



## CHAPTER ONE

# Orientation to Color Mastery

**Y**ou are holding in your hands a quilting book of a different kind. Most books on color for quilters show photographs of masterpiece quilts, present you with a color wheel, and say, “Off you go! You, too, can do this!”

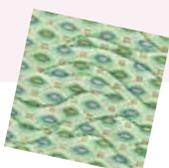
Maybe they could, but I couldn't. I know, because I tried. It's an enormous leap to look at a printed color wheel and then make a real fabric quilt with it. Using a color wheel is not a natural, intuitive process for most quilters, including me, and colors printed on paper don't accurately represent colors

ingrained in fabric. The answer? A map. This book contains a road map to the process for using colors and making them work together every time. You won't be limited to just the colors you like, only those you see in nature, or any other such random rule. I will literally show you how make any color work with any other color. I show you how to make colors behave and play well together. Follow the map—the ten principles—and your quilts will be transformed from blah to brilliant!



## Ten Principles of Color Mastery

Quilters who use color effectively develop creative habits that continually train their eyes, keeping them sharp and focused. Long-time quilters instinctively “know” these habits, and, until now, everyone else had to wait and hope for that “aha!” moment. Well, fellow quilters, the wait is over. I've uncovered the ten principles, those precious creative habits, you can use to guide your color selection process. Each chapter in this book contains exercises that demonstrate these principles. From creating and keeping a color journal to identifying the three elements of color and orchestrating harmonious and complementary color combinations, these exercises are intended to help you understand how to use the fabrics you already have to create more spectacular quilts. In short order, these principles will become second nature. Until then, think about the ten simple principles listed on the next page and detailed throughout this book. Get ready to put these principles into practice and experience the joy that comes from designing beautiful, colorful quilts.



## Ten Principles of Color Mastery

1. Keep a color journal to record your color discoveries.
2. Use the first element of color—hue—to identify the color itself.
3. Harness the second element of color—value, or the lightness or darkness of a color—to incorporate three dimensionality into your quilt.
4. Master the third element of color—intensity, also known as color saturation—to manage the brightness of your quilt colors.
5. Use Analogous, low-contrast color harmony for subtle color blending.
6. Apply Complementary color harmony using opposite colors on the color wheel for high contrast.
7. Opt for Round-Robin color harmony to achieve low contrast and variable color.
8. Use Triadic color harmony for medium contrast and a variety of colors. Triadic color harmony may well be the perfect color harmony.
9. Use Split-Complement color harmony for medium contrast.
10. Apply Double-Complement harmony for higher contrast and lots of colors.



**Chapter 2: Keeping a Color Journal**, encourages you to cultivate the creative habit and discipline of recording your color vision. The supplies you'll need and the best approach to mastering this process are covered here.

**Chapter 3: Uncovering the Secret to Stunning Color Combinations**, unveils the secrets of color relationships and fabric. This chapter explains the three elements of color, what they do, and how to use them in your quilts. I offer tips for building a better, more usable stash. It's more than a matter of buying on sale and swapping with friends. Don't skip this!

**Chapter 4: Mastering Hue—The Celebrity Element**, elaborates on the star of the show—hue. I explain, step by step, how to create a color wheel from your own stash, as well as how to see your fabrics with an artist's eye. This chapter is key to your understanding of how to use color in general. Trust me, you'll never look at bolts of fabric the same way again after completing the exercises in this chapter.

**Chapter 5: Mastering Value—The Workhorse Element**, explains why value is so important to beautiful quilt design. I show you how to select just the right values for your quilt design, and how to see a greater range of values in your stash than you thought you had. This chapter really opens your eyes to the possibilities lying on your fabric shelves.

**Chapter 6: Mastering Intensity—The Best-Kept-Secret Element**, addresses the most elusive element of color—intensity. Few quilters, even the most experienced of us, understand the role of intensity in a color palette. The exercises in this chapter are designed to help you recognize your natural preference for intensity, break out of an intensity rut, and shop for a greater variety of fabric intensities.

**Chapter 7: What Every Quilt Needs—The Dance of Harmony and Contrast**, provides techniques to help you evaluate your color choices by applying the concepts of harmony and contrast to achieve optimal color effectiveness in your quilts. The

exercises in this chapter focus on intuitively identifying harmony, understanding how to achieve it, and recognizing how much contrast an individual quilt needs, based on its design. This chapter also includes my top ten color mastery tips. Once you know how to master color, these guidelines and tips keep you on track, so you won't retreat into old habits.

**Chapter 8: Basic Color Harmony Projects**, contains four quilt projects: two color harmony quilts, a bonus quilt, and a quilt that shows the impact of neutrals on other colors. This chapter is a great place to start, since each of these projects can be made by most quilters in just one day.

**Chapter 9: Sophisticated Color Harmony Projects**, contains four color harmony projects that range from feminine to masculine and scrappy to funky. Once you've completed the workbook exercises and finished at least one of the basic color harmony quilt projects in Chapter 8, you're ready to move on to one of the four more advanced color concept quilts this chapter offers.

**Chapter 10: Creating Your Own Color Harmony**, empowers you to create your own color harmony and offers a masterpiece quilt as encouragement. Once you understand the rules of color relationships, you'll be ready to have some fun bending them, all the while using the three color elements to your advantage. This chapter walks you through the process of creating an entirely new color harmony, and uses a gorgeous quilt project as an example.

**Chapter 11: Frequently Asked Questions About Color**, contains the questions about colors I hear most frequently from quilters in my classes. If you've ever wondered about it, it's probably here, along with some additional questions that will really challenge what you've heard before about colors in your quilts.

The appendices contain helpful charts and details about an at-home Color Mastery retreat. I'd love to meet you in one of my upcoming classes, but

if you can't attend, why not have your own retreat for yourself and with your quilting buddies! The itinerary from my Color Mastery retreat is here to guide you.

## Color Mastery for All Fiber Artists

I teach color classes for all stripes of fiber artists, not just quilters. These classes are offered at a local arts center near my home in the beautiful Appalachians in Georgia. This locale has a rich heritage of folk arts and crafts, and my students range from knitters, rug-hookers, weavers, and embroiderers to collage artists who yearn to understand how to improve the color quality of their work. The ten principles outlined in this book work for all fiber artists, not just quilters. Fiber artists of all types will likely find the insights and exercises in chapters 2 through 7, as well as the frequently asked questions (and answers) in Chapter 11 particularly useful.

## Top Ten Color Myths for Quilters

I've taught color classes for years. I've had literally hundreds of students in my classes and I've heard every imaginable excuse for why it took some of them so long to finally commit to learning about color. Most of the objections have to do with learning how and why to use the color wheel. After all, choosing colors is the fun part of the process, so why make it such an academic ordeal? Just for fun, see if any of these misconceptions about quilters and the color wheel sound familiar. Then, take a minute to think rationally about how I bust each particular myth and why the wheel is such an important and fun tool:

### 1. I have to be an artist to understand all the theory and terms behind the color wheel.

Any quilter, from traditional to contemporary, can use the color wheel to improve the visual appeal of her quilts. The only people I would not specifically encourage to use the color wheel are

those just starting out in quilting. Newbies, don't be discouraged. First, master the basics: cutting, piecing, and the quilting process itself. Then you'll be ready to appreciate and apply an understanding of the color wheel.

### 2. I have to be a designer and create original quilts to use the color wheel.

You can use the color wheel for any quilt, whether it is derived from a new pattern, a classic pattern such as the Bow-Tie, or one you design yourself.

### 3. The color wheel is for painters. Quilters don't need it.

Painters need the color wheel to mix colors like lavender, chartreuse, or pink from basic colors straight from the tube. Quilters have the luxury of being able to go into a quilt shop and choose from an entire palette of fabrics that someone else has made. But because someone else has done the hard work of designing and making those fabrics for them, quilters understand less than painters about how colors work together, and the number one complaint I hear from quilters is, "I don't understand how to pick the right colors for my quilt." Quilters may not need to use the color wheel as much as painters do, but it certainly improves the look of the finished quilts.

### 4. Using the color wheel is too complicated for me.

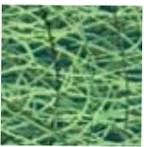
If you can piece a consistent ¼" seam, achieve sharp points, and match seams, learning the principles of good color using the color wheel should be a breeze. I find quilters often don't give themselves enough credit for how hard they work at mastering a technique, and once they do, they forget how hard they worked to attain that expertise.

By dedicating some time to learn how to use the color wheel before you get too deeply involved

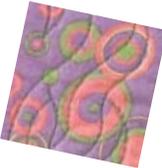




in designing and assembling a quilt, you'll actually spend less time in selecting colors and fabrics for your quilt. Using color principles will simplify your quilting process!



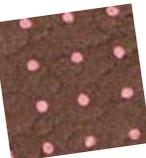
### 5. I'll lose my own style if I use color principles. My quilts will look formulaic.



We all have our own color preferences. I've always loved intense colors and lots of contrast in my quilts. That love didn't diminish when I started using the color wheel. Instead, I learned how to make those intense colors work better with other colors and fabrics.



Color principles can also be helpful if you're ready to transcend your tried-and-true routine and dabble in a new color palette. If you've always made quilts using reproduction fabrics, the color wheel can help you make a quilt using Asian, contemporary, or other types of fabrics you're not accustomed to using. The color wheel can take the fear out of the unknown!



### 6. I have to dye my own fabric to use the color wheel.



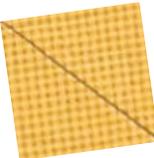
The color wheel works with all fabrics: commercial, hand-dyed, antique, you name it. It's all about putting colors together, no matter where they came from. And color wheels work for all kinds of fibers, not just fabric, so they work for knitters, too, even those who don't dye their own fleece.



### 7. I would require an enormous stash to use the color wheel.



Nothing could be further from the truth. The color wheel can help you to more effectively use the fabric you already have. And if the quilt shop is missing the "perfect" fabric you thought you needed for your background, border, or binding, your knowledge of the color wheel will help you know exactly what to look for in a substitute fabric.



### 8. Color principles are only for contemporary quilters/quilts.

All quilters and quilts benefit from understanding why some colors are stunning together while others look drab. Color principles can help you to understand how to draw attention to or away from a specific area of your quilt through the judicious use of color. And that applies to all quilts, not just contemporary ones.

### 9. Using the color wheel will be expensive for me—I'll just want to go out and buy more fabric!

Quilters covet fabric, knitters covet yarn, weavers covet fleece. Having or not having a color wheel won't change those characteristics of our artistic nature. My point is that, by understanding and using the guidelines for creating harmonious color combinations, you can use the fabric you have more effectively. You won't need to go out and buy more fabric—unless it's a day with a "y" in it.

### 10. Why should I learn better color techniques? I like my quilts just fine as they are.

If you are a quilter who absolutely, positively, and thoroughly loves all the quilts you have ever made and never wanted to change a single thing about any of them, I admire and salute you, and will submit your name to the Quilter's Hall of Fame.

For the rest of us, we have all, at one time or another, been frustrated by the prospect of selecting from among multiple perfect fabrics, working for months on a quilt, and being less than completely thrilled with the results. Who knows what happened, but the finished product didn't look as fabulous as we envisioned in our minds. The color wheel can help you avoid that disappointment by planning and choosing the relationship between your colors and designing the effect the finished quilt will have.

## Adopting a Playful Attitude About Color

I greet many intimidated quilters in my classes. They thirst for knowledge after years of frustration, but they're afraid to ask questions. I've even had students who did the exercises before the scheduled class so they wouldn't look foolish.

Here's my philosophy: choosing your colors and selecting your fabrics is the fun part of making any quilt, so why ruin it by getting so serious and knotted up? Have fun! Play at this stuff. It's just fabric, and you'll be using tiny swatches in these exercises. Really—it's just you and your stash. No one is looking over your shoulder. And who cares what anyone else thinks? It's your quilt—make it your way!

## Color Wheel, Rotary Cutter, and Sewing Machine: They're All Just Tools

Sewing machines and rotary cutters completely transformed the quilting process, rendering it easier and more productive. Compared to hand-stitching and scissor-cutting, these pieces of equipment allow us to make quilts in record time. But remember, they're just tools. They make my life easier, but they're not the focus of my quilts. And neither is the color wheel.

The color wheel and the harmonies I create by using it make my color decisions easier, less agonizing, and I'm much more confident in my color selections. Did I mention I achieve outstanding results from using the color wheel? I do. The principles I advocate here aren't my focus. They just make my quilts look oh so much better and they can do the same for yours.

The colors I see around me inspire me: a child's outfit, my kids' drawings, a flower, a painting by one of the Great Masters. I see colors and wonder what they'd look like worked into a quilt. When I get past the admiring and reach the point of wondering,

that's when I engage the color principles process.

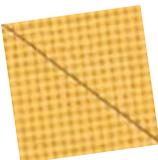
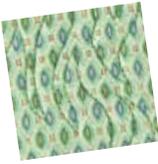
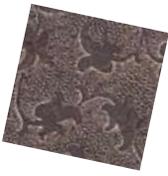
Design and fabrics are the focal points of a quilt. The color principles process enhances these focal points by empowering you to make better fabric choices, selecting colors whose relationships work well together to create a really powerful design. The color principles process is a road map, a supporting player, and I don't create a quilt without it. It's not all that difficult to follow and practice makes it even easier.

Understanding the vocabulary of color and learning how to apply the ten principles takes some work; there's no getting around that. But I think it's fun work; after all, we're not scrubbing the kitchen floor here. The process is one of discovery: uncovering the relationships colors have to each other, realizing your own color style, and marrying the two so you can make your color preferences work in every quilt you make. This is not the CliffsNotes version of understanding and achieving successful color selections. Completing the exercises in the various chapters will help you to master the concept of color, and it does take time. But what a difference it will make in your quilts. I promise.

## Beyond the Color Wheel

There's lots of information available on the color wheel and how to select colors for your quilt. Color wheels aren't a new invention, but going beyond the color wheel IS news. Understanding the principles of color harmony is not, in itself, enough to make a successful quilt, but that knowledge will get you much closer to your objective and each chapter provides information on the various aspects of color harmony that can help you to design a more visually appealing quilt.

Fabrics aren't paints: we're not mixing two fabrics to get a third one in a brand new color. Also, fabrics have texture, scale, and undergo a different dyeing and development process than do paints.

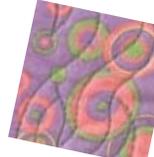




Our criteria for selecting fabrics goes beyond just color. There are other ingredients of color that, when combined appropriately, help to achieve a successful palette. I explain about those other secret recipe ingredients in Chapter 3.



**An important note:** You've made an investment in better color choices for your quilts by purchasing this book. Don't let it languish on a shelf. Make an investment of your time, too. Color mastery is not something you can learn about by reading; you see it for yourself using your own fabrics. The exercises I've designed are essential for refining your color vision skills.



### Basic Color Harmonies



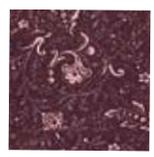
When you were a beginning cook, you didn't start out trying to make a cheese souffle appetizer, roasted duck with root vegetables for the main course, and tiramisu for dessert, did you? Or maybe you did and ended up in tears when your mother-in-law politely declined to eat your creation. Instead, you probably began with the basics, like baked chicken and rice, with pudding for dessert. Then you may have moved on to chicken divan, coq au vin, and more complex recipes and flavors. As you progressed, you added more challenging techniques and exotic flavors.



It's the same with creating color harmonies and what worked when you were learning to cook can work with this process, too. We'll start with the basics: simple color relationships. Does that mean you can use only simple quilt patterns? Not at all. You can use as many colors as you like, but the relationship among these colors will be uncomplicated.



The basic harmonies are also great fall-backs when you need a quick quilt for an impromptu occasion like a co-worker's birthday or a utility quilt for the back porch. Life gets busy, and we don't always have time for a gourmet project. Sometimes you need a 30-minute meal: something quick and



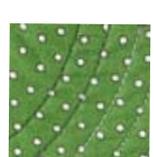
easy, but delicious nonetheless. Think of basic harmonies as the go-to palettes when you need something quick but with spectacular results. The basic color harmonies tend to involve either similar colors with low contrast or differing colors with high contrast. Using the color principles process, you'll test your fabric swatches first in your color journal, and once you're happy with the results, you'll be ready to make that quilt.



### Sophisticated Color Harmonies



Once you've mastered the basic harmonies, you'll be ready to graduate to the advanced harmonies. These have more intricate color relationships, but their results take less tweaking to be successful. While the simple color harmonies use similar colors with low contrast or differing colors with high contrast, the advanced harmonies are a nice middle ground. Again, you launch the process in your color journal, auditioning swatches for their various roles before committing to a big Broadway production—a quilt.



### Your Color Journal

The first step in the color mastery process is to create and keep a color journal. I cannot emphasize enough how vital this step is. This isn't a sophomore "dear diary" adventure; it's important and it'll make a huge difference in whether you fully grasp the concepts or just nod to them in passing. By building the sample swatches in your journal pages, you should see your fabric stash through new eyes and imagine possibilities and quilts you never dreamt possible before. I keep several color journals at once, and they have become essential tools in my own mastery of color. By experimenting here, on a small scale, before you spend your hard-earned money and precious time on a big quilt, you'll realize this step is a worthwhile and effective investment.

## Effortless Projects, Sophisticated Colors

When you're learning something new, you want to keep distractions to a minimum. By doing so, you'll have an easier time focusing on the task at hand. In this case, your task is mastering color, so I've made the quilt projects uncomplicated, yet sophisticated in their design. The objective is to enable you to focus on the color without having to wade through complex instructions and intricate piecing at the same time. The principles explained in these pages are timeless; fabric styles and trends change, but this color course and the quilt designs are classics.

## Disguising Leftovers

One of the most clever applications of the color principles involves taking scraps from one quilt project and giving them a makeover, creating an entirely new look. Chapter 9 has two transformative projects, taking scraps from one project in this book and disguising them so you'd never know their origins.



### KNOW THIS:

Color Mastery is a ten-step process, a road map, outlined in the following chapters, step by well-planned step.

### THINK ABOUT THIS:

Do you know where all of your fabric is stashed?

### DO THIS:

Start gathering your fabric stashes into one accessible place. Your entire collection will become your palette for your color mastery journey.