

A TOUCH of Gray

The common denominator in color trends for 2011 just might be a touch of gray.

Analyze virtually any so-called “new” color being touted for next season and chances are you’ll find that it’s a familiar hue modified by the addition of a touch of gray.

Brilliant peacock blue is out, replaced by a slightly less in-your-face, more distinguished blue. The change? A touch of gray.

The same goes for bright reds, yellows and oranges – all toned down with a touch of gray. Irish spring green? Too intense. Burnish it with a smidgen of gray.

Conversely, a non-gray color – whether aqua or henna or mango – very likely will be paired with a complementary shade of gray. A gray that’s not too light, like a pencil sketch, or too dark, like coal dust, but somewhere unobtrusively in between.

Gray, as one designer says, is the new neutral. Goodbye brown. Hello gray.

Wait a minute, you’re thinking. All this gray spin is about as appealing as the color scheme of an aircraft carrier. Is this what’s supposed to excite shoppers next season?

Yes. Because color mavens are injecting gray to introduce reality into colors that might otherwise border on Day-Glo. They’re adding gray to turn down the visual volume, add a degree of sophistication and extend the livability lifespan of fabric. Nothing dates a home more than a color whose time was brief and which passed long, long ago. Remember avocado green appliances?

Fashion gurus once thought that brighter colors were the best offense when battling tough economic times. That’s now old school thinking, tempered by the Great Recession.

“Big, bright, bold colors are just a bandage,” says interior designer Mark Woodman, incoming president for the influential Color Marketing Group (CMG). CMG is one of the organizations that determine future color trends by surveying color, design and fashion professionals in a variety of industries.

“The really bright colors seem artificially optimistic,” Woodman says. A bit of gray, he explains, “somehow gives an authenticity to the colors. We see a slight toning of them across the board. Gray has a subtle effect on them, but not so much that it makes things dull. There’s still color there, but it’s accessible.”

Accessible colors for textile designer Kate Korten’s 2011 lineup include a new, soft brown that she describes as “more of a black coffee with a slight bit of milk.” Creations by Kate Korten Design Strategies make up the exclusive Aláxi line of Sunbrella fabrics, marketed by Silver State, a jobber serving designers and retailers.

Korten assembled aqua, melon and ochre shades for a palette she calls Miami. Midnight Sun includes a bright navy, yellow and beige. Her most unexpected combination of “urban gray, orange and purples” was inspired by visions of arid, urban Los Angeles. But the gray reminds her of weathered wood, she says, and looks at home in her upstate New York retreat.

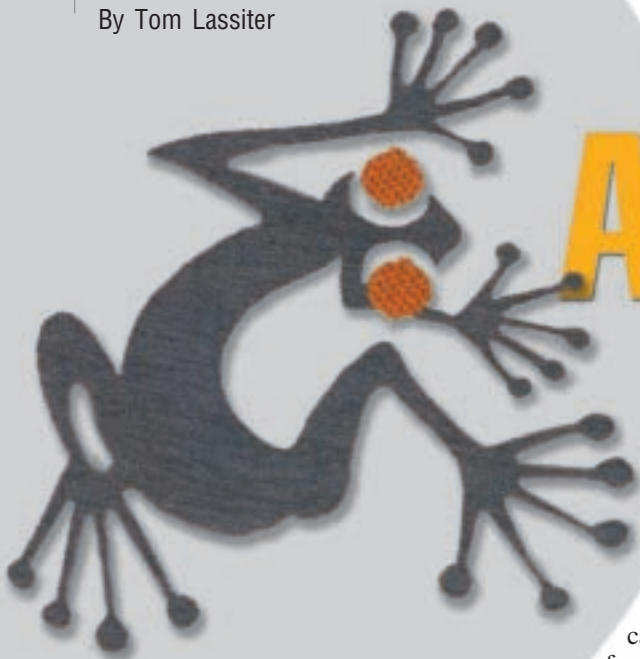
For evidence of gray’s eminent role,

OPPOSITE PAGE: Top to Bottom: Bebop/Indian Summer; Hop/Smokin’; Noodlin/Indian Summer; and bottom right corner is Jive/Smokin’. All from the Improv 2010 spring collection from Aláxi by Silver State.

Hop into 2011 with gray, the new neutral that pairs well with a broad array of colors, but don’t forget white or off-whites.



By Tom Lassiter



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Mardi Grape.

look no further than a dusky purple tone called Mardi Grape, which CMG picked as the hot, or “Next Color,” for 2010. “A sophisticated crossover between purple, brown and gray,” Mardi Grape is only a distant cousin to Kool-Aid purple and sophisticated enough to be “a neutral we can love long-term,” according to a CMG news release.

As a neutral base, gray allows other colors to stand out and speak up, especially in upscale, urban environments.

“If we had to pick a ‘color of the year,’ it would be gray,” says Brenda Sewell-Bost. She and partner Karen

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Williams make up the textile design firm D2, which creates the looks for Shuford Mills’ Outdura brand. The duo initially forecast gray as the season’s hottest color “several seasons ago, and I guess we were early,” Sewell-Bost says. “It’s now much more mainstream.”

“Gray is definitely coming on. It’s becoming the new neutral,” says Lori-Jo Shea, design director for Richloom Fabric Group’s Solarium Division.

“Gray is always paired with another color, a happy color, a color that’s going to inspire a feeling,” says Marcia Blake, president and creative director for Outdoor Interiors.

Gray’s common denominator role is apparent in a jazzy collection called Improv from Aláxi. One of the more fanciful patterns in the jazz-themed Improv line is a frog motif called Hop.

Hop is available in five colorways, including two blues, a green and a muted orange. Gray leavens the brighter hues throughout, and predominates in the fifth colorway (called Smokin’), providing the woven bodies for the frogs on an off-white field. The frogs’ eyes are a muted orange.

“In this economic environment,” Korten says her goal is “to create something that is uplifting but not whimsical.”

Gray’s ability to pair with any in a broad array of colors makes it the neutral choice for 2011. “It’s a great look,” says Gina Wicker, director of design for Glen Raven, maker of Sunbrella fabrics.

Current grays “are not the ultra-contemporary gray of the past,” Wicker says. “We are seeing a lot of people going toward cooler neutrals,” often pairing “with oranges and yellows.”

Wicker defines “cooler neutrals” as “white or anything up to and including



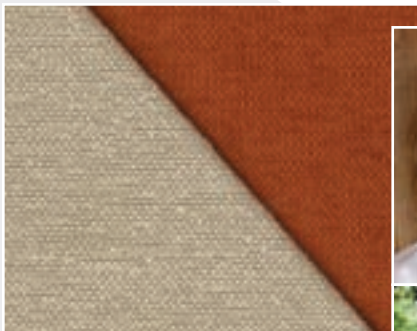
L. to R. Jive/Smokin’; Jazz/Smokin’ from the Improv 2010 spring collection from Aláxi by Silver State.



Kate Korten of Creations by Kate Korten Design Strategies.



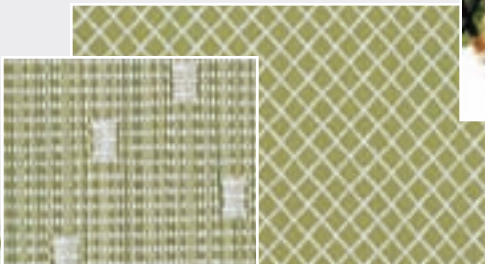
L. to R. Noodlin – Round Midnight; Illumination – Celestial; Bebop-Midnight Sun; Illumination – Electric Blue. All from the Improv 2010 spring collection from Aláxi by Silver State.



ABOVE: L. to R. Rumor in Stone & Brick from Outdura.



Top to Bottom: Brenda Sewell-Bost and Karen Williams of design firm D2.



Shown top L. to R. Diva Palm, Lavalier Palm, Chateau Palm, and Traveler Calypso are key patterns in the French Twist collection from Outdura.

heather beige or charcoal. We’re seeing a lot of use of white and very light neutrals as the ground, the canvas. We’re seeing people set up their larger pieces in a fabric they can live with for a very long time.”

Speaking of beige, the Color Marketing Group’s current “next” color is nothing but. Called Barefootin’, the soft, sandy hue is a “color-infused” neutral able to “soothe a weary psyche, but without being dull.” Not so coincidentally, Barefootin’ “pairs wonderfully with today’s newest soft and muted grays.”

Despite the chatter about grays and neutrals, color abounds in casual fur-

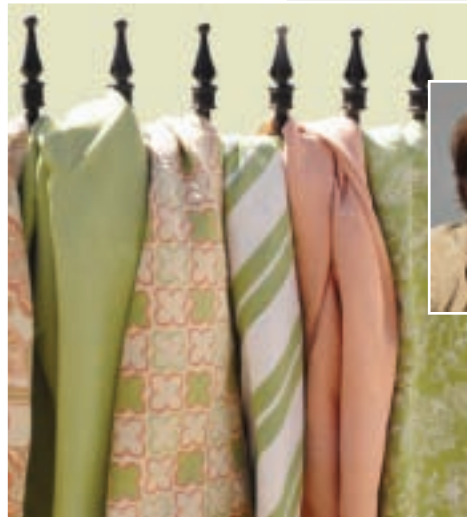
niture fabrics for 2011. Whether a homeowner is outfitting the Outdoor Room of a seaside cottage, a desert Southwest retreat or a home in green suburbia, designers have something for everyone's tastes.

"The colors we've focused on are the spice tones," says D2's Brenda Sewell-Bost. For Outdura, "We've taken them to a new level and emphasized apricot and cayenne colorations."

"Green continues to be a great color, because of the ease in working with different settings," says D2 partner Karen Williams. For one Outdura-brand design, D2 specified two shades of green fibers for a woven pattern. To the human eye, the finished product takes on a third coloration, Williams explains.

Outdura's lineup for 2011 features a collection called French Twist. The collection uses classic design elements, such as scrolls and diamonds, in an updated approach to an ancient style of weaving called ikat (pronounced EE-cot). Design elements from the Middle East to Asia (a.k.a. ethnic elements) turn up in the patterns, the D2 duo explain, adding that the French have long success with ikat styles. Hence the name, French Twist.

"If you open any fashion magazine, it's very prevalent right now," Sewell-Bost says.



Geobella by Phifer.

Also hot in fashion and reflected in D2's designs for Outdura: linen looks. The Outdura interpretation is a bouclé pattern called Rumor and "inspired by French laundry domestics."

Spice tones including warm saffron and spicy mustard are found in a collection called Bohemian Chic, from Phifer. Designer Carol Harkey says such ethnic, tribal and henna-inspired hues "are part of that global marketplace that's going on."

Phifer's Garden Party collection



Designer Carol Harkey.



Garden Party collection by Phifer.

includes paisleys, florals, stripes and houndstooth patterns unified by an "understated elegance." The Cape Cod collection features soft greens reminiscent of sea grass, Harkey says, and includes lattice-like patterns as well as stripes.

The Phifer lineup includes a new group of cushion fabrics called GeoBella. The yarns are made of 100 percent reclaimed and recycled olefin (polypropylene), and the fabrics may in turn be recycled. GeoBella could be a marketing advantage as consumers become more aware of, and interested in, sustainable lifestyles.

Glen Raven's confidence that white will be a major look in 2011 is reflected in its Sunbrella.com Web site. White or off-white cushions can be seen in each of the casual furniture photos in rotation on the home page.

"White becomes exciting with the other things you put on it," says design director Wicker. "You can make it anything you want it to be and be happy



Seating fabric – Sunbrella Canvas Natural; pillow fabric (L. to R.) Flagship Mango, Canvas Aruba, Dupione Stone, Caroline Seabreeze, Luminous Pool; Sunbrella throw by Textillery, Sunbrella rug by CMI. Subset: Gina Wicker, Sunbrella.





ABOVE: Patagonia Latte shown with Rave Spray woven solid from the Solarium collection from Richloom Fabrics Group.



MIDDLE: Lori-Jo Shea, design director for Richloom Fabric Group's Solarium Division.



BELOW: Island Salsa shown with Delmar Stripe Salsa from Richloom Fabrics Group.

with it for a long time.”

Another strong Sunbrella color for 2011: navy, which “tends to be regional and never really goes away,” Wicker says. Navy is a strong story in current fashion, she says, as interest in black has faded and business and evening wear designers have moved toward “all shades of gray and navy in a big way.”

CMG’s Woodman says he expects North American interest in nautical themes to grow, mirroring a look that is “huge now in Europe.” Note that this interest in horizontal stripes of red, white and blue probably will translate as “patriotic” upon reaching the United States, he says.

An interior designer for more than 20 years,

Woodman is a trend analyst for Global Color Research, a London-based publisher focused on design and color trends.

Richloom Fabric Group’s newest offering under the Solarium brand is a line of solution-dyed olefin fabrics, says design director Shea. Marketed as the Solar collection, colors include “the basics” such as navy, hunter green and camel.

Some fabrics include a second color of yarn woven with the dominant color to produce a heathered, or linen tone, effect, Shea says. These colors include spray (an aqua), kiwi green, salsa and brick.

Other new introductions include spun-polyester prints with leafy tropicals in greens; medallions in shitake gray mixed with buttercup yellow and mandarin orange; and salsa, a vibrant red complemented with cream.

“Red is our No. 1 selling color in any category,” Shea says. “Our customers and consumers can’t get enough red.”

And most designers might say that red pairs nicely with gray.

All Tastes (and Politics) Are Local



Tastemakers and trendsetters may stipulate what is or isn’t au courant on the national and international scene. The real fashion story, however, is what matters regionally and locally.

Casual furniture retailers and interior designers should be able to inform a customer about the latest industry trends in fabric colors, patterns and textures, but the customer (who is always right) may wrestle with a hundred other considerations. A sister-in-law’s advice or the new chaise lounges at the country club can have far more influence than some far-off fashionistas.

Local tastes often can be hyper local. Interior designer Carol Smith serves clients in arid Scottsdale, Arizona, where the landscape often dictates colors for Outdoor Rooms.

“My clients are all pretty much in the desert,” she says. “They tend to gravitate to the very neutral colors and want their furniture and cushions to blend with the desert.”

Smith’s clients rarely choose prints, and if they do, the patterns are small. Green is popular, as long as it matches the greens of desert flora.

Tastes differ in the lower elevations not so far from Scottsdale, where it’s a different home fashion scene. “Designers I know in the valley are using lots more patterns and colors. I can’t convince customers up here in the desert to go with bright colors and patterns.”

Atlanta interior designer Alice Cramer finds her customers attracted by texture. “There are quite a few that look and feel like velvet,” she says. “And there are tweeds and wovens, not very pretty, but they’re out there.”

Debbie Cherry describes her market in the Dallas suburbs as “very traditional” but sees a shift toward more contemporary looks such as solid cushions with bright, contrasting piping.

“We are getting more and more requests,” she says of her clients. “They are aware of the trends. It takes everybody a while to accept change, and this is a little bit of a change, because people are used to prints.”

Furniture makers often present seating with dark fabrics, which aren’t ideal for the Texas market, Cherry says. “Darker colors are hot,” she explains, “and it’s not enticing

to sit outside in a brown chenille chaise.”

Synthetic leathers offer a similar challenge for outdoor use in Texas. “We’ve done a lot with synthetic leathers, but not necessarily outdoors,” she says. “In 100-degree weather, nobody wants to sit on a leather sofa. Even the thought of it is horrible. We have used a lot of the fauxs inside, even on dining room chairs. They’re good for kids coming in with wet swim suits.”

Cherry, whose business is called One Swanky Shop, in Marble Falls, goes to national and international shows and markets to keep abreast of trends. The dominant color at April’s International Home Furnishings Market in High Point, she says, was “hot, hot orange. Tangerine was everywhere at market. It’s been coming for about a year. On the interior side, it’s strong, and usually the exterior is not far behind.”

Could this mean tangerine will be splashed heavily throughout outdoor fabric offerings for 2012? Time will tell. 