost as much to paint as it does to re-cover your sofa or chairs," she says.

Many major home stores were ready for the news and have come out with bright products for spring. Crate and Barrel, Pottery Barn and Williams-Sonoma describe new items with a banana-bunch of yellow words, including "lemon," "citrus," "sunburst" and "turmeric."

Besides its message of hope, Eiseman says, Mimosa in the home will provide a sense of reassurance that in the end, everything will be sunny side up. "It gives the suggestion of sunshine even when there isn't sunshine," she says.

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