

JAIC Special Issue on Environmental Colour Design

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This Special Issue consists of eight articles on the theme of Environmental Colour Design (ECD), which arose out of the conference Progress in Colour Studies (PICS), held at University College London (UCL) in September 2016. Although the primary focus of the conference was on colour in language and linguistics, a strong body of work was submitted in the field of ECD, which justified a dedicated session. My sincere thanks to all the authors and peer reviewers who have worked hard over the past 12 months to develop the conference presentations into first-rate journal articles.

During his long career Frank Lloyd Wright aimed to produce structures in harmony with the natural environment and with their human occupants, a philosophy he called “organic architecture”. The designs were facilitated by his expressive use of both natural and new materials and the creation of new organising principles for the living space. His work is universally admired, yet his philosophy of fitting the building to its surrounding environment has generally not become the norm. In too many cases architects and designers still seek to impose their preconceived schemes onto the landscape, with the result that buildings frequently clash in appearance with their environments.

The colour environment consists not only of the individual surface colours, as one might measure with an instrument or judge by juxtaposition with samples from a colour atlas, but also of the visual effect of the interplay of light on multiple surfaces and forms. As these are assimilated into the perception and memory of the observer, they change and evolve over time and with the expectations and shared understanding of all the people who inhabit the space. As Lois Swirloff put it: *“The richness and subtlety of places redolent with color represents an accrual over time, rather than conscious design.”*

A frequent theme throughout the articles in this Special Issue is the *genius loci*, the ‘spirit of place’, that embodies the characteristics or distinctive atmosphere of a location, and hence guides the design choices as to what is proper and appropriate. Perhaps we should also be invoking his colourful cousin, the *genius chromatici*, to guide our colour choices, in a way that is harmonious and sympathetic to the distinctive colours of the local environment. But how should we know the spirit of the place? Is it better to conduct a systematic analysis of the type pioneered by Jean-Philippe Lenclos around the regions of France, or to rely on keen observation, intuition and experience?

Understanding the *genius loci* opens the way to selection of colours and materials. This cannot be done by pastiche, merely copying a style or palette that worked well in another time or place. Every place is unique, with its own vegetation, geology, topography, weather, viewpoints, and relationship to its surroundings. Moreover, ECD is a design discipline, so the practitioner has to manage the project, work with clients, conform to standards, deal with contractors, meet constraints of time and resources, etc. The design process must include both creativity and practicality. Grete Smedal expressed these ideas in her celebrated project at Longyearbyen on the Island of Spitzbergen: *“Mother Nature’s palette cannot be transposed directly to these new situations. Colours for man-made environments must be chosen on the basis of a different set of premises. However, nature and buildings interact. A planner will have to enter into a dialogue that is also open to the colour language of the landscape, and, if successful, the results can enrich and accentuate both nature and the man-made elements.”*

These are the issues addressed by the eight articles:

Starting from the premise that the identity of a place is determined by its location and characteristics, Johnny Jie Xu believes that colour identity is a pervasive and persistent characteristic of a place that enhances the visual experience, and helps to create a familiar environment. This offers a way to counter the influence of globalisation, which tends to homogenise cities, making them all appear the same. These notes provide a theoretical basis for how colour can help to construct an identity of place in the urban environment.



In the realisation of a colour design, or of a colour plan, every designer should have the availability of a set of basic tools to prevent him- or herself from performing prejudicial operations, advises Pietro Zennaro. So it should be clear to the designer who faces a chromatic project, that he or she primarily needs a dedicated strategy, different from case to case, specific to each place. This is the result of research experience at the University Luav of Venice and in professional activity of colour design and planning for villages/towns with historical centres, expansion zones, isolated houses and industrial areas.



A phenomenological approach is advocated by João Pernão to gather the perceptual characteristics of a building and its environment, by bringing together, defining and illustrating key concepts to complement the standard approach to colour survey. These phenomena are: Landscape, Townscape, Image of the City, Synaesthesia, Colourscape, Geography of Colour, Colour Loci, Emotional Atmosphere, Light and Time. To illustrate them, he presents some results of professional practice, both as Colour Consultant and as teacher and researcher in the Faculty of Architecture in Lisbon.



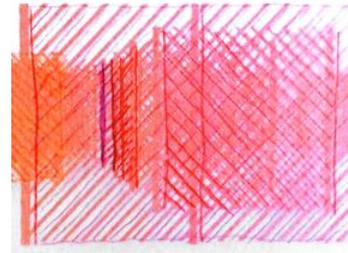
When should we consider the colour of a building as a sustainable feature? Alessandro Premier and Katia Gasparini argue that in contemporary architecture, old and new materials, technologies and products should comply with the new rules of sustainability by providing the project with the means to adapt to new challenges of innovation. Chromatic usage is considered for twelve families of materials, technologies and products with the aim of assessing their real impact on the environment.



Research on the historical colours of Silesian architecture has been undertaken by Karolina Białobłocka to identify original colour schemes of exteriors from the Middle Ages to the present day. Archival research was identified as a valuable source of data on original colour schemes, and the following were analysed: documents recording examinations of exteriors, written sources, and colourful depictions. Findings include historical colour schemes resulting from later repainting, and several technical issues about paint research.



Building upon Josef Albers' seminal primer on colour theory, *Interaction of Color*, Esther Hagenlocher and Landry Smith propose an experimental installation for the International Garden Festival in Quebec, with an array of lattice fences painted in various reds. This research examines the hypothesis that the perceptual effect can be increased in a viewing volume by understanding the interactions of colour in the overlapping layers of the 3D garden space within the larger built and natural environment.



A series of colour observations was conducted by Bertolt Hering in the Georgium park, part of the 'Dessau-Wörlitz Gartenreich', the first English landscape garden in continental Europe. He systematically described the natural colours of the site during the changing seasons, seven times throughout the year, recording hue and chromaticness with NCS terminology. The visual vs perceived changes in colour are presented in detail for each area of foliage and vegetation.



Systematic observation of an attractive avenue of elm trees, with its rhythmical changes of shape and shifting of colours, in all weather conditions and seasons throughout the year, has led Henriette Jarild-Koblanck and Monica Moro to explore colour and spatial experience in green spaces and their cultural associations. It was carried out on the Swedish island of Öland through a combination of observations, photographs, thoughtful reflections, and workbook method. A summer Art Exhibition, named "Kulturarv – källa", was held in June 2017.



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(Guest Editor)

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