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Linda O'Keeffe's Take on "Livable Color"

THE PEOPLE'S THEATER

Wall Art



INTERSECTION

Color
PULSE®
2013

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF CATE AND FRANCINE GARDNER



As Benjamin Moore's Color Pulse 2013 explores the intersection between the past and present, New York designer and "wanderlust traveler" Francine Gardner shares how the past influences her work and where she encountered many of the colors from the latest Benjamin Moore® forecast.

Designer Francine Gardner considers herself a "wanderlust traveler." And while she says her life fantasy is to be a nomad, she currently finds home base in New York as the owner of Interieurs Showroom and Design Studio. As you'll discover, though, the world quite literally is her inspiration. Her exotic journeys – from Bhutan to her native South of France – inform everything from her design process to the tones and textures of her latest furniture collection.

Similarly, Benjamin Moore & Co.'s color experts travel the world each year in their search of what's driving the future of color. For its latest color forecast, Benjamin Moore looked across various disciplines and discovered a combination of concepts, colors, materials and textures surfacing in new and unexpected ways ... traditional styles merging with modern technologies ... bold and dynamic colors animate the world of design ... technology evolving into organic forms.

Our findings from this trek through color are revealed in Color Pulse 2013, now available through Benjamin Moore (see page 51). We also found that Francine Gardner made comparable color connections – especially during her most recent trip to Tanzania. In this issue of *Nuance*[™], she discusses how these background colors of browns, neutrals and grays that “anchor the burst of more primary colors” are already influencing her interior work. And, just as this year's Color Pulse forecast explores the “intersection” between the past and present to create new directions for the future, Gardner shares a similar motto: “I do not believe in recreating the past,” she says. “The influence of the past is so strong, however, that I cannot escape it.”



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— Francine Gardner





BM: Where do you find inspiration for color and design concepts for the furnishings in your showroom, Interieurs? How is this inspiration carried into the spaces you design?

FG: *With years and time, my philosophy about life is to live in the moment, which I do, fully, with open eyes and an open heart. Opening your eyes to the world, its people, nature, landscapes, birds and animals is the source of my inspiration. I have conceptualized entire projects from a random moment. For example, while out-of-bounds skiing in pure powder bliss in Deer Valley [Utah], I fell upon a derelict mine structure. That was an epiphany! I stopped in my tracks, took photograph after photograph, felt a surge of excitement and instantly decided that will be the new direction for Interieurs.*

I read volumes about the industrial revolution in Europe and America ... the lives of the miners, the incredible structures and machinery. From there, a new style was born. That was more than 10 years ago, when peers and clients thought I truly had lost my mind; the trend is now in full force and everyone, including the mass retailers, is catching on. The colors follow; I painted a large wall of my Tribeca showroom in a Benjamin Moore deep chocolate brown [Silhouette AF-655], which has become my staple color. Designers would bring their clients just to look at the brown wall and the amazingly beautiful canvas it created for the furniture to come alive.

My latest furniture collection, AMARA, was designed in my head while reading the book Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese. The descriptions of Ethiopia, its rich landscape and culture awoke a craving for furniture that would embody all these elements. I collect African art, but, in this one moment, I looked at an Ethiopian grain harvest and for the first time noticed the intricacies of its hand-carved details. The Amara collection was born.

My design sensitivity gravitates toward "perfect imperfection." It is those imperfections that give spaces their characters or personalities; a rough hewn

table top, an industrial armoire with slight dents and deep scratches will testify to its original utilitarian purpose. My spaces carry a common denominator, are modern eclectic, are very personal, and are designed to embrace my clients' lives, to soothe and to be the design foundation for a life fully lived.

BM: Benjamin Moore's emerging trends in Color Pulse 2013 show what was once disposable can assume a new life through repurposing. How does this idea of upcycling influence your work, and what impact does this concept have on color and texture and design in general?

FG: From the beginning of Interieurs, I embraced the concept of repurposing and uplifting. When Interieurs first opened in SoHo, we took quite a gamble by importing old, discarded French painted furniture pieces, showing them in the showroom as we say in French "dans son jus" – in its original juice or state – and embracing all their imperfections. With that, we curated an authentic atmosphere of a time gone by. I still remember our first window of a French rusted garden bench with trays of cut grass in lieu of seat cushions. That same week, we made the front page of the New York Times Style section, and the adventure began.

The newness was to show no colors but rather shades taken from the aged patina of the paints covering the pieces. This trend is still very much alive, and one can find paint colors to replicate the original. I've spent hours at the Benjamin Moore store in SoHo trying to match swatches of peeling paint for my projects. While traveling through Indonesia some 15 years ago, I saw enormous palm wood trunks and discarded teak trunks on the side of the road. What was supposed to be a retreat type of trip became a search for all these magnificent raw woods. I imported a container of these teak trunks, refinished them in New York, and turned them into tables, consoles and seats. The rest is history. It has become a staple of eclectic fashionable design.





Meanwhile, my curious mind took me on another upcycling adventure with my latest passion for industrial discarded machinery and utilitarian furniture. Who knows what will come to me next, but I am ready and open to embrace the next upcycling adventure.

BM: Benjamin Moore's Color Pulse is divided into four "influences:" Flow, Cycle, Animate and Connect. In Flow, we show how color, texture and shapes of the past are reintroduced, creating a look that brings comfort and familiarity and yet is modern. Did your upbringing in a small village in France play a role in developing the aesthetic you are known for today? Do you find yourself reinventing things from the past, or do you look to the past to design for the future?

FG: I definitely look at the past to design for the future. My past is truly a reflection of who I am. I was born in a 12th century village where my family lived for generations. Houses were built in stone. The colors included the grays and beiges of the local limestone, the rich browns of the century-old oak floors, grayish and red tiles, the red of the soil, the lush greens of the vineyards, the bursts of pale pinks and reds, the yellows of the trees and sunflowers. These textures and colors are imprinted in my brain ... or maybe in my DNA!

I visit home every other month and take long walks with my camera in hand and, invariably, notice a new tone, a new shape. When designing for the future, I subconsciously incorporate all these elements and translate them into a modern statement. I actually live in a stone house with red Saltillo tiles. The house surrounds a gravel courtyard, and guests feel as if they have stepped into a village in France. I guess our past is really embedded in us, and one can choose to ignore it, reject it or embrace it. I certainly embraced it, but I also have made it my own evolving future.

BM: What colors are you seeing in your travels, and are there any connections or similarities to the colors selected for the Color Pulse 2013 forecast? How do you see these colors influencing interiors, textiles and finishes?

FG: My last trip took me to Tanzania. Going up Mount Kilimanjaro was an amazing experience. We followed the longest and harshest route, and every step took in unexpected, spectacular scenery. The days were filled with sounds and colors, starting with tropical forests teeming with life – monkeys, birds, every tone of greens, the bright blues of bird feathers. We moved to the surreal landscapes of huge century-old trees draped in white and all shades of gray lichens and moss. As we gained altitude, the grays all at once were behind us and we entered a world of giant heathers of soft purple and yellow, then rocky dry landscapes with amazing rock formations. Suddenly, amidst the darkest, most unfriendly ground, emerged the surreal world of Giant Lobelias towering over us in a burst of vibrant primary colors. On the final days to the summit, we endured the most forbidding, unfriendly, steep, dark brown ground. Deprived of oxygen, I almost gave up at 24,000 feet, but being stubborn kept me going, and it was rewarding when suddenly appeared the most beautiful sight: the huge Kilimanjaro glacier towering over us in all shades of white and blue.

I went on to the Serengeti and other parks in Tanzania where I encountered sand colors, the reds of the dirt, the browns of the trees, the grays from the elephants' skin, and the prints of the giraffes, leopards and cheetahs. The old Stone Town in Zanzibar with its marketplaces is filled with bright colors of the fruits and the weathered, distressed tones of the stone facades of the houses and palaces – a landscape of colors that I will incorporate in my next designs.

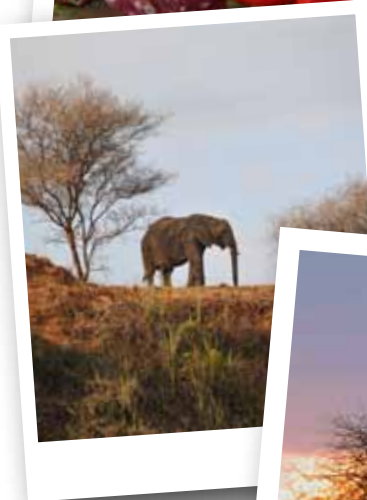
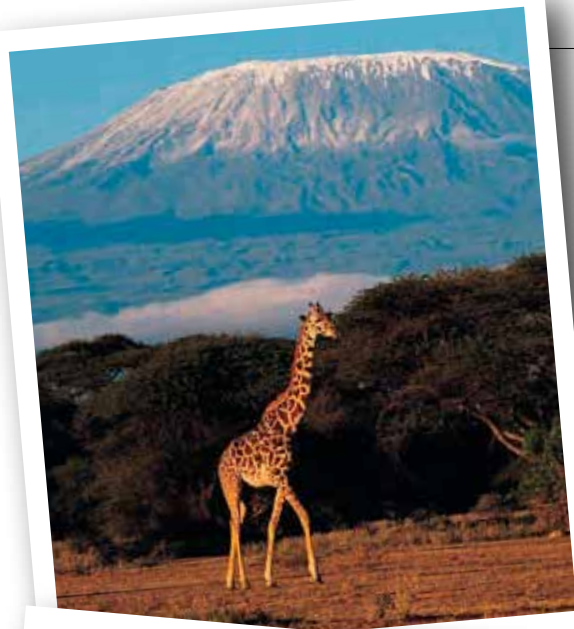
Looking at the 2013 forecast, I can see the connections with the colors I discovered on this trip. These background colors of browns, neutrals and grays anchor the burst of more primary vibrant colors found in the 2013 forecast. These colors will definitely influence design, textiles, interiors and finishes where ethnic, primary, vivid tones have found their place.

BM: Color Pulse 2013 explores the intersection between the past and the present to create new directions for the future. How does this concept resonate with you, and is it reflected in the pieces you select for your showroom?

FG: You have touched right on my design motto, and I am very much looking forward to working with Benjamin Moore's Color Pulse 2013 palette. I do not believe in recreating the past. For instance, I would never use a copy of a Louis XV chair. I always look forward. The influence of the past, however, is so strong that I cannot escape it, and I will somehow incorporate it in my designs.

The pieces I design and select for the showroom have strong ties to the past but are focused on the future. I will juxtapose an industrial table with an ultra contemporary white lacquered chandelier. My next collection is in steel with chrome or lacquered color finishes, however the shapes might be an echo of the past.

Clients come to Interieurs for our aesthetic vision that defines who we are and what we bring: the touches of the unexpected, the textures of the past, the vision of the modern lifestyle. It is the unique object we find or the furniture pieces we design specifically for a particular client that set us apart. By way of example, we are presently in the final phase of a design project for an apartment in the Jean Nouvel building on the West Side Highway in New York.



The conventionally “expected” design, driven by the architecture, would be an all-white, contemporary, sparse space. While I love the architecture, it is quite cold and, in a sense, forbidding. While embracing the vision of Jean Nouvel, we interpreted it to create an inviting apartment. The building is connected to a prison for women. Why should we hide that fact? Rather than take the expected route, we took the road less traveled by designing the dining area to showcase a custom-made industrial round dining table and bright Paola Lenti woven chairs. In the living area, we incorporated an all-glass pool table offset by modern sofas, tribal rugs and textiles I found in Bhutan.

For more information on Interieurs Showroom and Design Studio and to read Francine Gardner’s well-respected blog – Art-de-Vivre – visit www.interieurs.com.

