



Quilter's Top Ten

Myths About the

Color Wheel

by

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Myth #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 her quilts.

You don't need a degree in art, just the desire to make more spectacular quilts and gain a mastery over color. You don't need to know artist terms or have an art studio. Just a notebook, camera, and a place to sew will do.

Are all quilters ready to learn the color wheel? Probably not.

Some quilters truly don't want to make their own decisions. They would rather let someone else, who is supposedly more knowledgeable, select their fabrics. They make quilts only from kits, fabric bundles, or the fabrics chosen by quilt shop employees. I actually had this experience while I was working in a quilt shop. A woman came in with her daughter and saw a Christmas quilt on the wall. She looked at me and said, "Pick out fat quarters for me so I can make that quilt."

Picking out the fabric is the fun part! Getting to play with all those colors, textures, prints: does it get any better? But for some, all those choices can be overwhelming. That's where the color wheel can help. It allows you to pare down your choices to those that will contribute to the quilt type you

want to make.

Anyone else not ready? Newbies, and I mean real newbies. If you are just starting out in quilting, hold off on the color wheel. You need to master the basics: cutting, piecing and the quilting itself.

Myth #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 comes from a pattern, a classic such as the bow-tie, or one you design yourself.

Even if you want to duplicate the quilt you see in a magazine (or other source), chances are you won't be able to find those exact fabrics. Using the color wheel, you can select substitute fabrics that will give you the same results as the ones in the photograph.

What if you want to create the same quilt, but with a different set of colors? If the pattern uses delicate florals and you want to make a seasonal quilt with fall colors, the color wheel can help you do that. What if you are making a college dorm quilt and you hate that screaming orange and blue? The color wheel can help you tone it down.

And if you are creating an original quilt, the color wheel becomes even more important. An artist needs to lead the viewer through the quilt, subtly suggesting where the most important elements are, and the color wheel can help you achieve that effect.

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

Quilters don't *need* sewing machines either, but you won't catch me making a quilt without one.

Painters need the color wheel to mix colors like lavender, chartreuse, or pink from basic colors straight from the tube. Quilters don't have to mix two different-colored fabrics to get a new one. We have the luxury of going into a quilt shop and having an entire palette of fabric before us. But because of that, quilters understand less 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 the color wheel, but it certainly improves their quilts.

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

You aren't giving yourself enough credit. If you can piece 1/4" seams, match points, and sew on a binding, the color wheel should present no problem for you.

The color wheel is a tool, just like your rotary cutter. Sure, I sliced my fingers and bled a little when I first started using it, but eventually I couldn't imagine not cutting fabric without it.

By taking the initial time to learn how to use the color wheel,

you'll actually spend less time in selecting colors and fabrics for your quilt. The color wheel will simplify your quilting process!

Myth #5: I'll lose my own style if I use the color wheel. My quilts will look formulaic.

We all have our color preferences. I love intense colors and contrast in my quilts, and that never changed when I started using the color wheel. I simply learned how to make those intense colors work better with other colors and fabrics.

The color wheel also helps you if you want to transcend your routine choices and try a new color palette. If you normally make quilts using reproduction fabrics, the color wheel can help you make a quilt using colors outside of that genre.

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

The color wheel works with all fabrics: commercial, hand-dyed, vintage, batik, you name it. It's all about putting colors together, no matter where they came from.

Fabric manufacturers research what colors quilters prefer, and they know 95% of all quilters will never dye their own fabrics. Next time you go into a quilt shop, look around and notice what color is offered the most. Those are the colors fabric manufacturers are counting on you buying.

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

Nothing is further from the truth. The color wheel enables you use the fabric you have more effectively. And if the quilt shop is missing the “perfect” fabric you need for your border, binding, or background, your knowledge of the color wheel will help you know exactly what to look for in a substitute fabric.

Myth #8: The color wheel is only for contemporary quilters/quilts.

All quilters benefit from understanding why some colors are stunning together while others look drab. You can learn how to draw attention to or away from a specific area of your quilt by using color.

The color wheel applies to antique quilts as well. Baltimore Album quilts retain their classic look because they use a high-contrast color palette that rarely changes. Civil War quilts are recognizable for their muted colors, limited color palette, and small-scale prints.

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

Well, quilters covet fabric like we covet chocolate, with or without the color wheel. But by knowing the guidelines of the color wheel, you can use the fabric you have more effectively. No need to go out and buy more.

The color wheel also enables you to be successful when you are making a challenge quilt or other project that has restricted fabric choices. You can take the limited resources you have to work with and really make your quilt stunning.

Myth #10: Why should I learn the color wheel? I like my quilts fine as they are.

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

For the rest of us, we have all been frustrated by buying those perfect fabrics, toiling for months on a quilt, and being disappointed in the result. The color wheel can help you avoid that by planning the relationship between your colors and what effect you want the quilt to have in the end.

Resources

Maria Peagler's website is at <http://www.mariapeagler.com>.

Maria's blog is at: <http://quiltsandcreativity.com>.

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