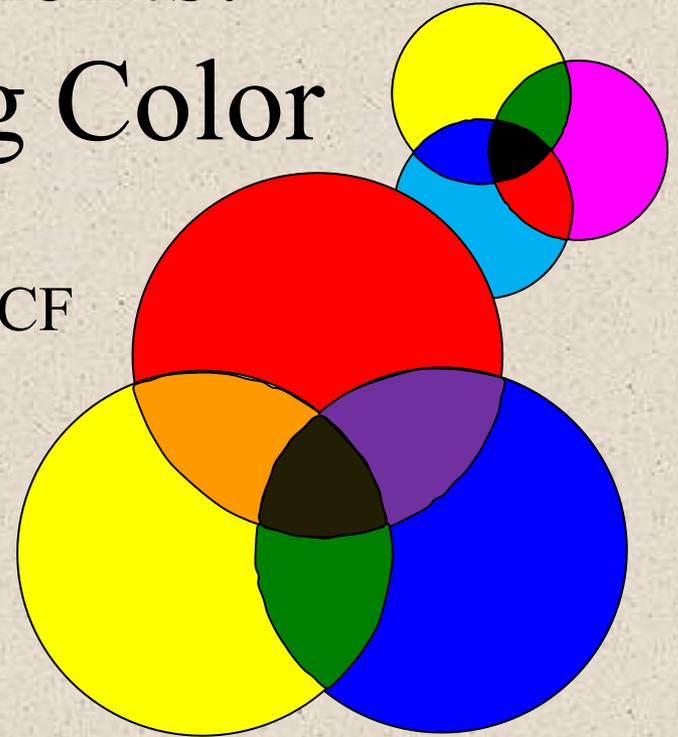


Design Elements: Understanding Color

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF



Sponsored by Crescent Brands
WCAF Framing Expo 2026 Orlando

Color

is the most emotional and expressive element in design.

Principles of Design

Elements
are the easily identifiable
building blocks

Line

Balance



Texture

Emphasis

Space

Intensity

Shape

Proportion

Rhythm

Factors
are the mortar that
hold the blocks
together

UNITY

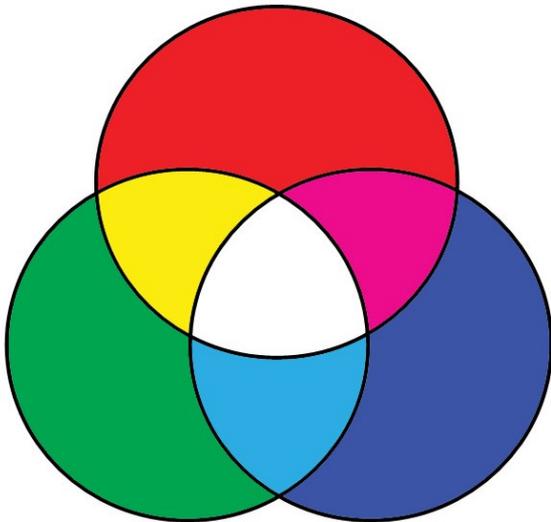
Definition of Color

“Color is the character of a surface which is the result of vision sensitivity to reflected wavelengths of light.”

In other words, to see green, all other wavelengths are absorbed, and green is reflected back to the eye

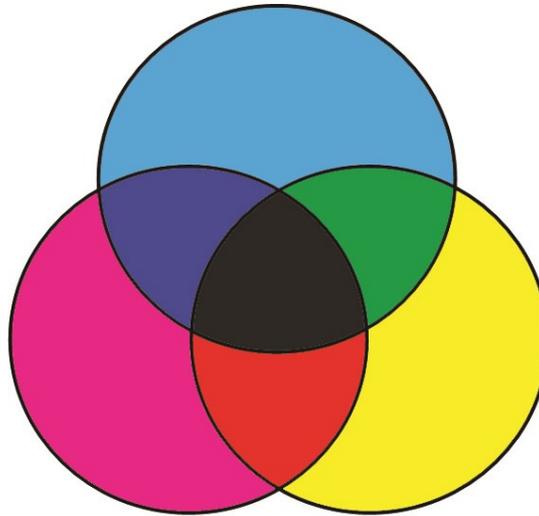
Color Theories

Additive
Light



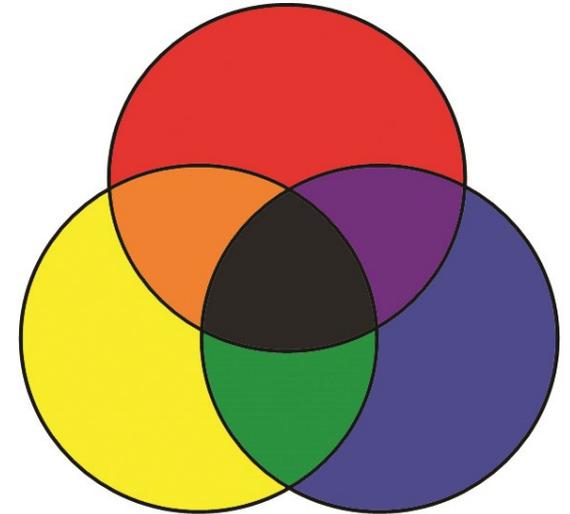
Lighting

Subtractive
Digital Inks



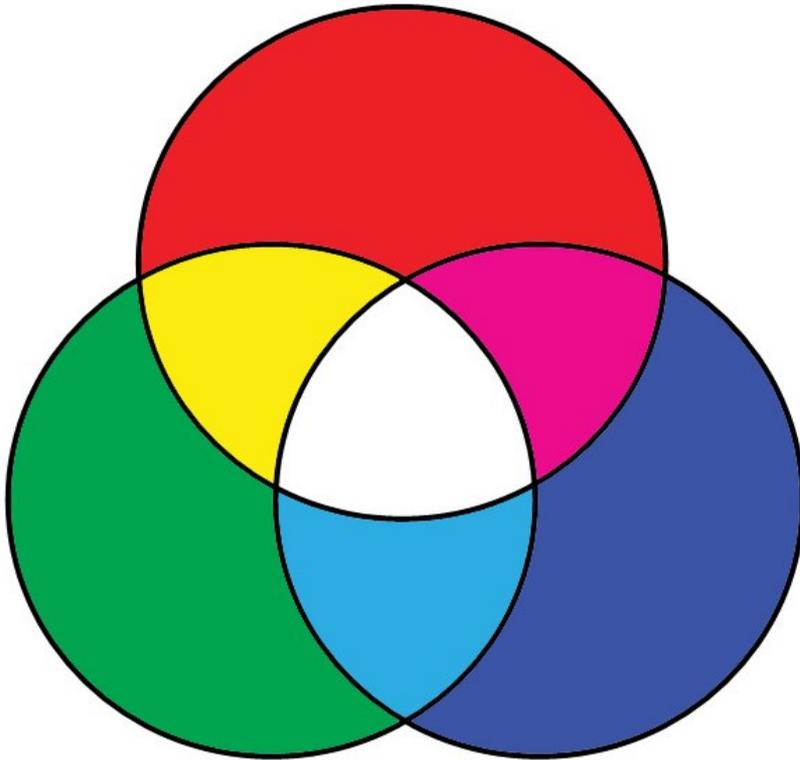
Printers

Subtractive
Artist Pigment



Framing

Additive Color Theory (LIGHT)

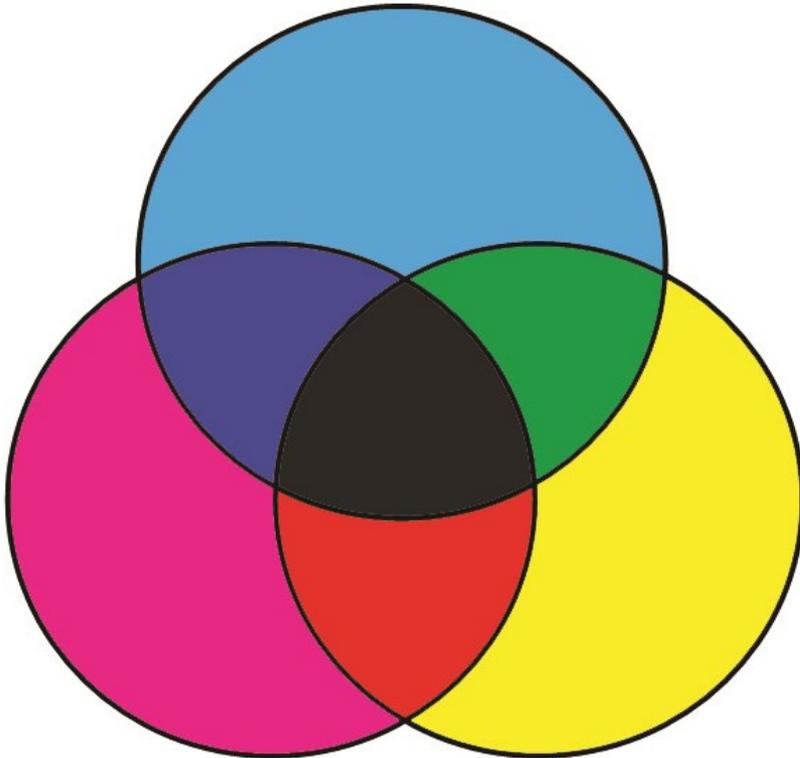


Additive RGB theory begins with black. No light, no color. All three combined create white, as all the colors in light are present and absorbed. To see a red apple, all other wavelengths are absorbed, reflecting only the red waves, allowing us to see it as red.

Primaries of red, green, blue create secondaries of yellow, cyan, magenta.

Subtractive Color Theory

(DIGITAL/PRINT)

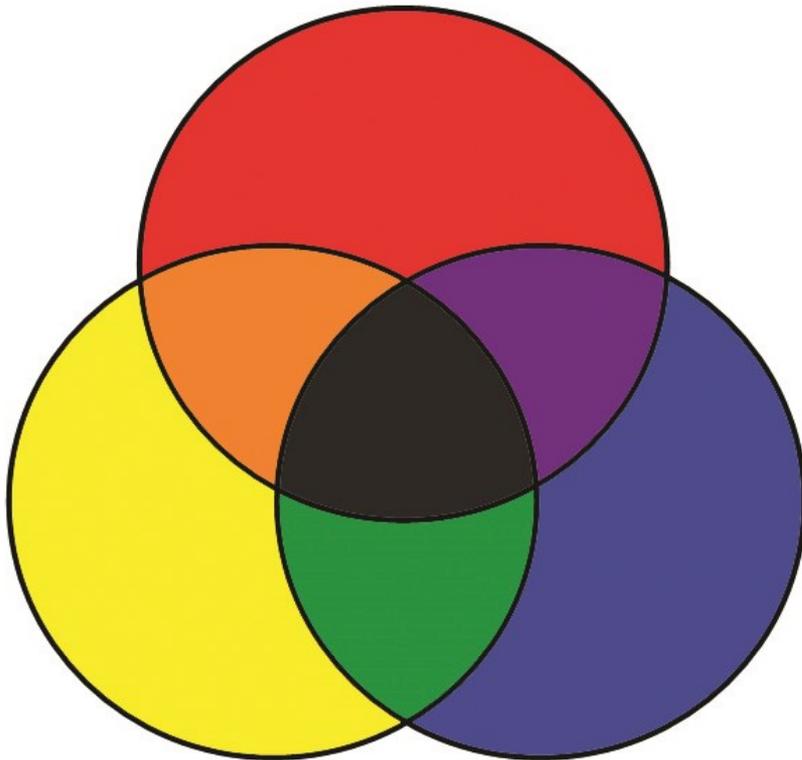


Primaries are cyan, magenta, yellow, black (CMYK). These blend to create secondary colors violet, orange, and green. The presence of all colors creates black.

Subtractive colors begin as white and are created by absorbing (or subtracting) some the light wavelengths and reflecting others.

Subtractive Color Theory

(ARTIST PIGMENT)



Subtractive pigment theory begins with white (nothing), as colors are added the result gets darker to brown, gray or black.

Pure pigmented primaries of red, yellow, blue are mixed to create secondaries of orange, green, purple.

Unlike light waves, no amount of color mixing will ever produce white.

Glossary of Color Terms

Primary Colors - Pure colors (Hues) that cannot be mixed

Red, Yellow and Blue on wheel

Secondary Colors - Orange, Yellow, Purple

Mixed from Primaries

Complimentary Colors - Opposites

Tint – Color plus white, lighter than normal value

Tone – Color plus Grey

Shade – Color plus black, darker than normal value

Monochromatic – Shades and Tints of same color

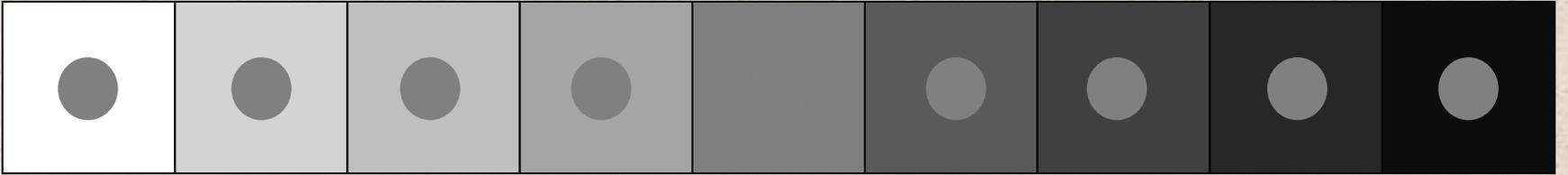
Color Properties

Every color has three basic color properties: *hue, value, chroma*

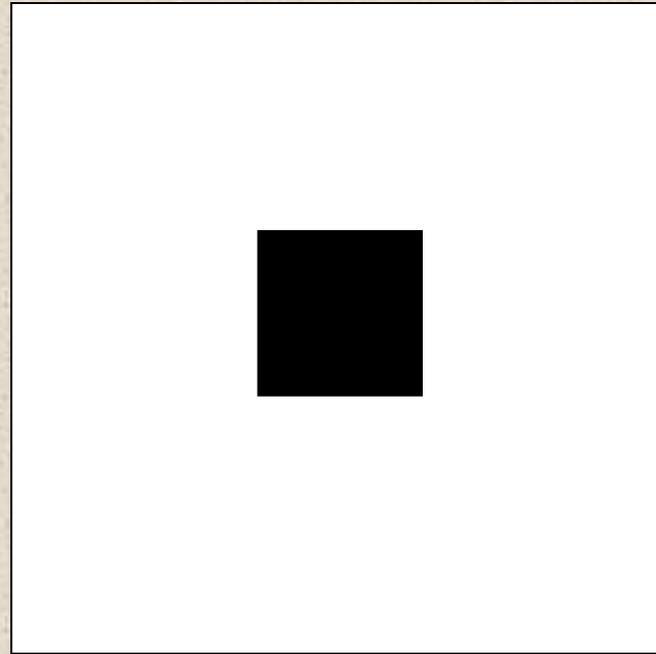
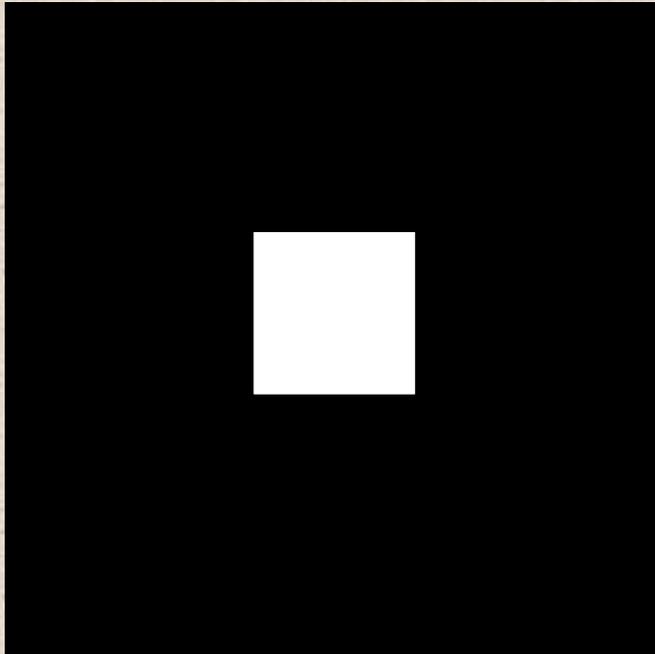
Hue - A pure color in the spectrum that has not been dulled or diluted, no white, black or color added

Value - lightness or darkness of a color in relation to a scale ranging from white to black

Chroma - (saturation, intensity) Brightness or purity
Cannot change value without changing chroma



Value Scale



Liner is warm
white expanding
the image

Bevel wrap brings
eye into the tree

Top picks up
neutral tan



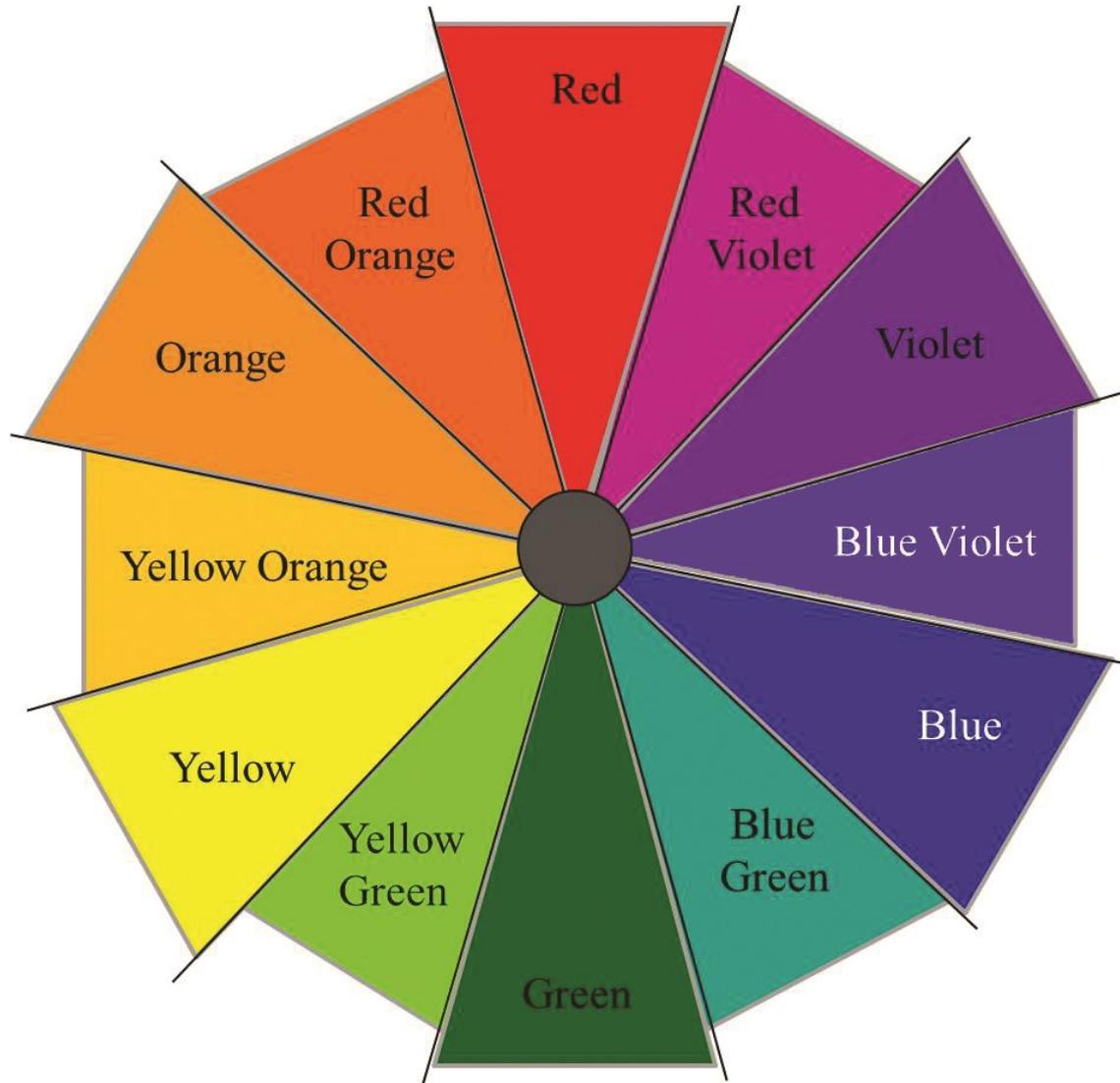
Warm white
expands image

Spacer adds
depth and
shadows

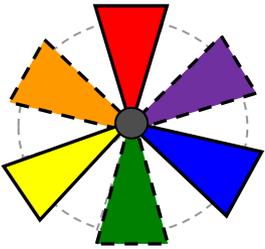
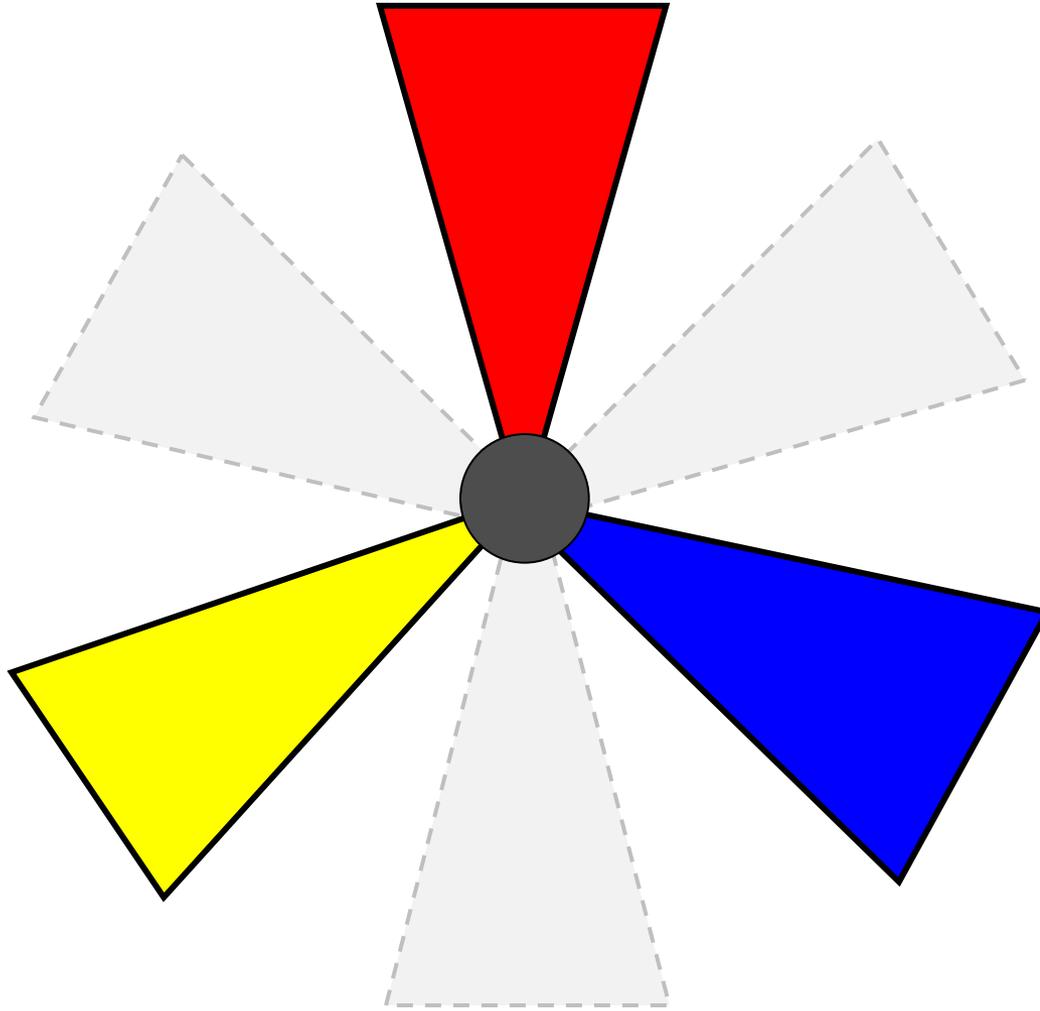
Top warm gray
Draws the eye
into the leaves



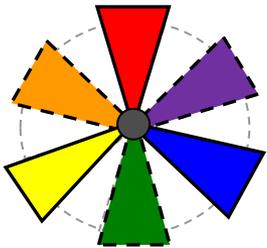
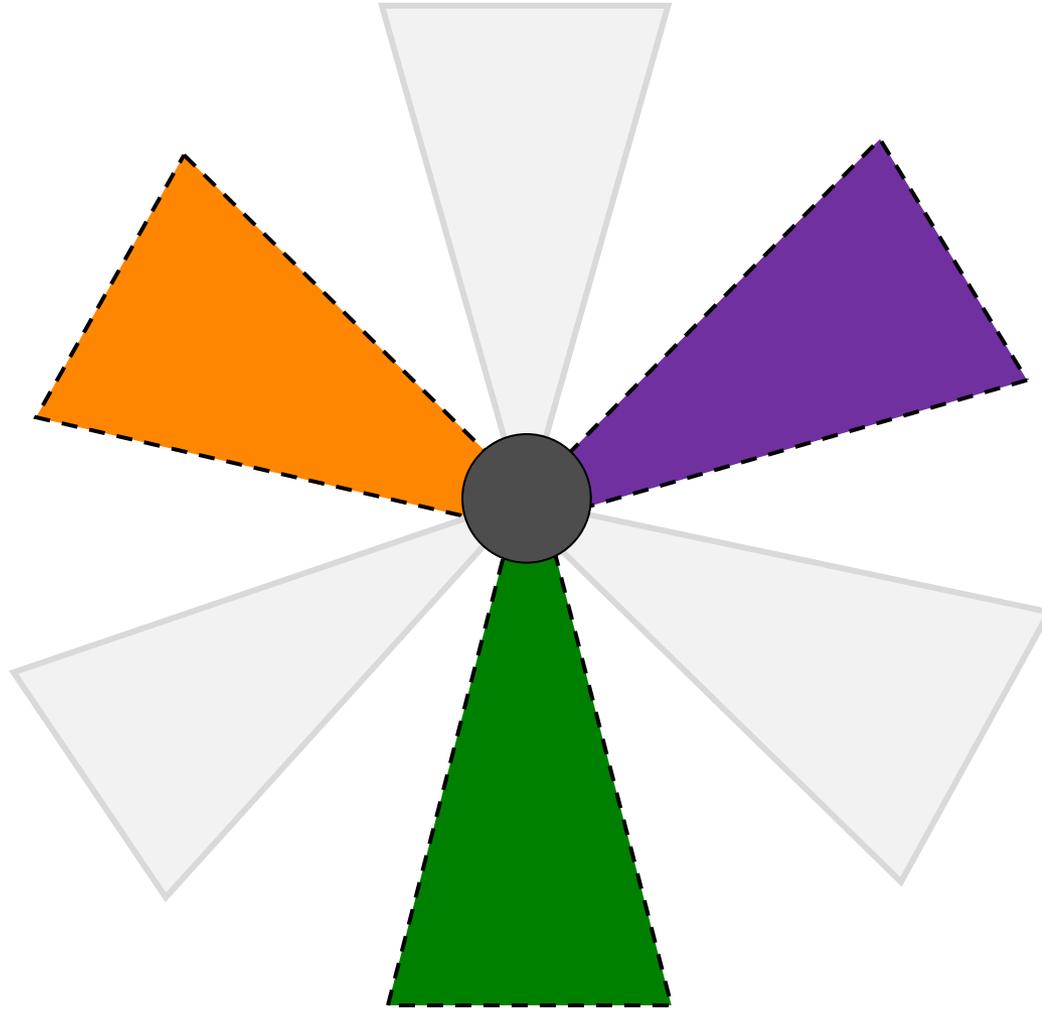
Color Wheel



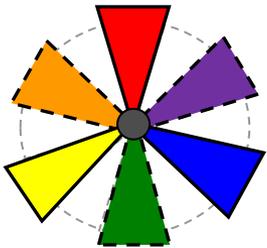
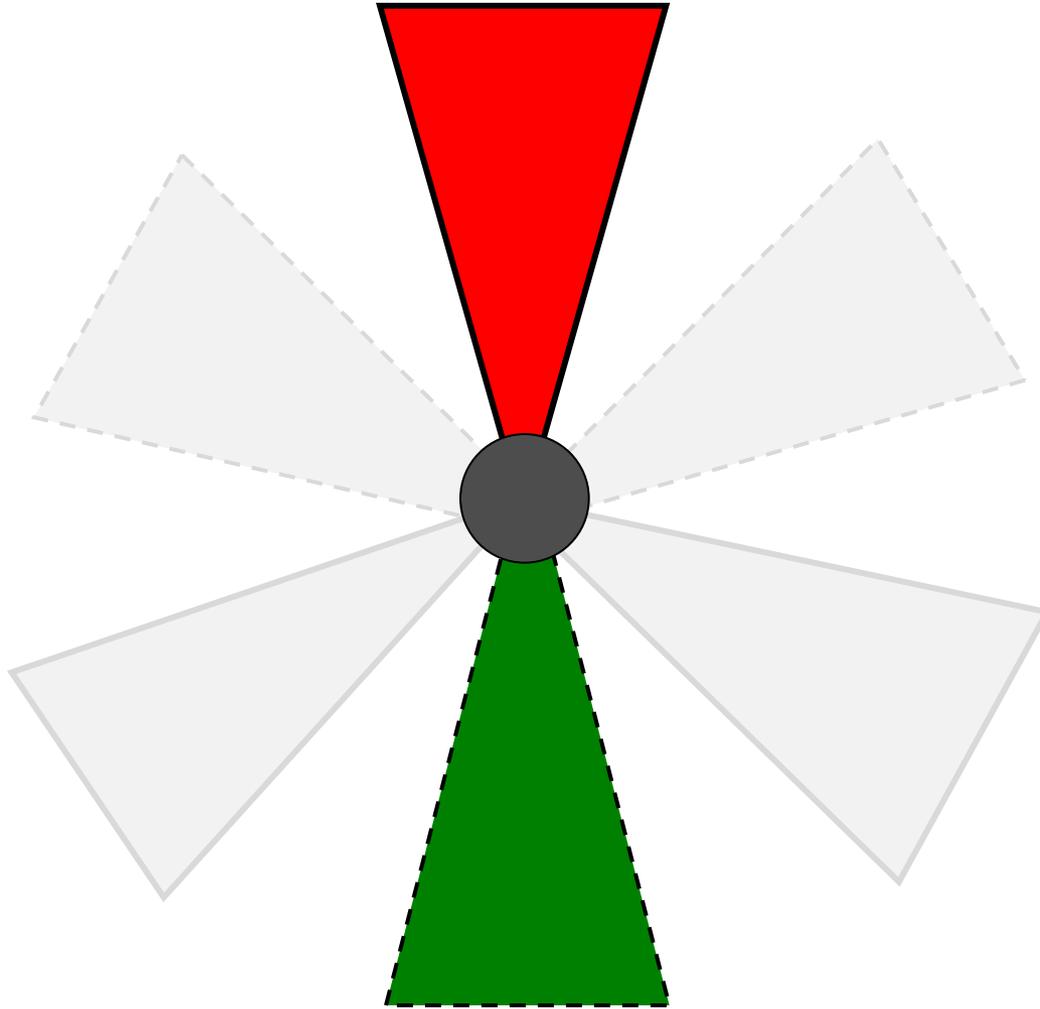
Primary Colors



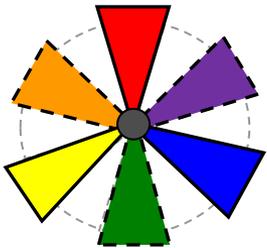
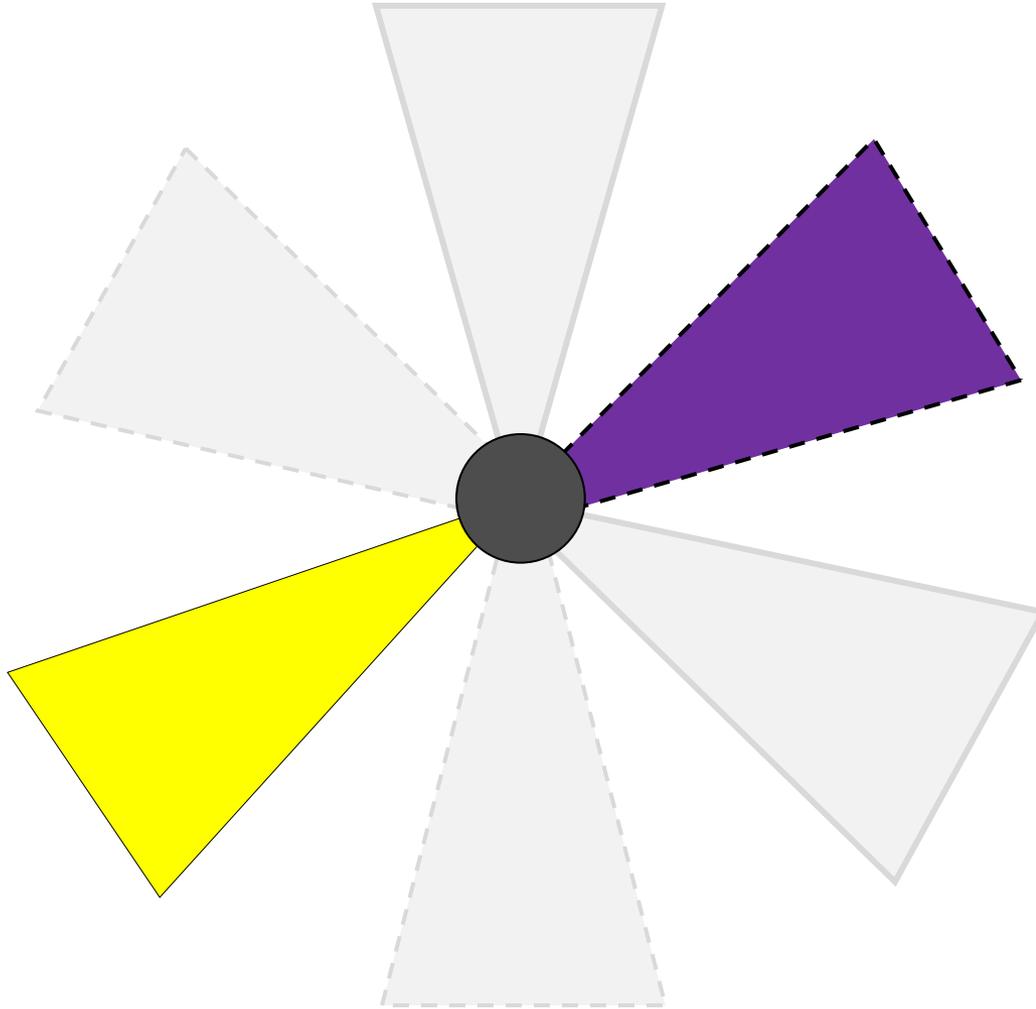
Secondary Colors



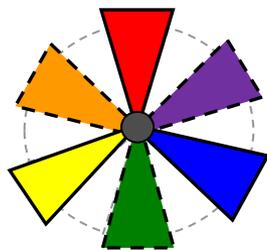
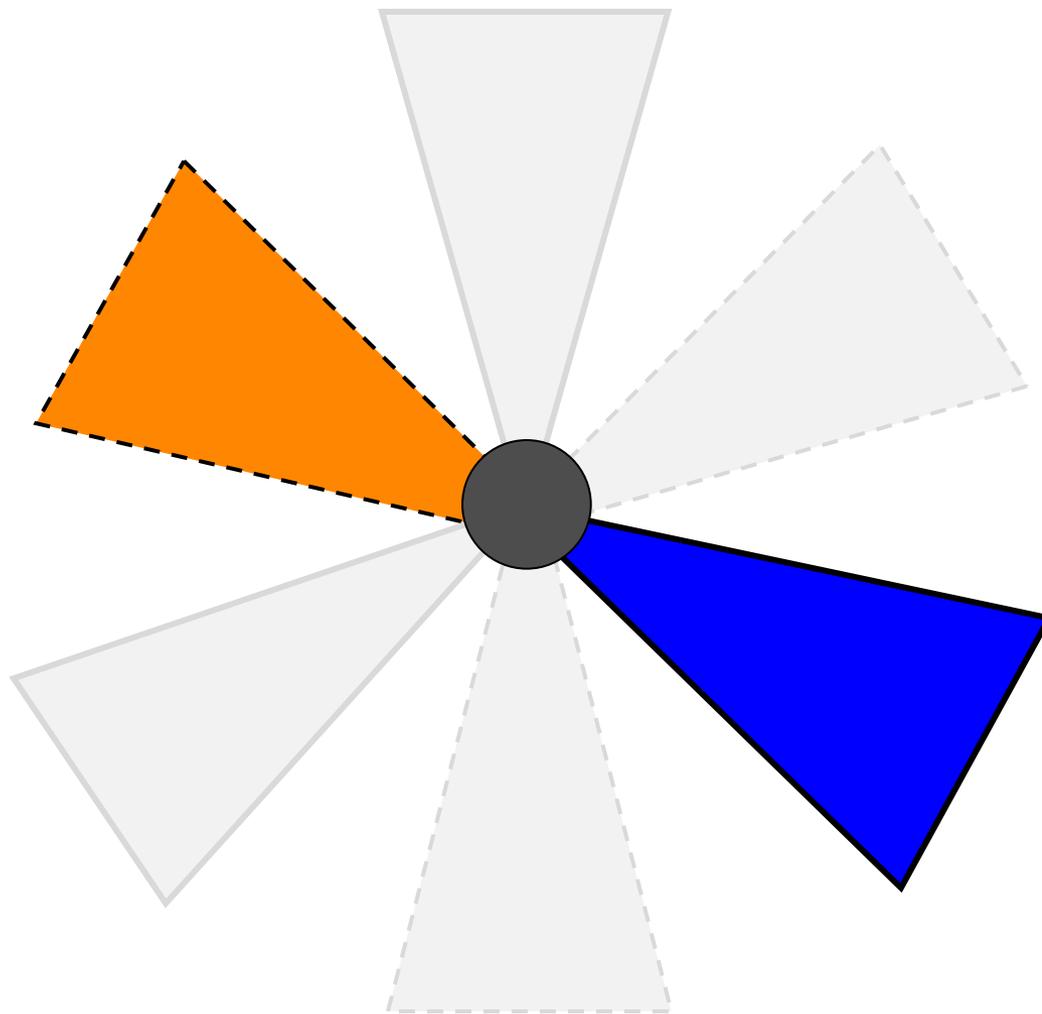
Complementary Colors



Complementary Colors

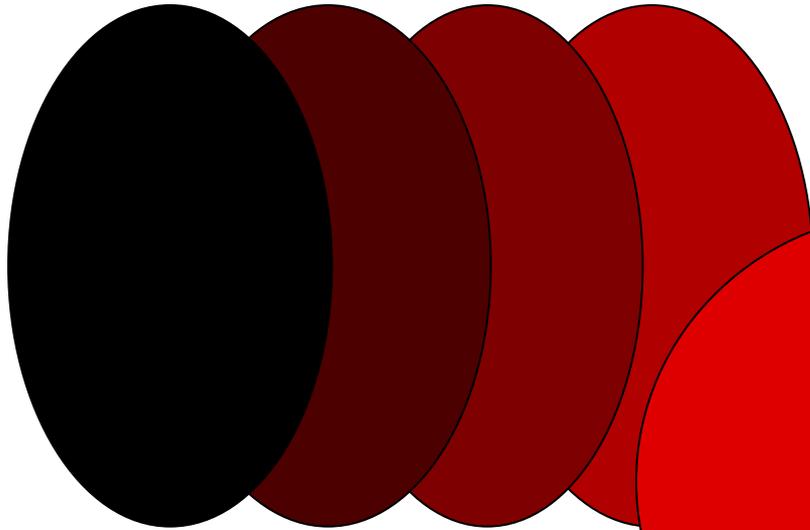


Complementary Colors



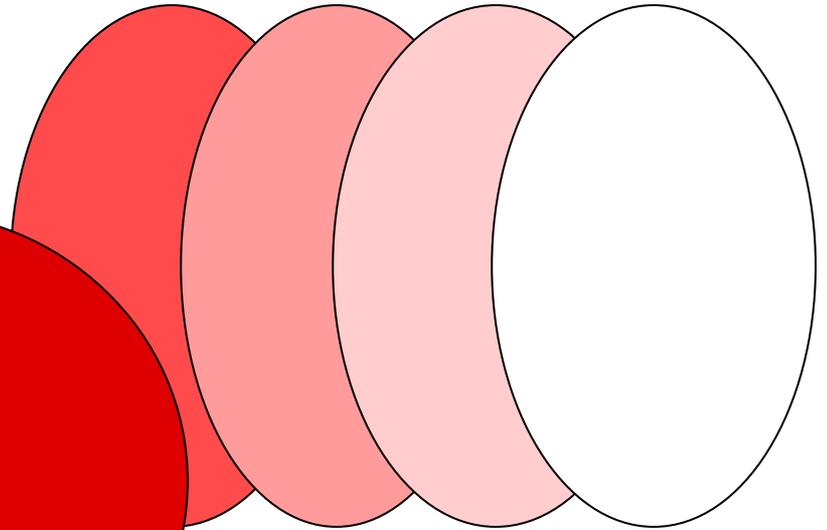
Shade

hue plus black



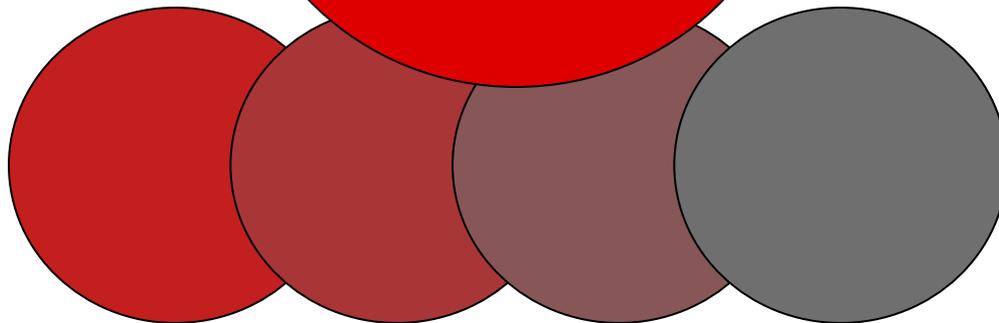
Tint

hue plus white

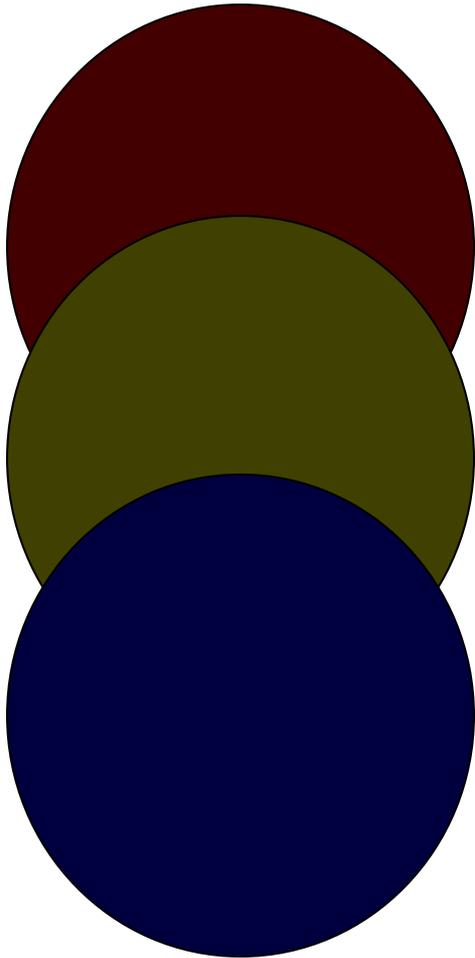


Tone

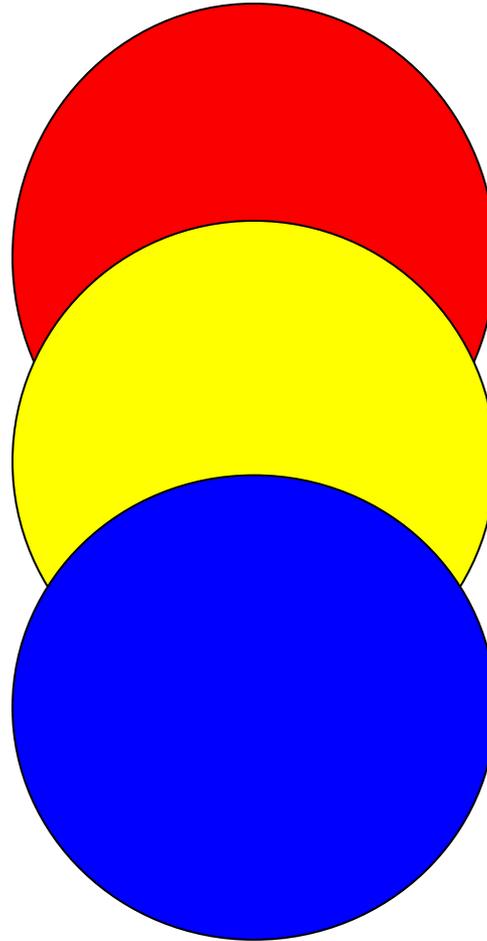
hue plus gray



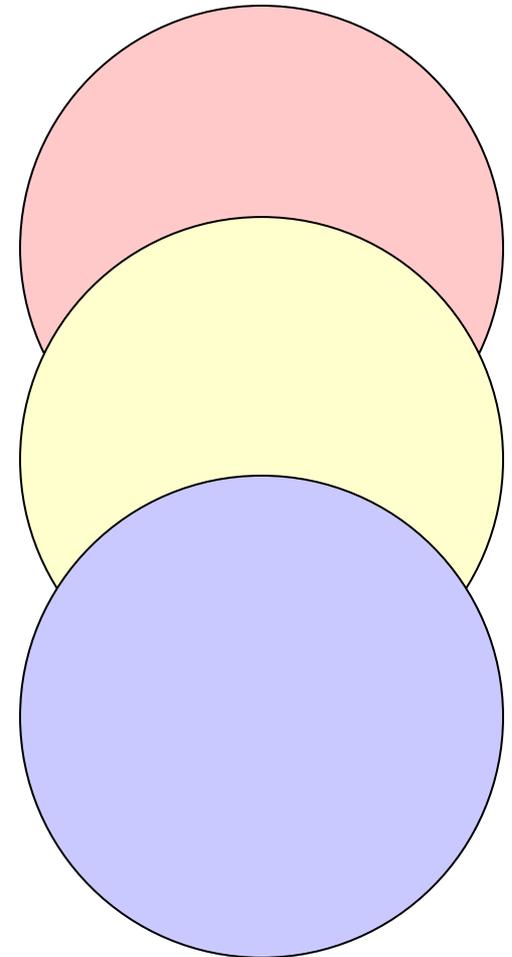
Primary
as Shade



Primary
Colors



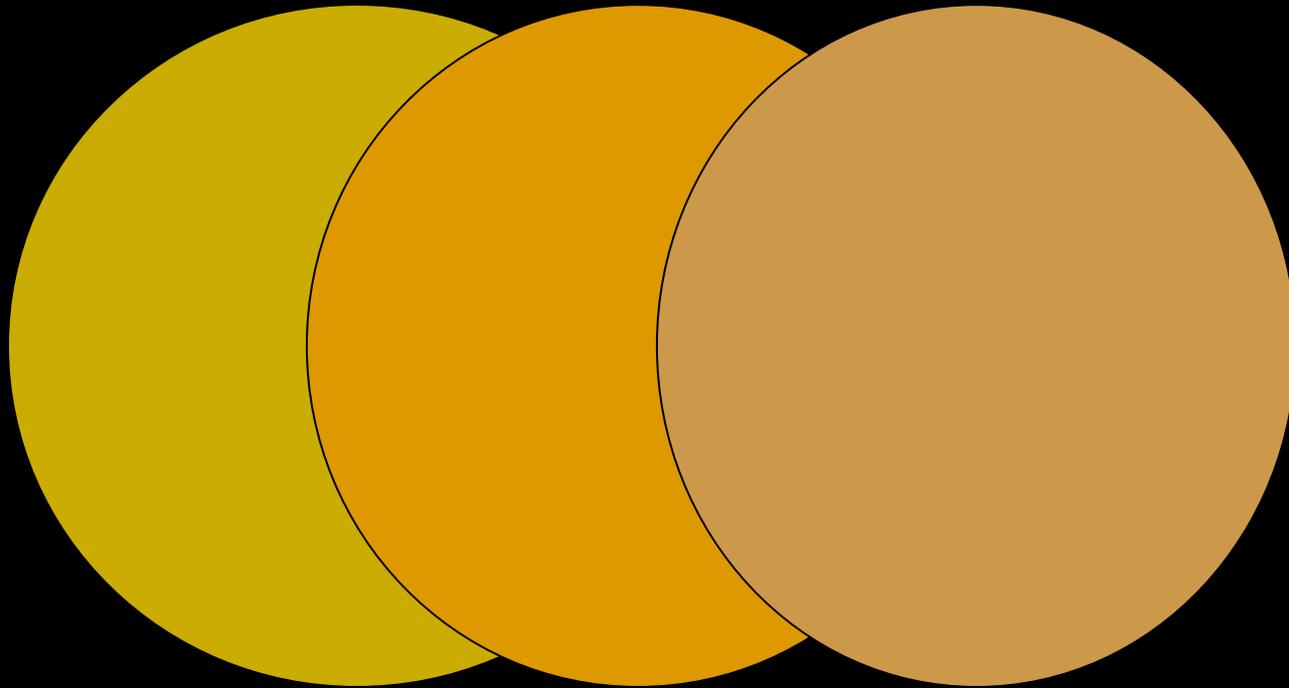
Primary
as Tint



Metallics



Metallic Bases



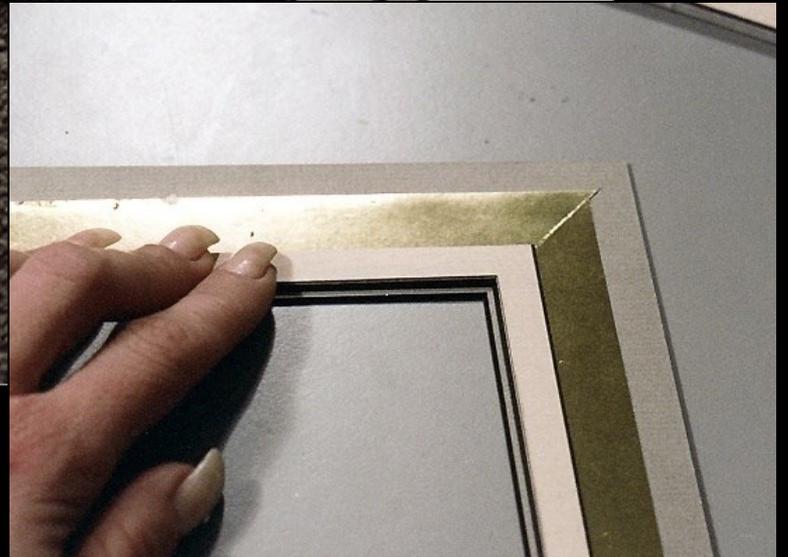
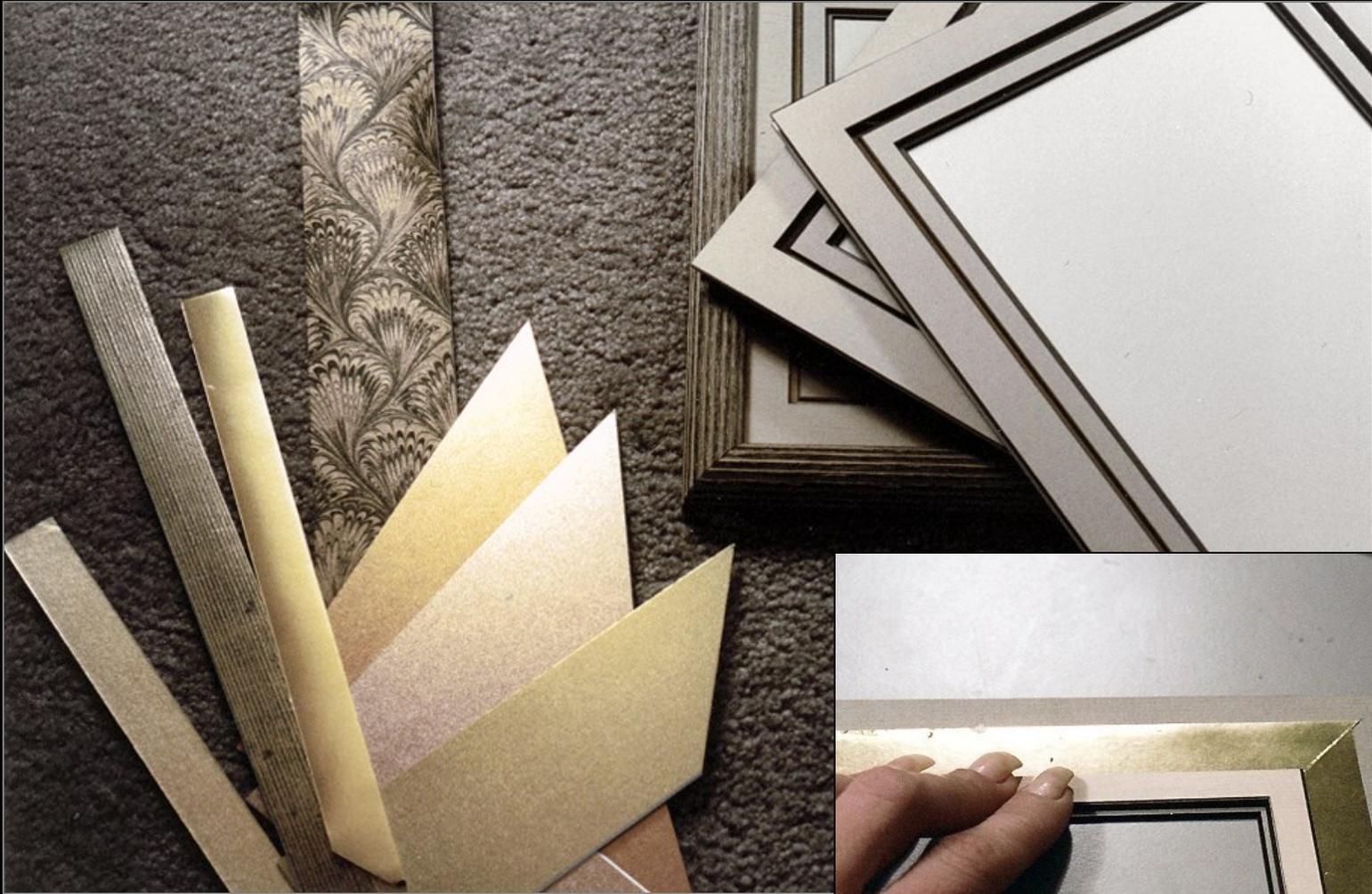
Yellow Base

Red Base

Blue Base

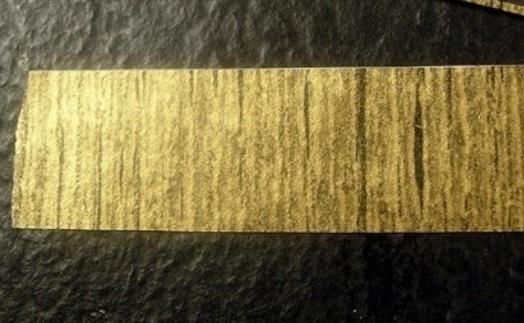
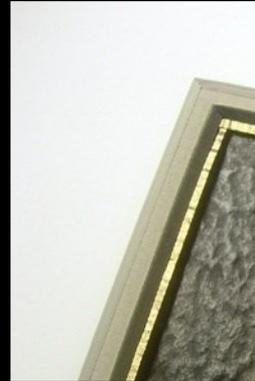
NORIS Gold Leaf (Germany)

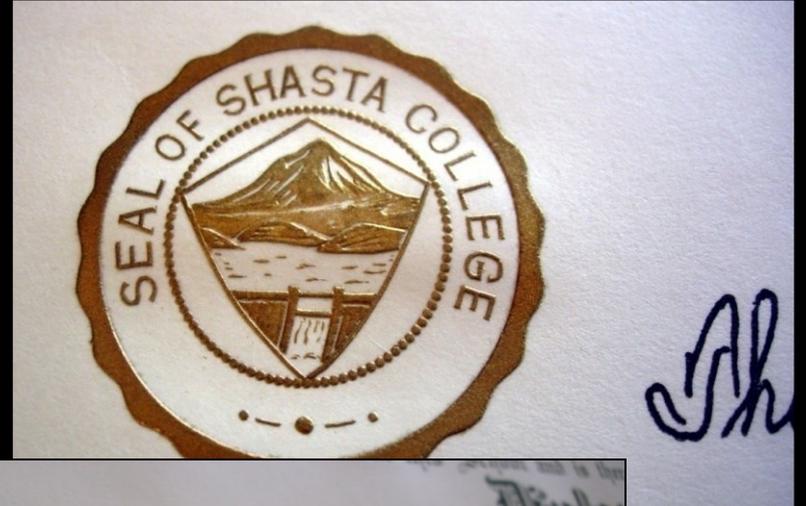


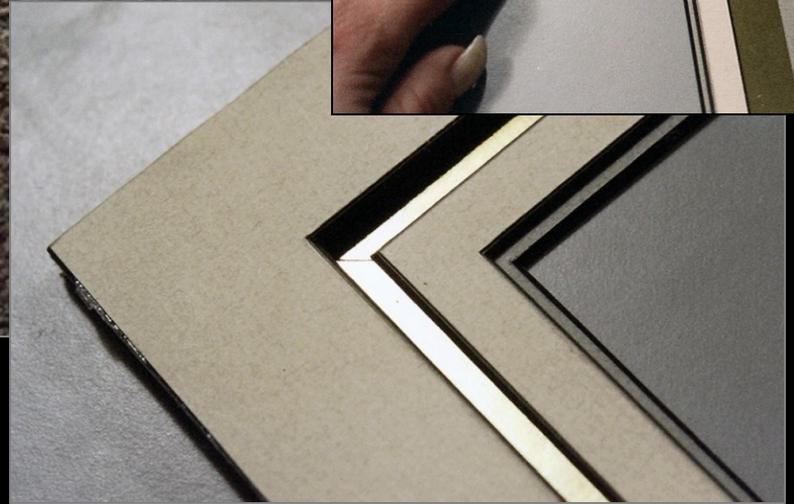
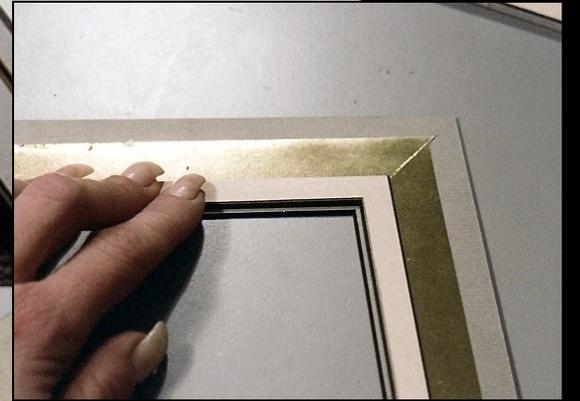


Metallic Bases

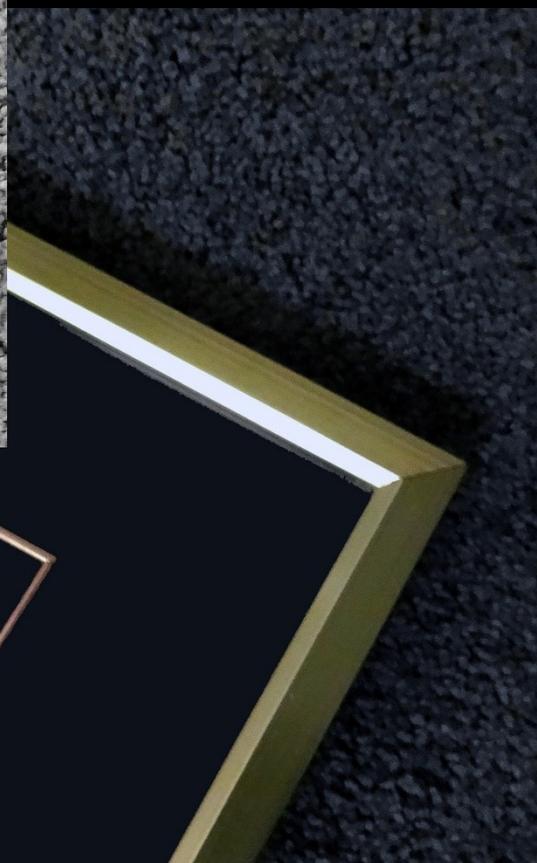
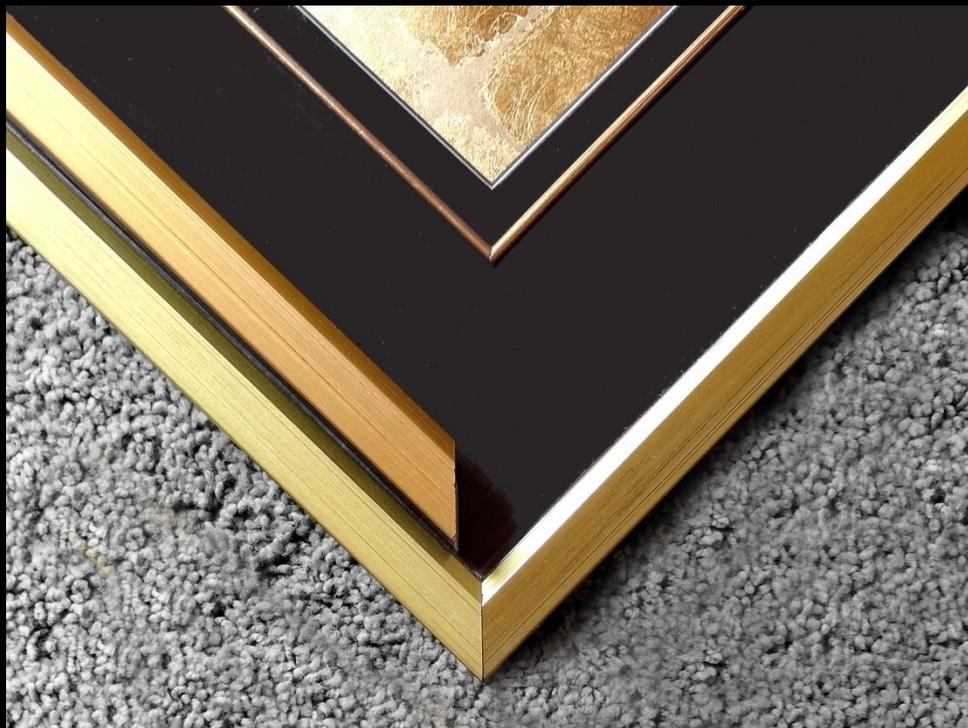
Must match frame,
mat, fillet and gold
used within art
or document





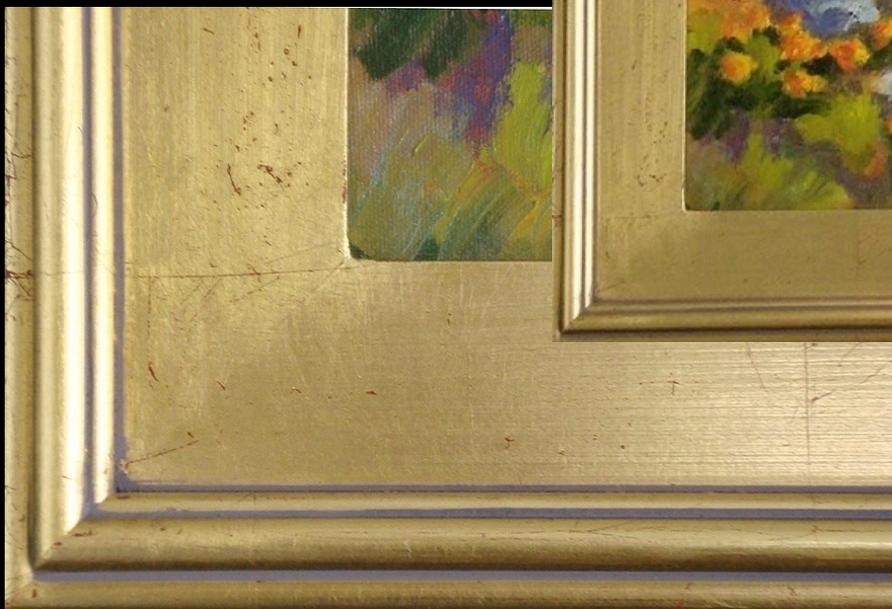


Faded Gold Moulding





Gold matches
tones and warmth
in painting





Common plein air profile
Good color match to cooler tones in art



Color directing Emphasis



Controlling focal emphasis

- Cream = sky
- Green = grasslands
- Brown = mountain base

A triple mat will unify the focus.

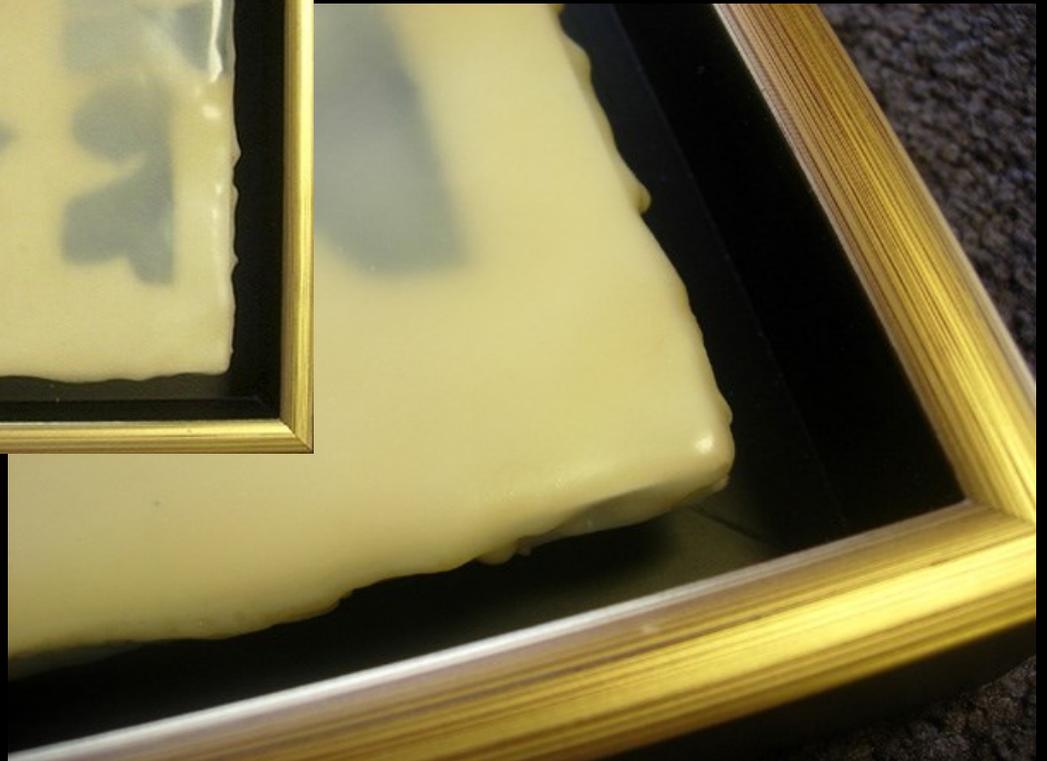


Visual focus through color and scale

- Dark frame brings drama
- Light mat distracts away



Soft brushed gold
tones harmonize
with the encaustic
medium



Soft brushed
antique silver
works with melted
opaque waxes





Crème rag top mat

Wrapped textured
bevel for rhythm

Liner white to
match background



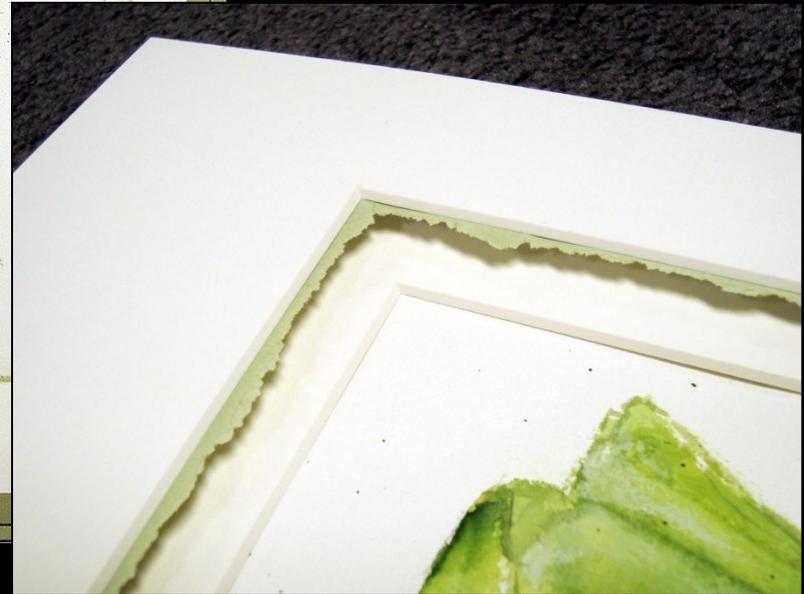


Torn paper
accents





- White background
- Green frame & accent torn deckle
- Grey edge highlight
- Asian proportions



Mat Color Selection – Rules of Thumb

1. Dominant art color = top mat color selection

There are exceptions to every rule

Consider textures and contrasts

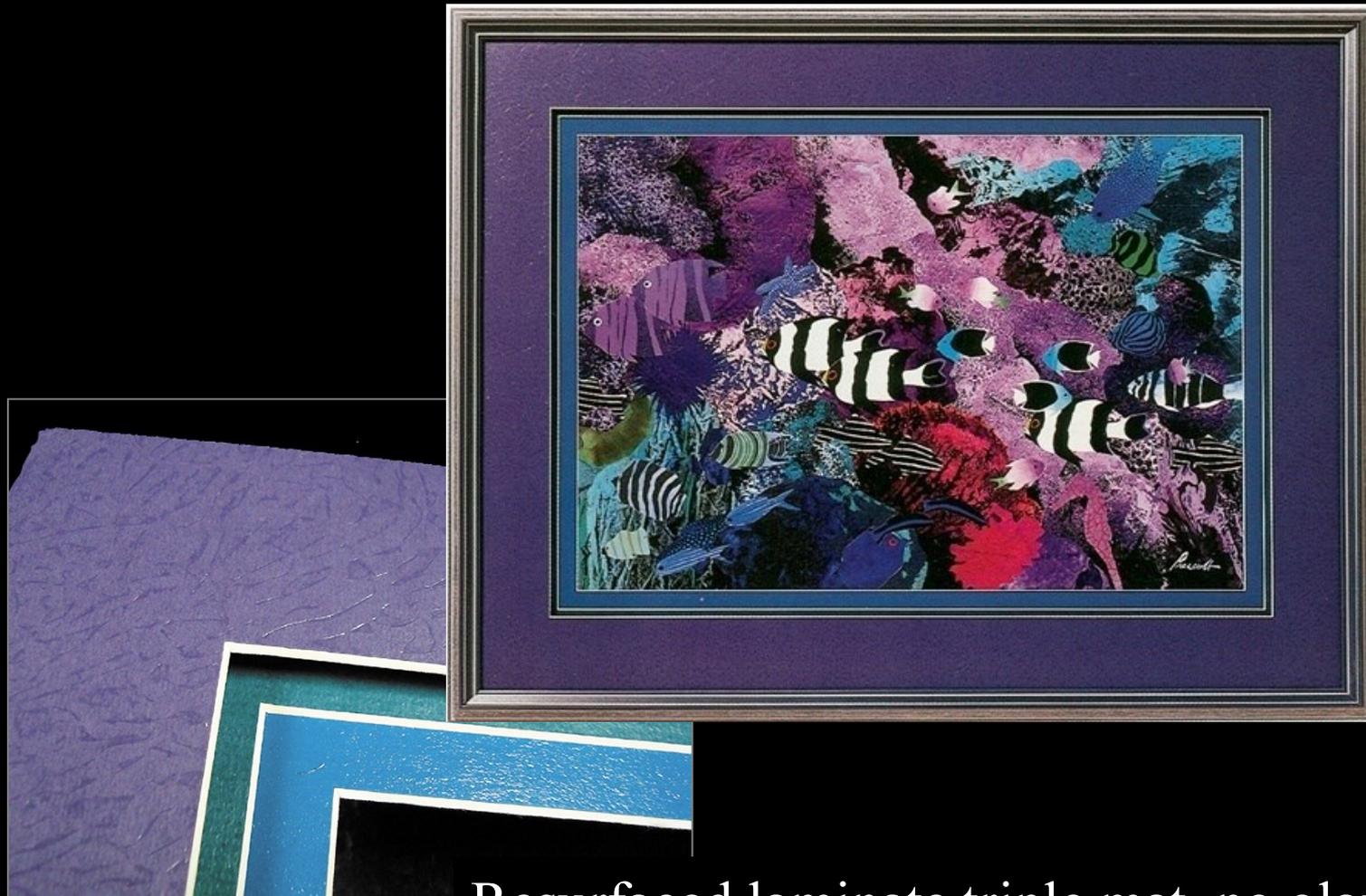
2. Secondary art color = middle mat or first accent

Second mat width does not have to be middle

3. Third art color = third mat or second accent

Can be as simple as red line on frame edge

Or under tiered mat

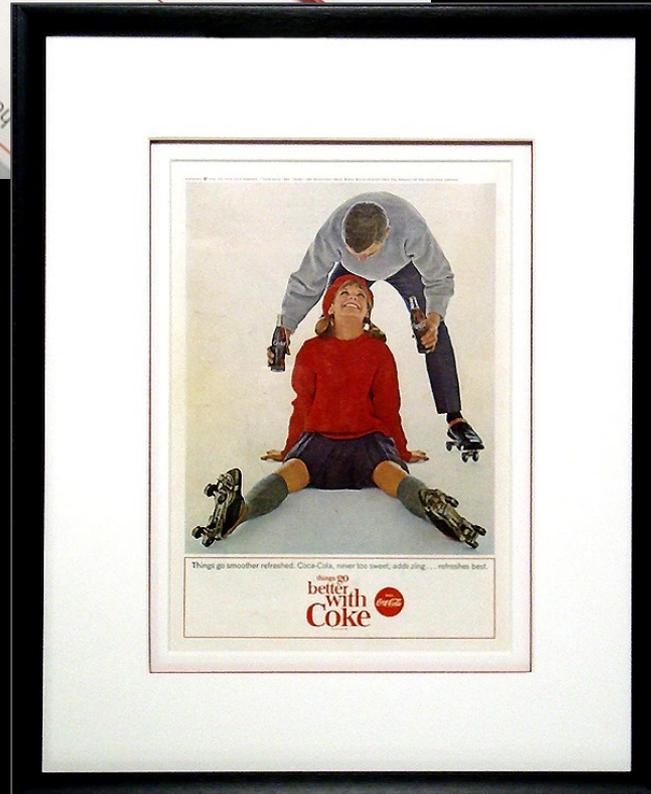


Resurfaced laminate triple mat, no glazing.

- Top = Purple matte crinkle
- Middle = Teal smooth matte
- Bottom = Turquoise smooth luster



- Under tiered top mat.
- Liner mat color varied to better match aged ads.





- Dominant blue is too dark for top mat.
- Brushed aluminum accents the airplane.
- Deep bevel wrap and gray help integrate.

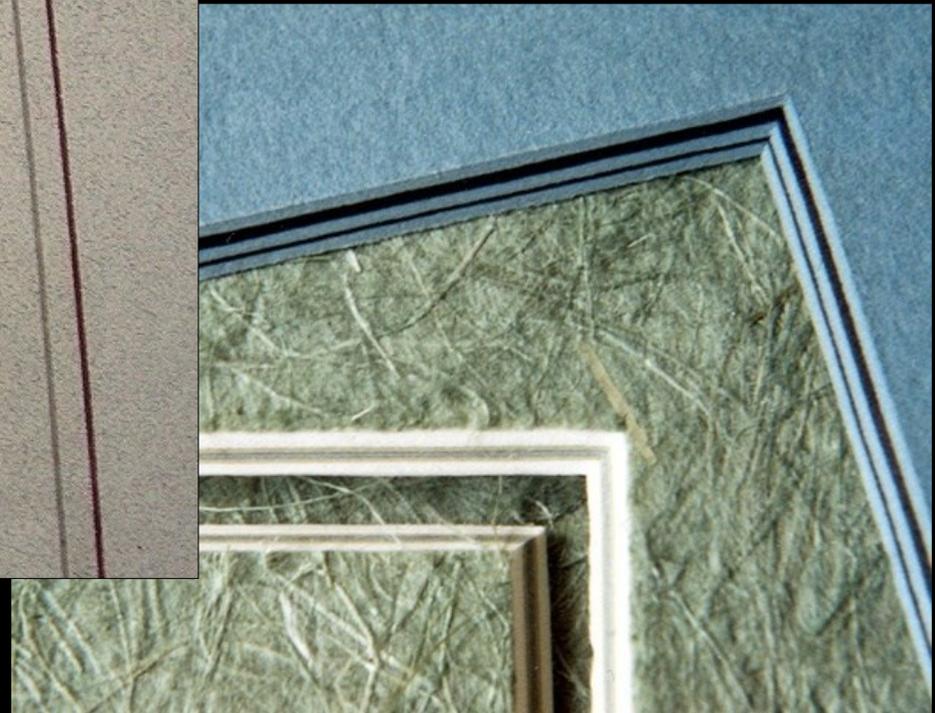


A traditional pastel
concept of white mats
to allow the art to
showcase itself



Softened transition
of antique whites,
brightest on top, with
a copper frame to
unify with color.

Color & Line



Color, Line & Repetition



Color, Line & Texture

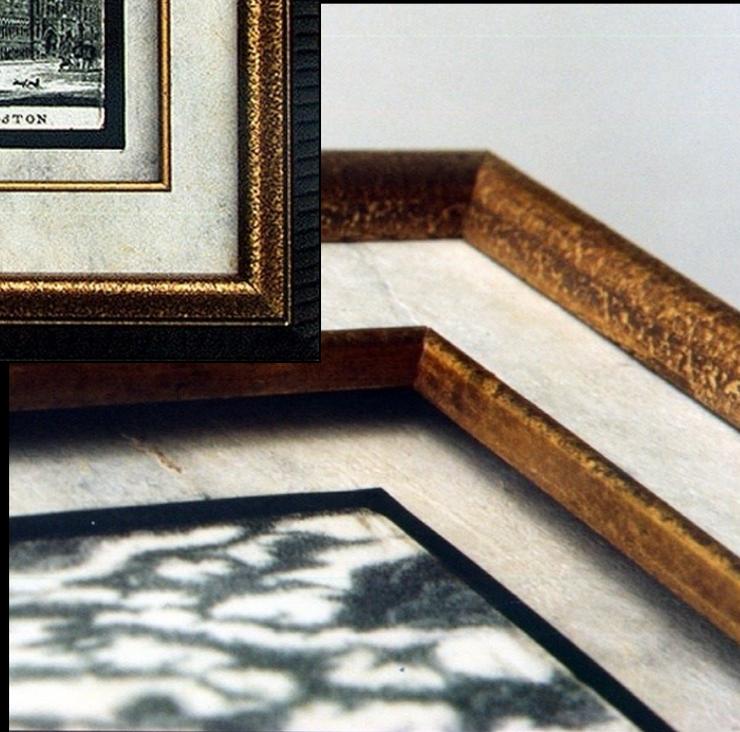




Color, line, texture, and rhythm all in one frame.
The power of this frame overrides the "givens".



Antique tile is accented by both texture and rhythm by bleached bark paper mats, fillet and frame.





Color & Rhythm



Color & rhythm of the
foliage and mottled hills are
in the suede mat.



Surface tiered (T)
Matte laminated (B)





Color + Shape, Space

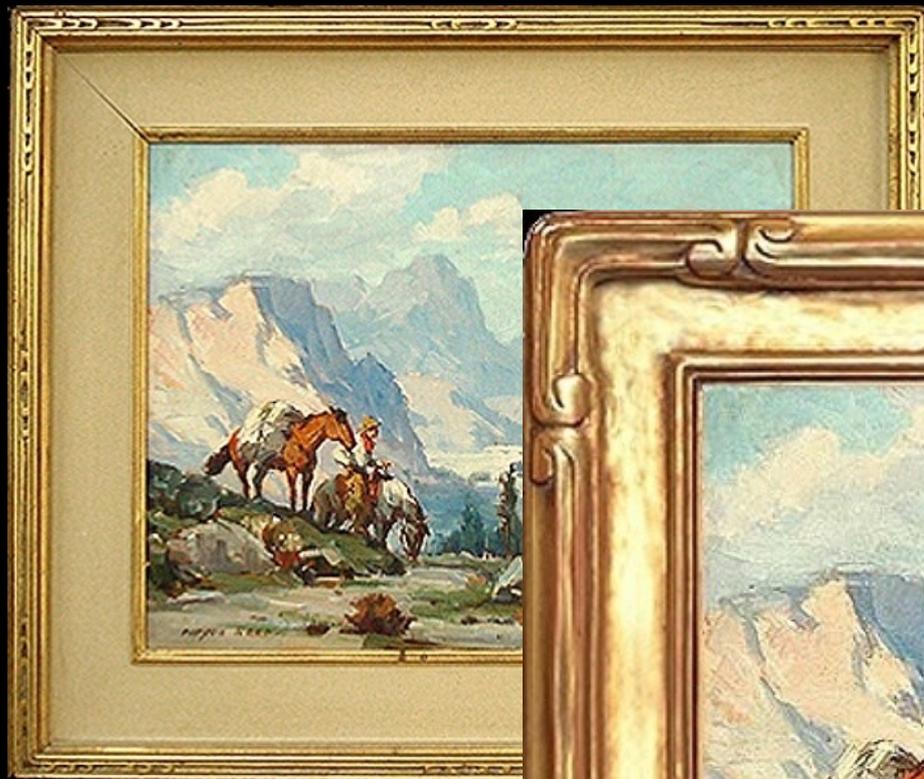
Shape = positive, object use
Space = void or negative use

Color & Style (Era/Period)









European

Black = Grief, death, void, nothingness

White = Purity, innocence

Yellow/Orange = Warmth, newness

Pink = Tenderness, poetry

Red = Love, passion, desire, fire

Violet = Meditation, mystery, occult, exotic

Purple = Aristocratic, royal, worldly

Blue = Loyalty, isolation, honesty, sadness

Green/Blue-green = Earth, naturalism, Zen

Brown = Earthiness, solidity, firmness

Asian

Black = Immortality, knowledge, power

Grey = Dullness, indefinite

White = Death, mourning, spirits, ghosts

Yellow = Clarity, reliability, royalty

Orange = Change, spontaneity

Pink = Love

Red = Wedding, luck, happiness, joy, life

Purple = Spiritual healing, strength,

Blue = Healing, calmness, immortality

Blue/Green = Vigor, vitality, longevity,

Green = Calm, healing, health, harmony

Brown = Industriousness, grounded

Science of Color

Physicists tell us about the make-up of color composition and explain how the human eye perceives a given color.

Science of Color

Physicists tell us about the make-up of color composition and explain how the human eye perceives a given color.

Psychologists tell us how color affects us physically and emotionally.

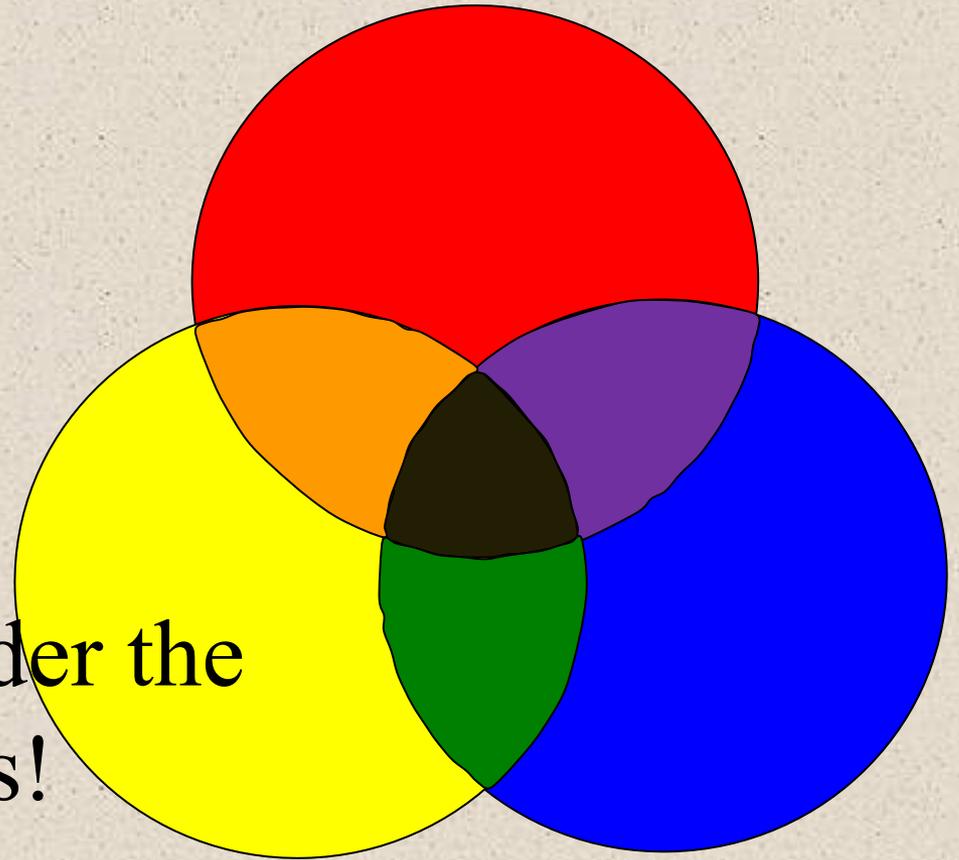
Science of Color

Physicists tell us about the make-up of color composition and explain how the human eye perceives a given color.

Psychologists tell us how color affects us physically and emotionally.

Frame designers assimilate all this information and sell it to the client as the most dynamic solution possible.

Color...consider the possibilities!



Additional Resources

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Wong, Wucius. PRINCIPLES OF COLOR DESIGN.

New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987.

Paschke, Chris A., Designs Ink, <http://www.designsinkart.com/library.htm>

***"The Design Process"*, PFM, 12-part series, 1994.**

***"Design And Critique"*, PFM series, 1997.**

***"The Essence of Design"*, PFM, 12-part series, 2000-2001.**

Other Paschke classes WCAF 2026

Mastering Mounting: Sensitive Items

Saturday, 9:00-11:30am

Mastering Mounting: Mounting Basics

Saturday, 1:00-3:00pm

Mastering Mounting: Handling Digitals

Sunday, 1:30pm -3:30pm

Paschke Online
Article Archive and Reference Library

<https://designsinkart.com/library.shtml>

Articles by Subject:

WCAF Framing Expo 2026 Orlando

PowerPoint and Outline PDFs

THE PRINCIPLES OF FRAMING DESIGN

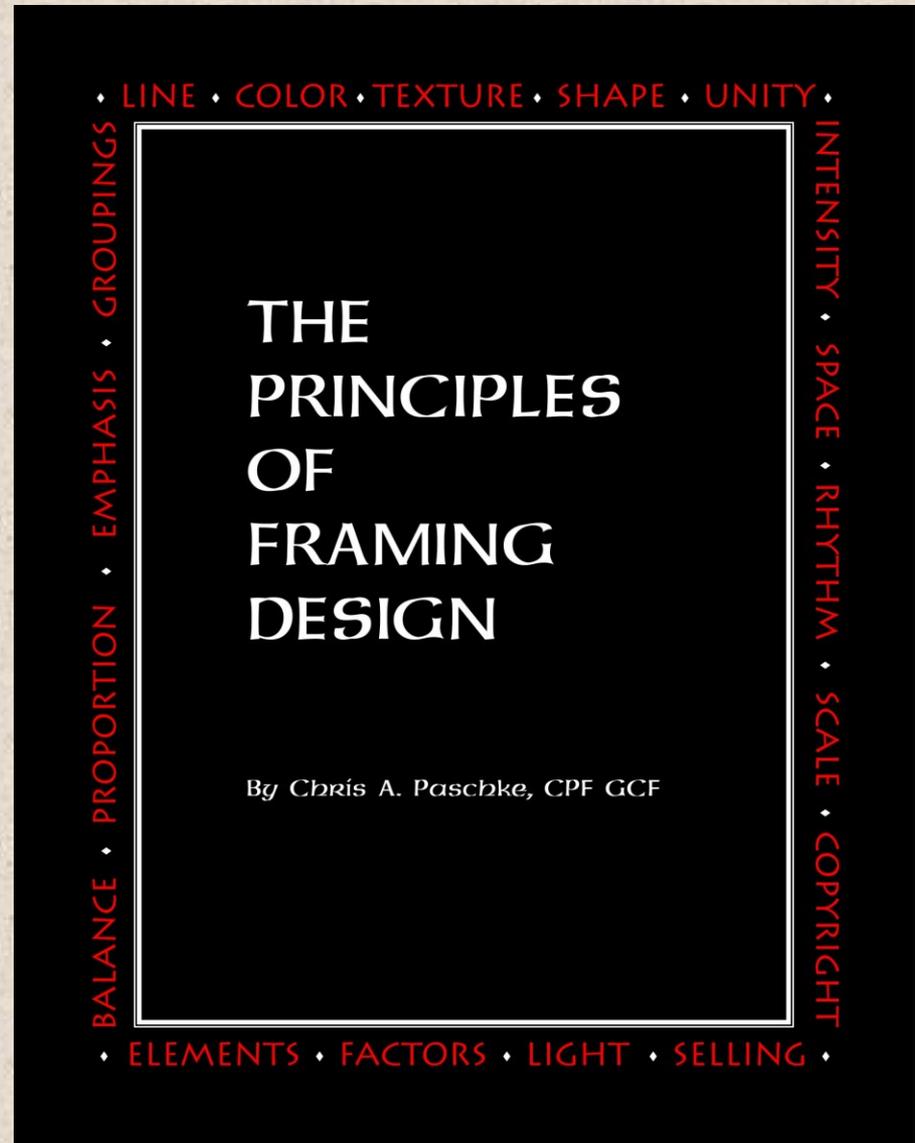
By Chris A. Paschke, CPF GCF

Unlike any other design book in the industry, *The Principles of Framing Design* examines traditional Design 101 art concepts but reconfigures them to fit within the confines of the picture framing industry. Never has a design manual redefined the elements to work within the confines of frame design including mats, moulding and layout. This is written for custom framers, artists, and photographers who do their own framing, as well as those interested in designing for both PPFA and general framing competitions.

In-depth chapter by chapter discussions of the elements (line, color, texture, shape, intensity, space, and rhythm) and factors (proportion, balance, emphasis, unity) which together form the palette of principles that remain the fundamentals of successful frame design.

This 2026 release from Designs Ink PUBLISHING, is a laminated, soft cover, 172 pages, 7 x 9", that retails for \$39.95. Soon available as a PDF version.

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