How to cool a hot photo

When your photo can't be changed, surround it with cool color.

Continued ▶

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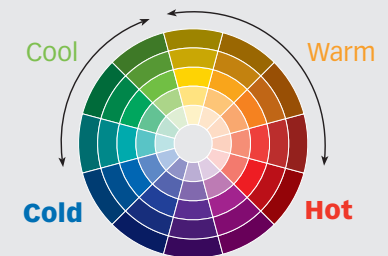When your photo can't be changed, surround it with cool color

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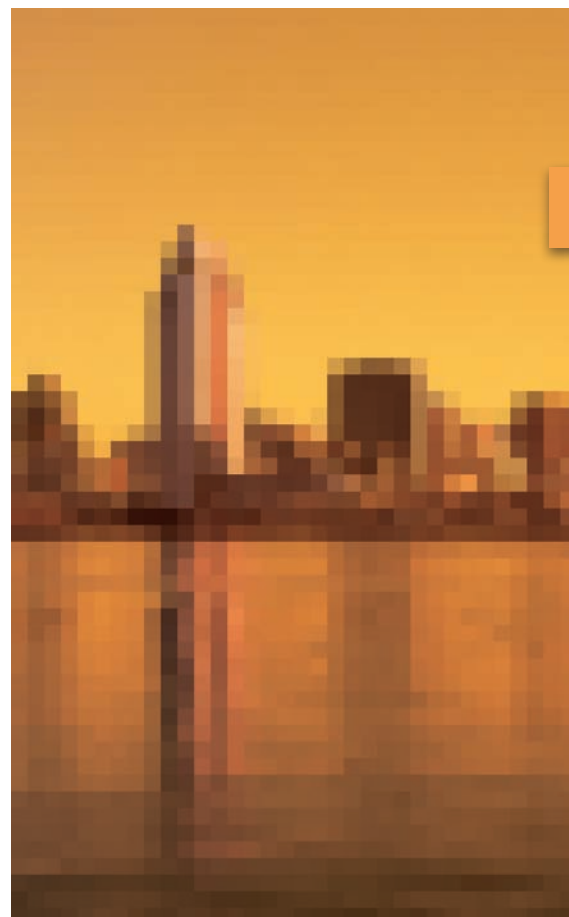
Cool Warm

Cold Hot

The color wheel is an artificial device that's good but not perfect— colors in nature aren't so evenly distributed— whose purpose is to show color *relationships*. Also on the wheel are values (dark-light) and temperature.

First step: Find the color palette in your photo

Every photo has a natural color palette; first step is to find it and organize it. Zoom in on your photo, and you'll be astonished by how many colors you see.

First, reduce the photo to a manageable number of colors; the easiest way is to create a mosaic using Photoshop's Mosaic filter *(Filter>Pixelate> Mosaic)*. **Working from the biggest areas (sky, skyline, water) to the smallest, extract colors with the eyedropper tool. For contrast, pick up dark, medium and light pixels of each color. Then—this is important—sort your selections by color and each color by value (dark to light). This lets you see every color in relation to the others. It's obvious just by looking that this palette is very narrow.**
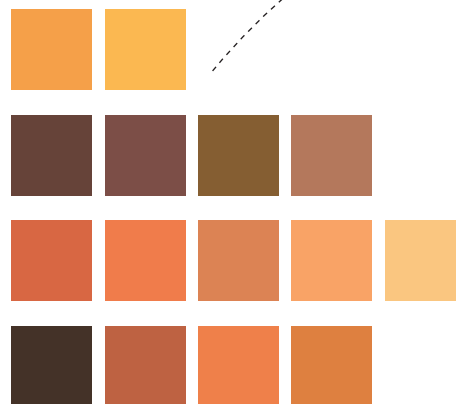
Sky

Skyline dark

Skyline light
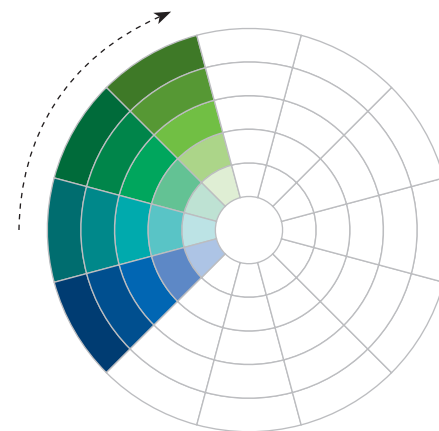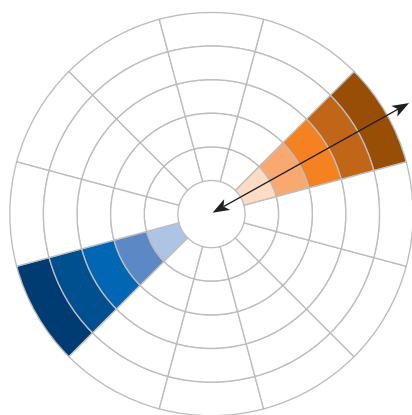
Water

Locate your colors on the wheel

To find compatible colors, we first need to know the relationship of our colors to others on the wheel. Working by eye (the wheel's not exact, remember), locate your swatches by hue (color) and value.

All the colors in this image are in the yellow-orange, orange-red range, quite unusual. The sky is somewhat yellower, some shades are darker than our chart, but this is the zone.

Tint

Hue

Shade

What we know

Our photo is full of colors in the orange range, and *very* warm. Orange's opposite—or *complement*—is blue, the coldest color. Let's start there.
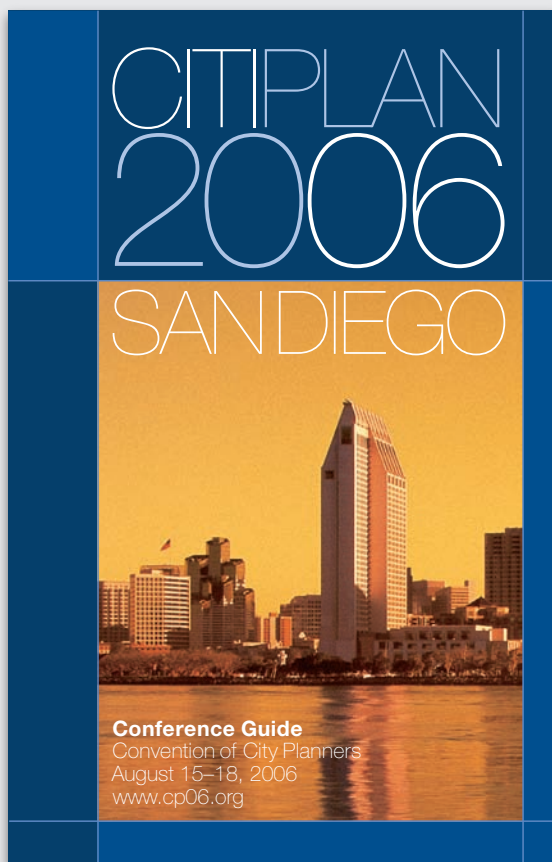
Tints and shades

Color is made darker or lighter by adding black (a shade) or white (a tint). Because they are *color neutral,* black and white do not change the hue. As a result, any one color plus its own tints and shades always coordinate naturally. Such a palette is called *monochromatic*. Blue and orange are opposites, or *complements,* as shown above.

A color in common

Adding yellow to blue yields the cool range; these are the colors of water, new growth, springtime. They are peaceful colors, tranquil and refreshing. As with a monochromatic palette, all hues that share a color—blue, in this case—coordinate naturally. Any color in this range will work with any other.
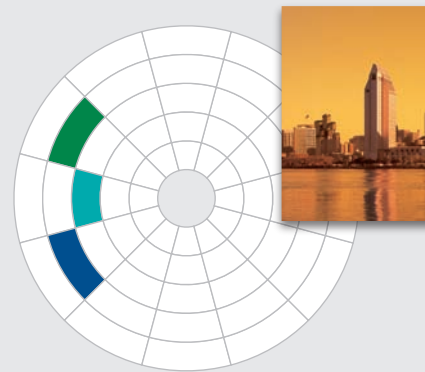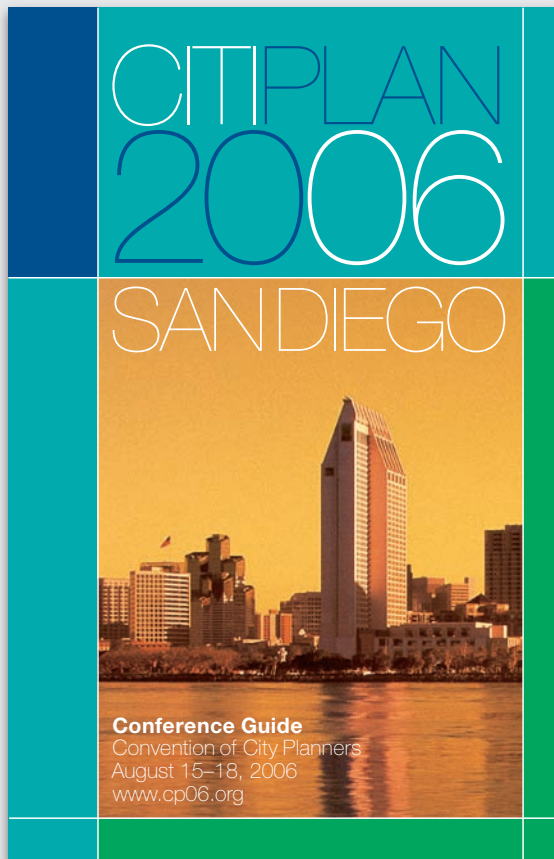
Color the brochure

It's time to take that hot photo and submerge it in cool colors. For depth, coolness and beauty, two colors are better than one, and three colors are better than two.

Ice All blue monochromatic palette is very cold and has very high *value* contrast with yellow-orange. Blue and orange have no color in common and therefore have high color contrast, too. High contrast normally equals high energy, but here the conservative dark blue (think winter) mitigates that somewhat.

Cold Moving toward yellow is a cool mix of blues and greens; the greens share warm yellows with the photo, while the blues provide the ice. Blue dominates, keeping the overall effect cold. The colors shown here have similar value and therefore low contrast.
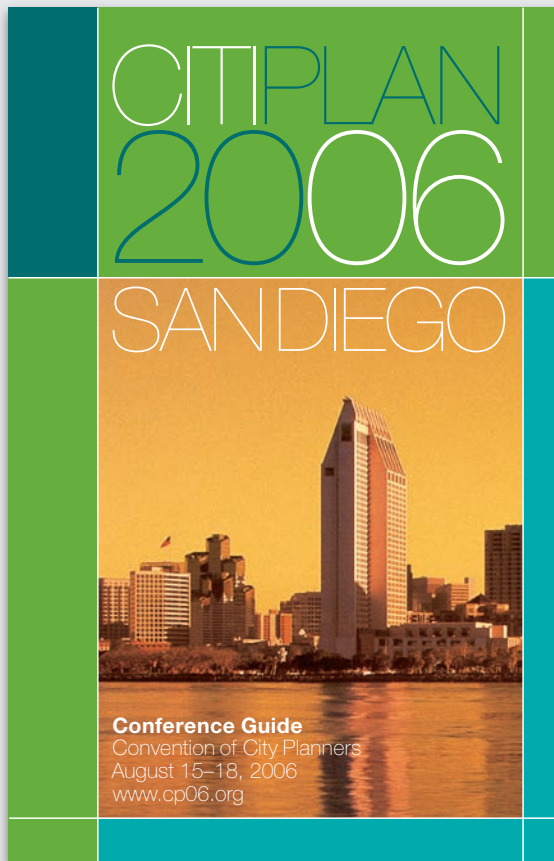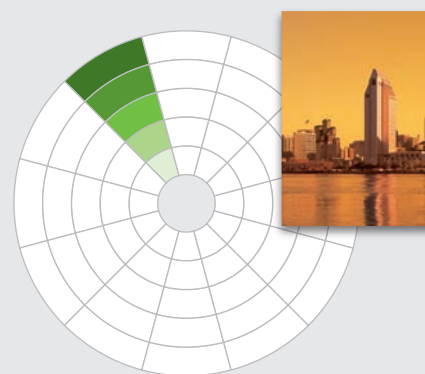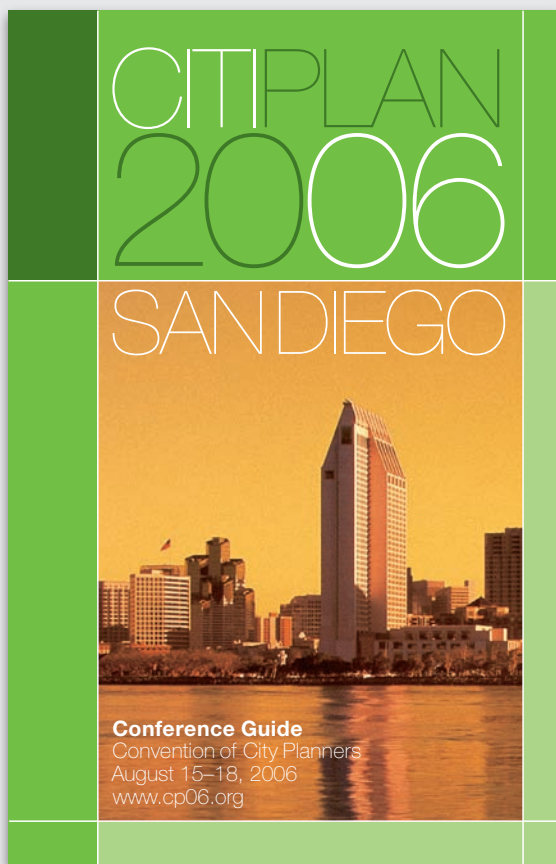
Cool Closer to yellow, the palette is warmer still. These are the colors of springtime, cool and refreshing—but with sun in the sky! Green dominates. Green has a lot of yellow in common with the photo, yet the aqua blue keeps the effect cool.

Warm Here, all the colors are yellow-green, a mono-chromatic palette that has the most color in common with the photo and yields the warmest image; it doesn't really cool the skyline very much.

Tone down the color

Less saturated colors (more black or white and less hue) yield quieter, more "professional" palettes. Quantity matters; the more of a color, the greater its influence.
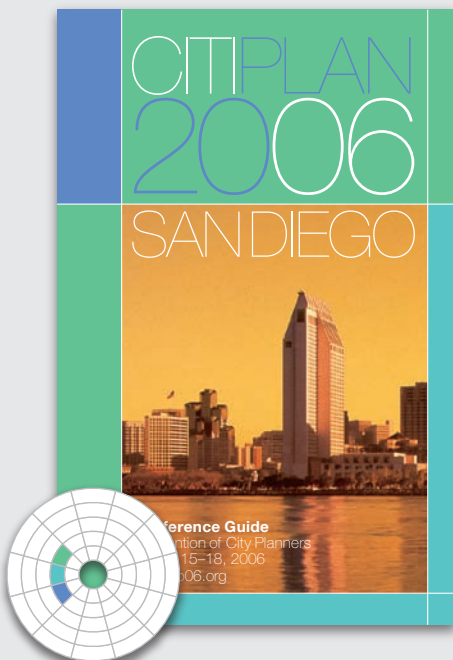
Analogous (side by side) tints with very low contrast are soft and touchable. Think baby products.
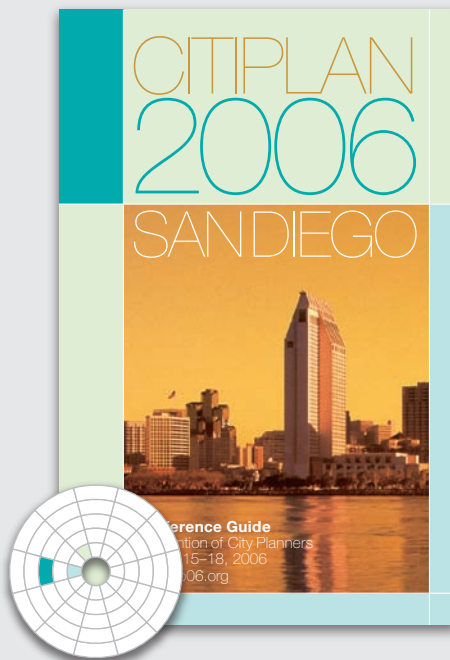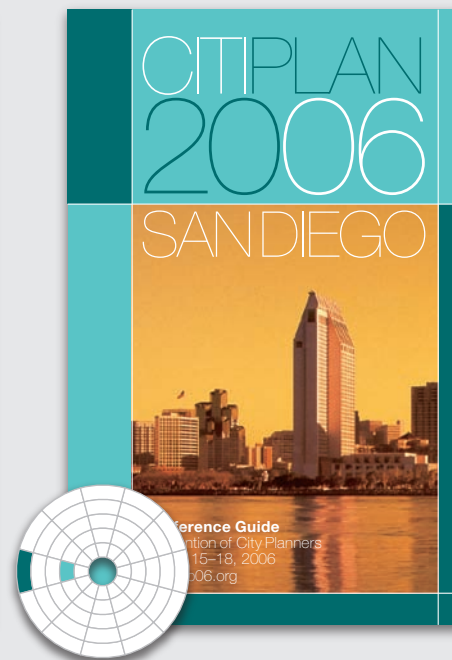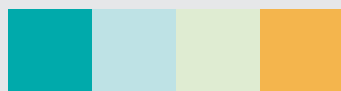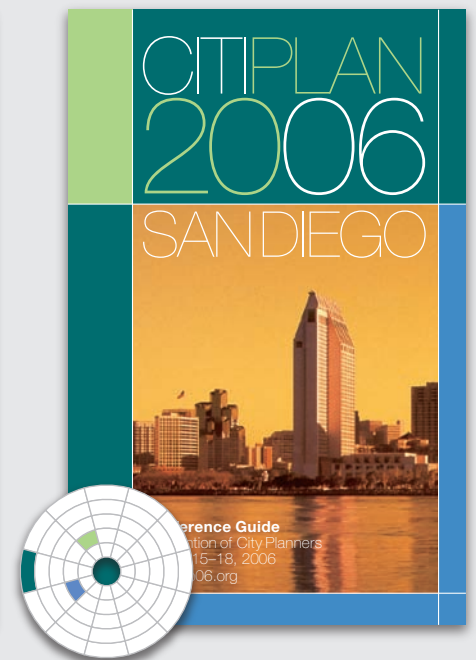
Photo stands out against light tints, which recede. Yellow "city" color connects head to photo.
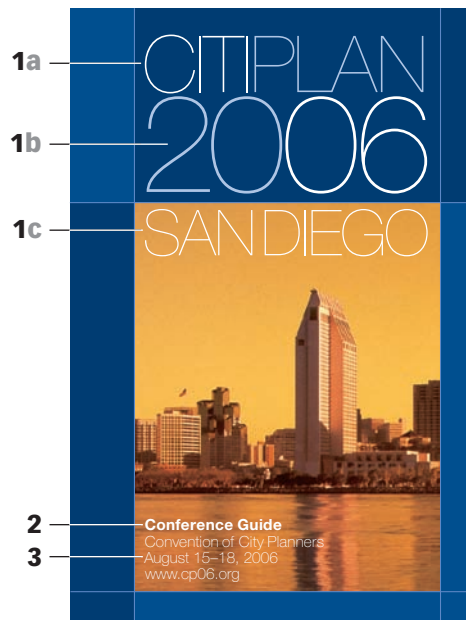
Dusty, dark-light monochrome is handsome; identical opposite corners act as a frame.

Low-contrast green-blue and light blue harmonize; light green and white cool the headline.

Article resources

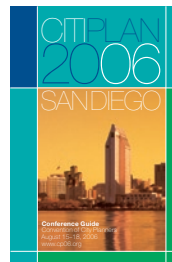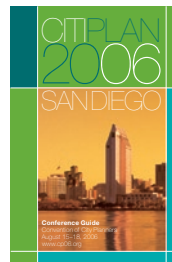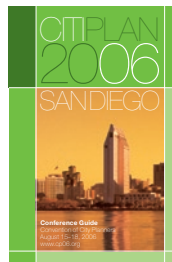## Typefaces

1 (a–c) Helvetica Neue 25 Ultra Light
a) 41 pt, b) 72 pt, c) 33 pt

2 Helvetica Neue 75 Bold | 8/8.5 pt

3 Helvetica Neue 35 Thin | 8/8.5 pt

Color

4	C**100** M**60** Y**0** K**45**
5	C**100** M**60** Y**0** K**25**
6	C**30** M**15** Y**0** K**0**
7	C**100** M**0** Y**40** K**0**
8	C**100** M**0** Y**90** K**0**
9	C**100** M**0** Y**40** K**45**
10	C**60** M**0** Y**100** K**10**
11	C**60** M**0** Y**100** K**45**
12	C**60** M**0** Y**100** K**0**
13	C**35** M**0** Y**60** K**0**

14	C**65** M**40** Y**0** K**0**
15	C**60** M**0** Y**55** K**0**
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19	C**3** M**31** Y**80** K**0**

Color wheel

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Print: (Specify pages 14–19)

Print
Format: Landscape
Page Size: Fit to Page

Save
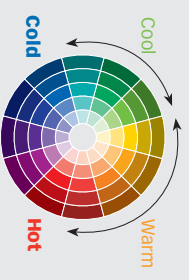Presentation format or
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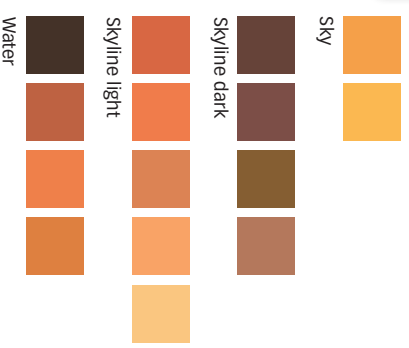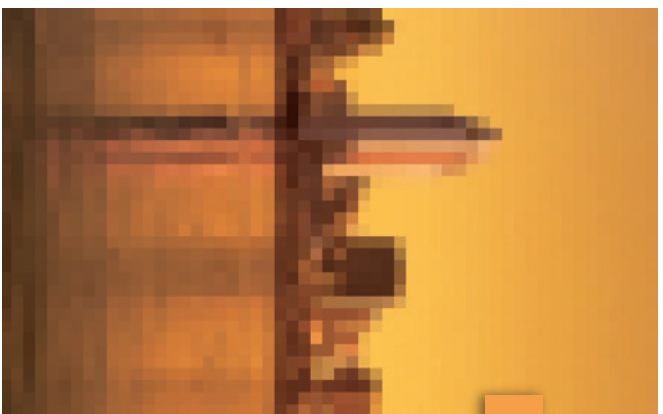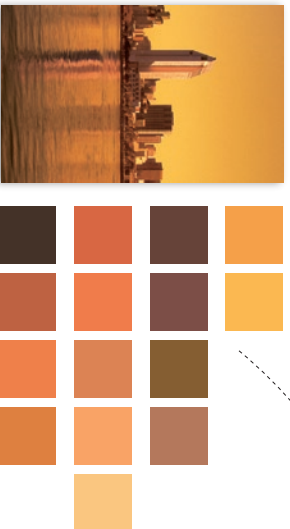## First step: Find the color palette in your photo

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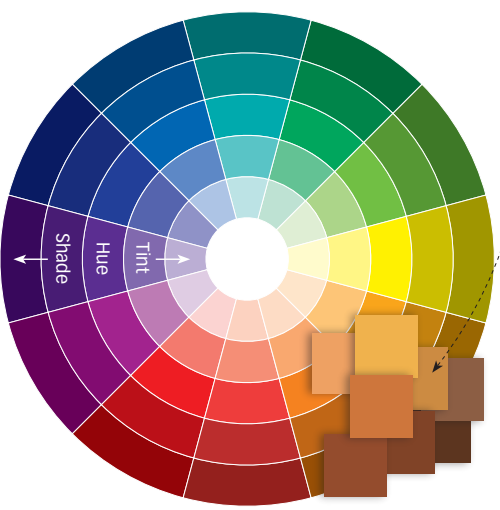To find compatible colors, we first need to know the relationship of our colors to others on the wheel. Working by eye (the wheel's not exact, remember), locate your swatches by hue (color) and value.
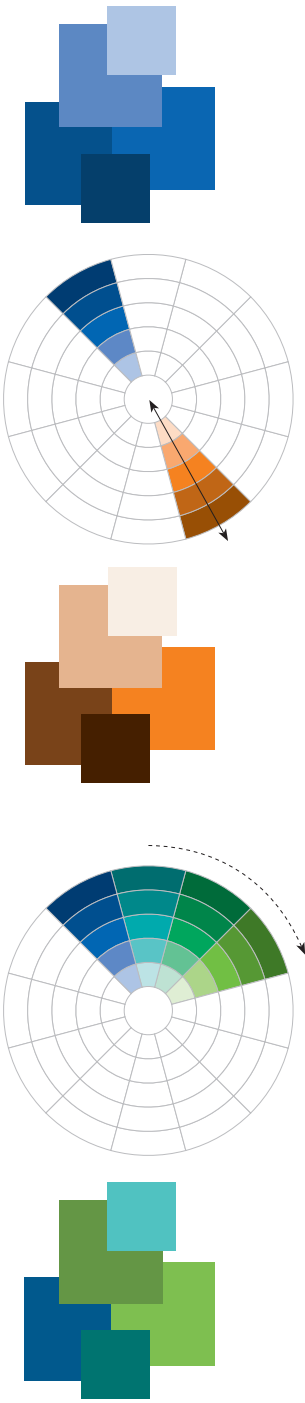
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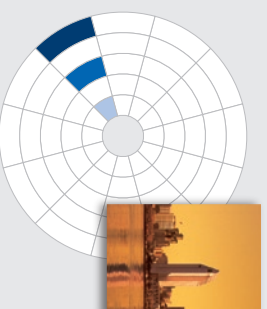
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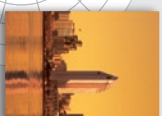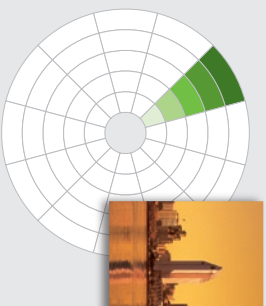Convention of City Planners
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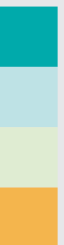
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11 C60 M0 Y100 K45
12 C60 M0 Y100 K0
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