Our color wheel

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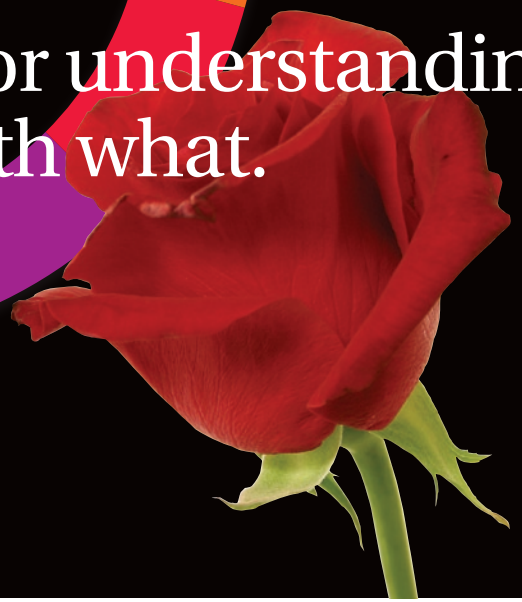

Continued

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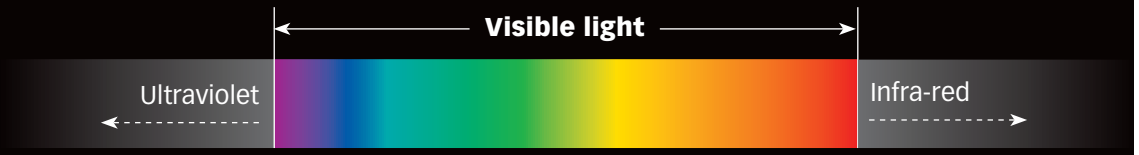
Wherever there is light, there is color. While we think of colors as independent—this blue, that red—a color is never seen alone but always in the context of other colors. Like a musical note, no one color is "good" or "bad." Rather, it's one part of a composition that *as a whole* is pleasing or not. The color wheel is our tool for understanding how colors relate to one another. Here's how it works.



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Infinity, simplified
White light contains all visible colors, which form an infinite spectrum that always appears in the violet-to-red sequence you see in a rainbow (right, top). To make it practical, the color wheel represents this infinity with 12 basic hues pretty much like those in your first box of crayons.

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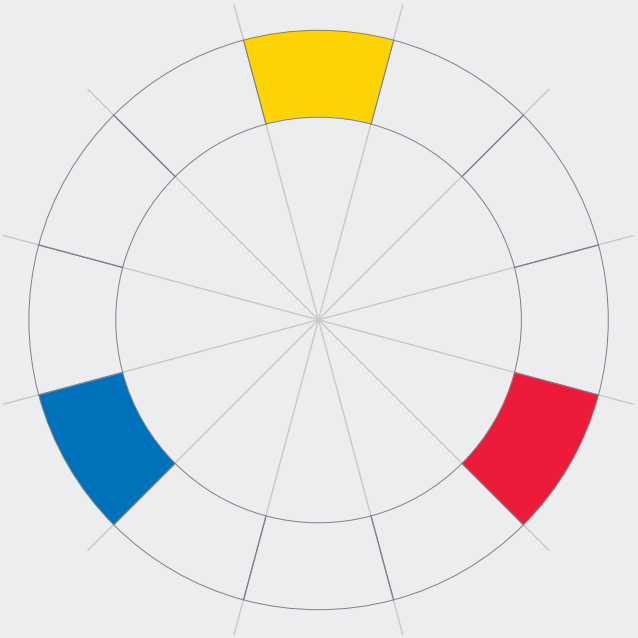
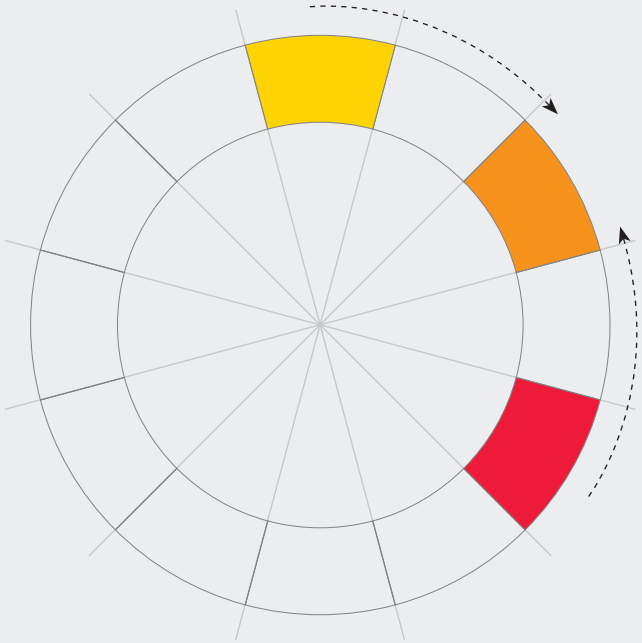
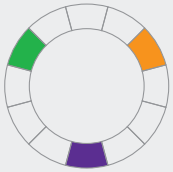
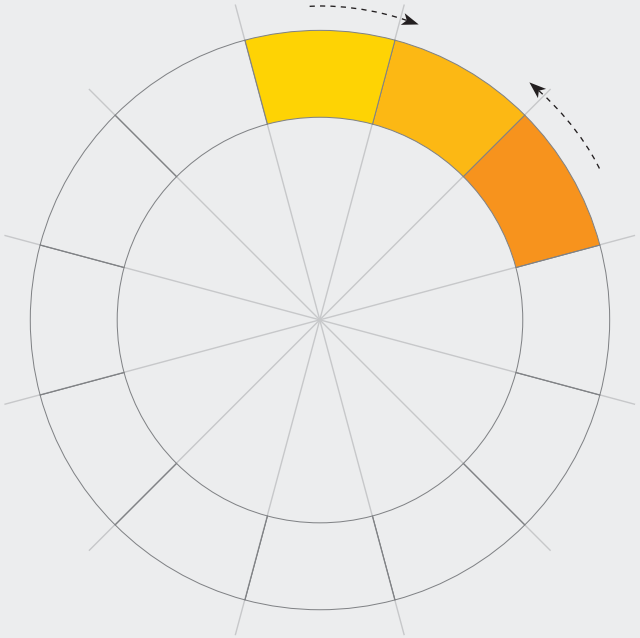


Primary colors are the wheel's "parent" colors; they are the only colors not made from other colors. The primary colors are positioned around the wheel in thirds.





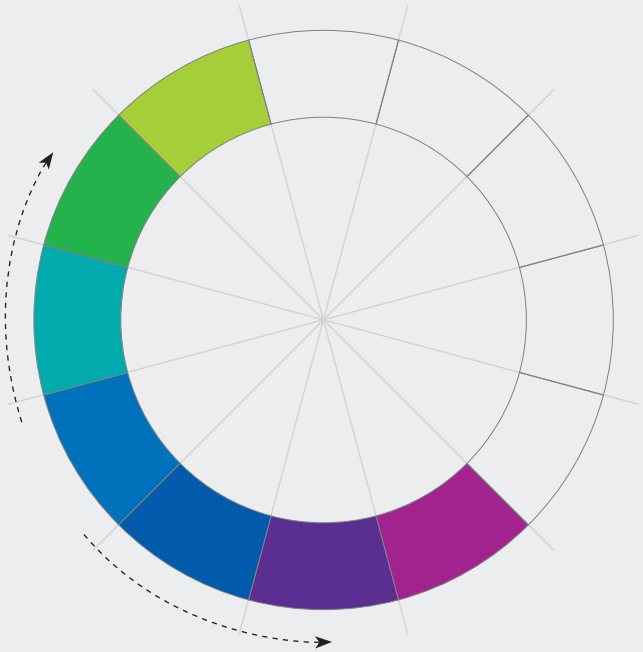
Secondary colors are halfway between the primary colors. Each is made from equal amounts of the nearest primaries.



Tertiary colors are halfway between the secondary colors. Each is made from equal amounts of the adjacent secondaries.

Colors in common

As you can tell, every color is part of the color next to it, which is part of the next and the next, all the way around the wheel. *Colors in common* are the basis of color relationships.



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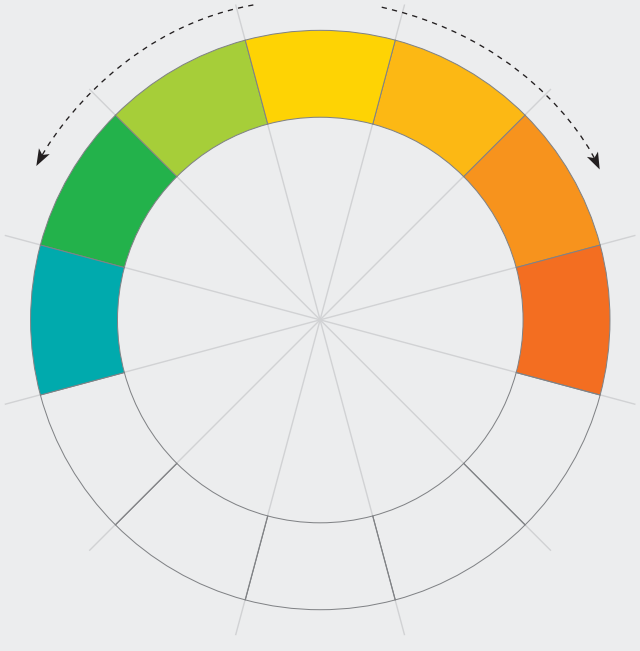

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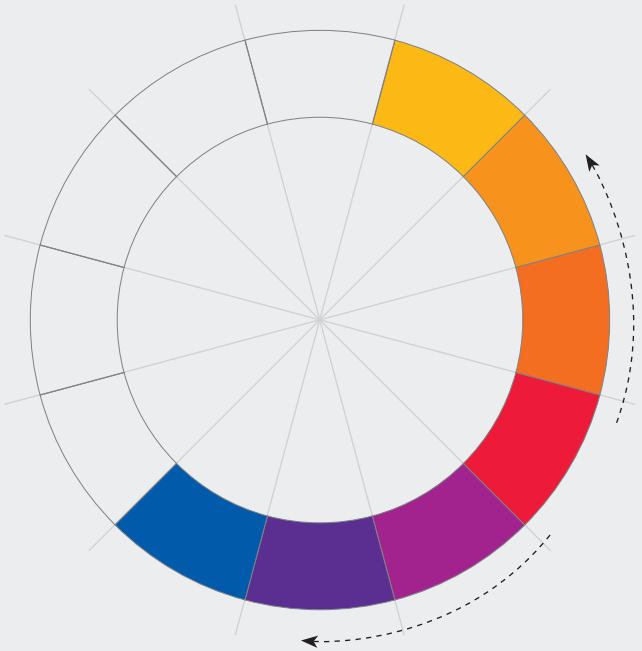

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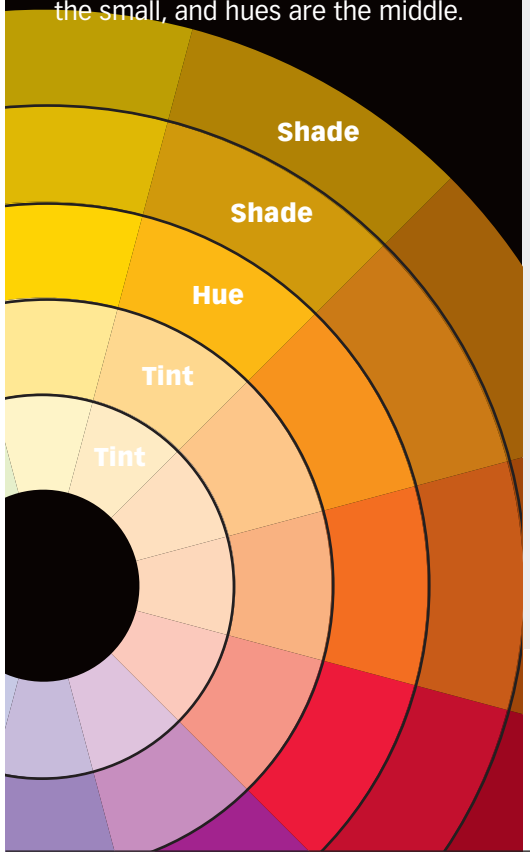
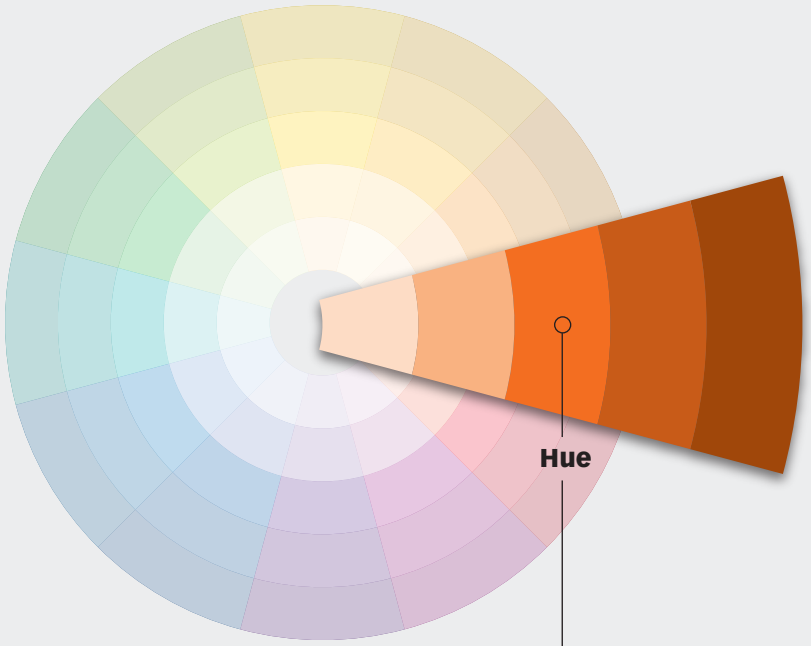
Color value

Color also has darkness and lightness, or *value.* To show value, the color wheel has more rings; two big rings for the dark *shades* and two small rings for the light *tints*.

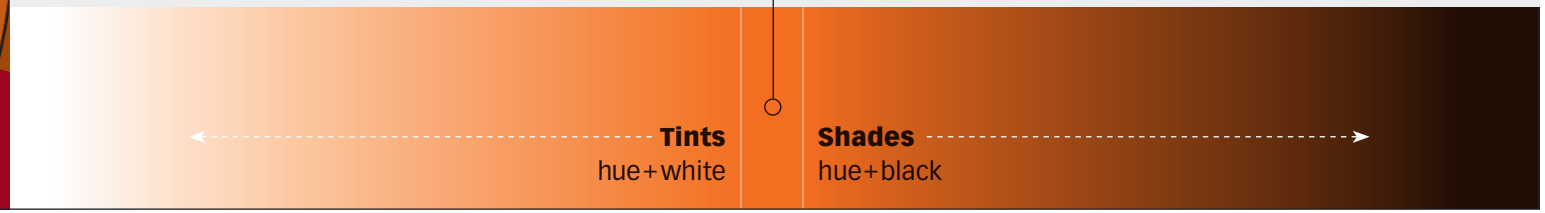
The color wheel has five concentric rings from dark to light—shades are the big rings, tints are the small, and hues are the middle.





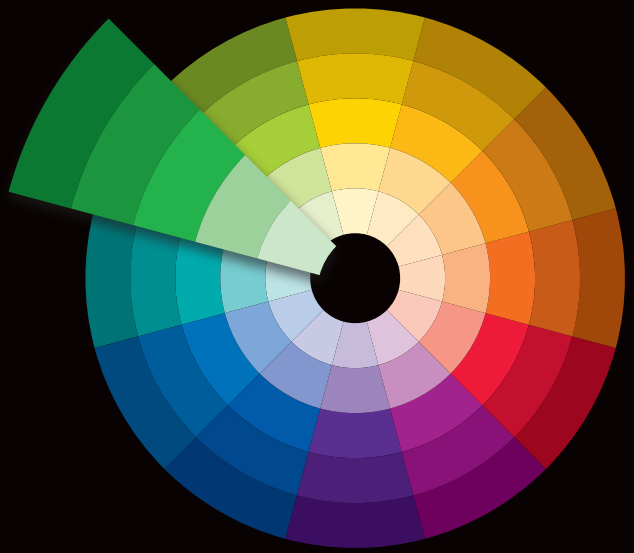
Tints and shades
(Left) A *shade* is the hue plus black, and a *tint* is the hue plus white.

Infinite gradient
(Below) Five steps represent what is actually a continuous gradient from white to black. A tint or shade can fall anywhere on the continuum.



Color relationships

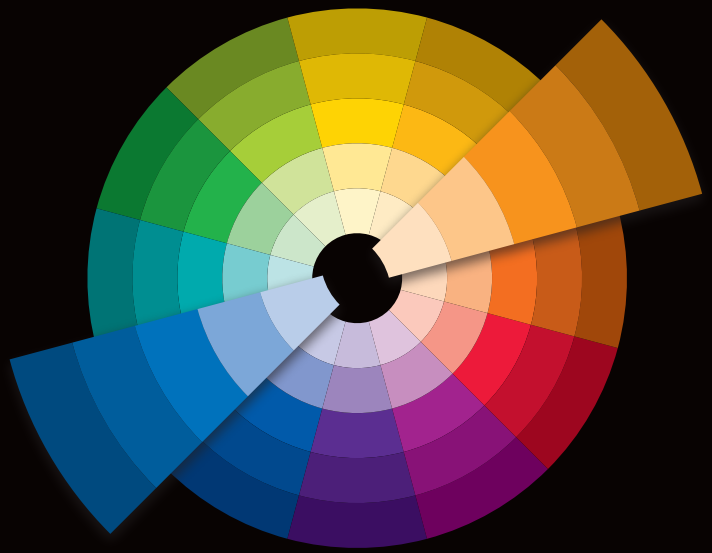
The following pages illustrate the six basic color relationships. Each can yield an endless number of color palettes.



Monochromatic
First are the dark, medium and light values of a single color. This is a monochromatic palette. It has no color depth, but it provides the contrast of dark, medium and light that's so important to good design.

Analogous
Adjacent colors are called analogous. Analogous colors share strong undertones (here, yellow and red), which create pleasing, low-contrast harmony. Analogous palettes are rich and always easy to work with.

Any palette can include shades and tints along with the hue. The result can be all dark, all light, or any combination.



Complement
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Split complement
One step either way are the complement's own analogous colors. This palette is called a split complement. Its strength is in the low-contrast beauty of analogous colors, plus the added punctuation of an opposite color. In this case the red, because it's most different, would likely be used as the accent.

The amount of color matters. Palettes can be made warmer/cooler, darker/lighter, stronger/quieter and so on by using more or less of some colors.

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The primary colors are rarely seen as a trio except in children's products. Red and yellow, however, are popular in American culture for everything from fast food to gasoline. Red and blue are common but attractive only if separated by open space.

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Secondary colors have a lot in common—two share blue, two share yellow, and two share red—so harmonize easily. As a trio they are soft, inviting and rich, and have pleasing depth and dimension that are hard to get in other ways.

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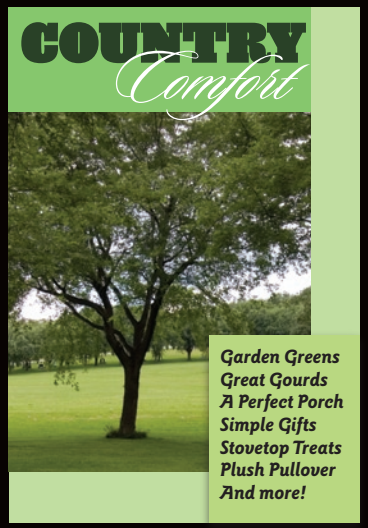

- ☐ Monochromatic
- ☐ Analogous
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- ☐ Split complement
- ☐ Primary
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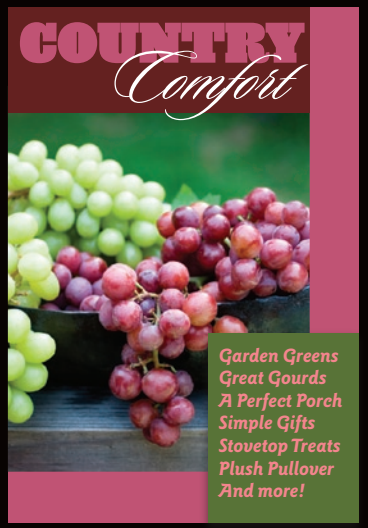

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Download: Before & After color wheel

Before&After®

Our color wheel | 748kb
www.bamagazine.com/ColorWheel/

This color wheel is exactly the one we use in Before & After magazine. It is a reference tool, not an interactive product. Its purpose is to help you understand how colors are related. Its 12 hues and 48 tints represent the full spectrum of color but are only a tiny fraction of the infinity of colors actually in nature.

The format is Adobe PDF. For everything you want to know about working with PDF, please contact Adobe's Reader support Web site at www.adobe.com/support/products/acrreader.html

Article resources

5

6

7

8

Typefaces

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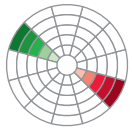
Images

4 (a–d) iStockphoto.com | a b c d

Quiz answers

5 Monochromatic



6 Complementary

7 Primary

8 Analogous

Colors

9	C65 M35 Y75 K65
10	C50 M0 Y76 K0
11	C30 M0 Y64 K0
12	C26 M0 Y47 K0
13	C60 M25 Y0 K0
14	C50 M15 Y0 K0
15	C15 M5 Y0 K0
16	C0 M55 Y20 K0
17	C30 M85 Y75 K55
18	C20 M80 Y35 K5
19	C60 M28 Y90 K30
20	C0 M75 Y95 K0
21	C25 M75 Y100 K20
22	C0 M30 Y97 K0
23	C5 M48 Y96 K0

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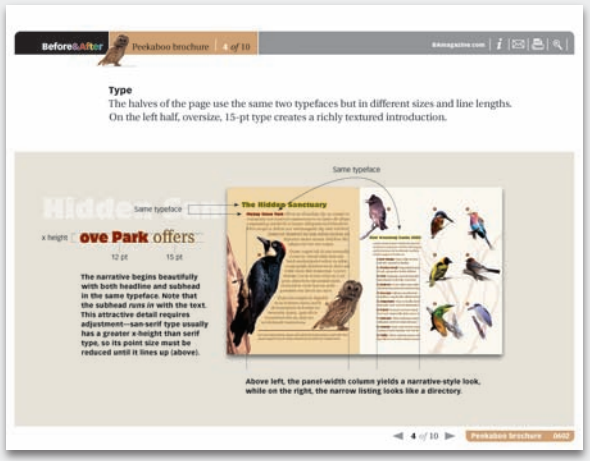

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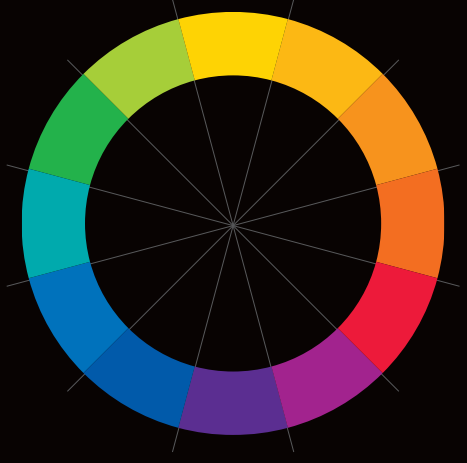

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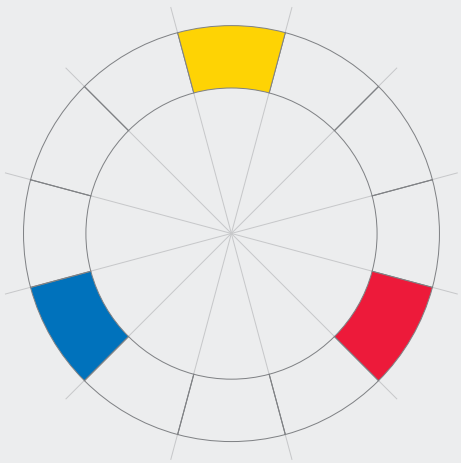

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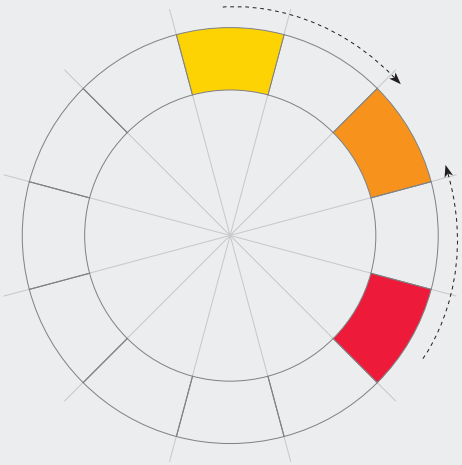

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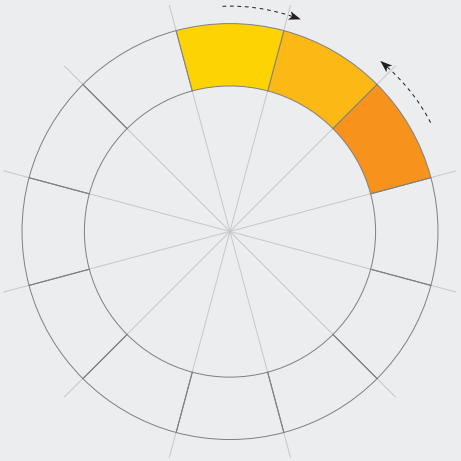

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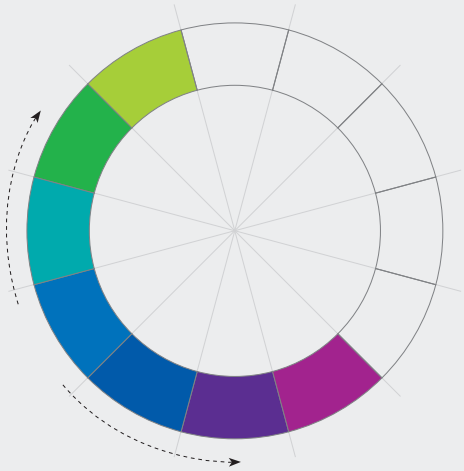

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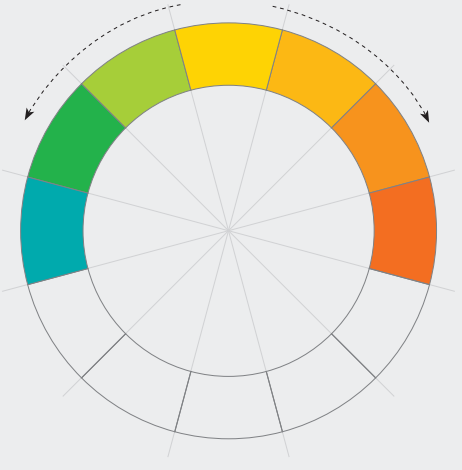

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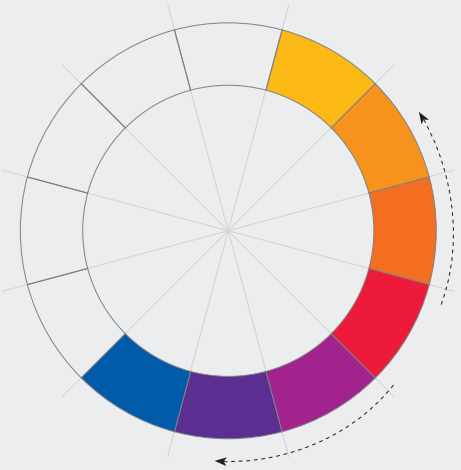

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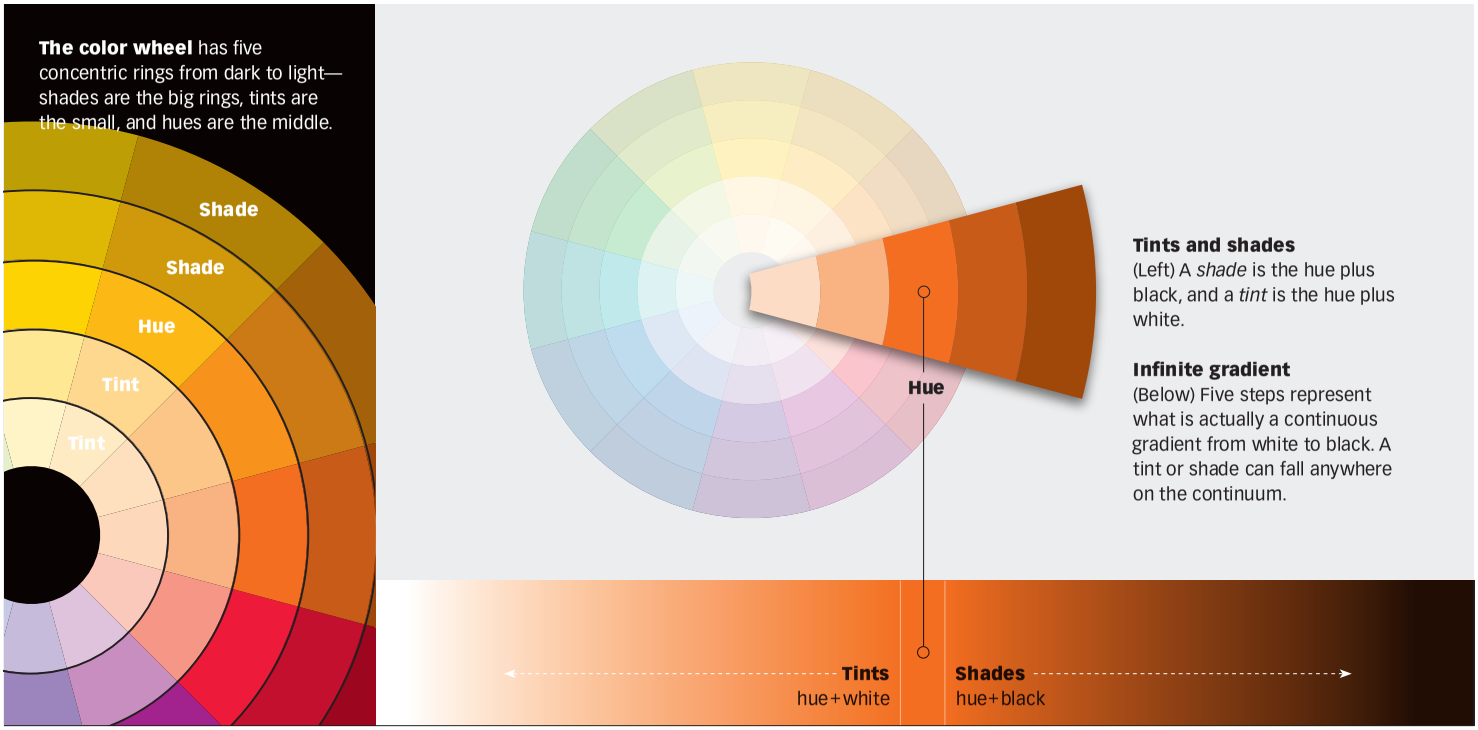

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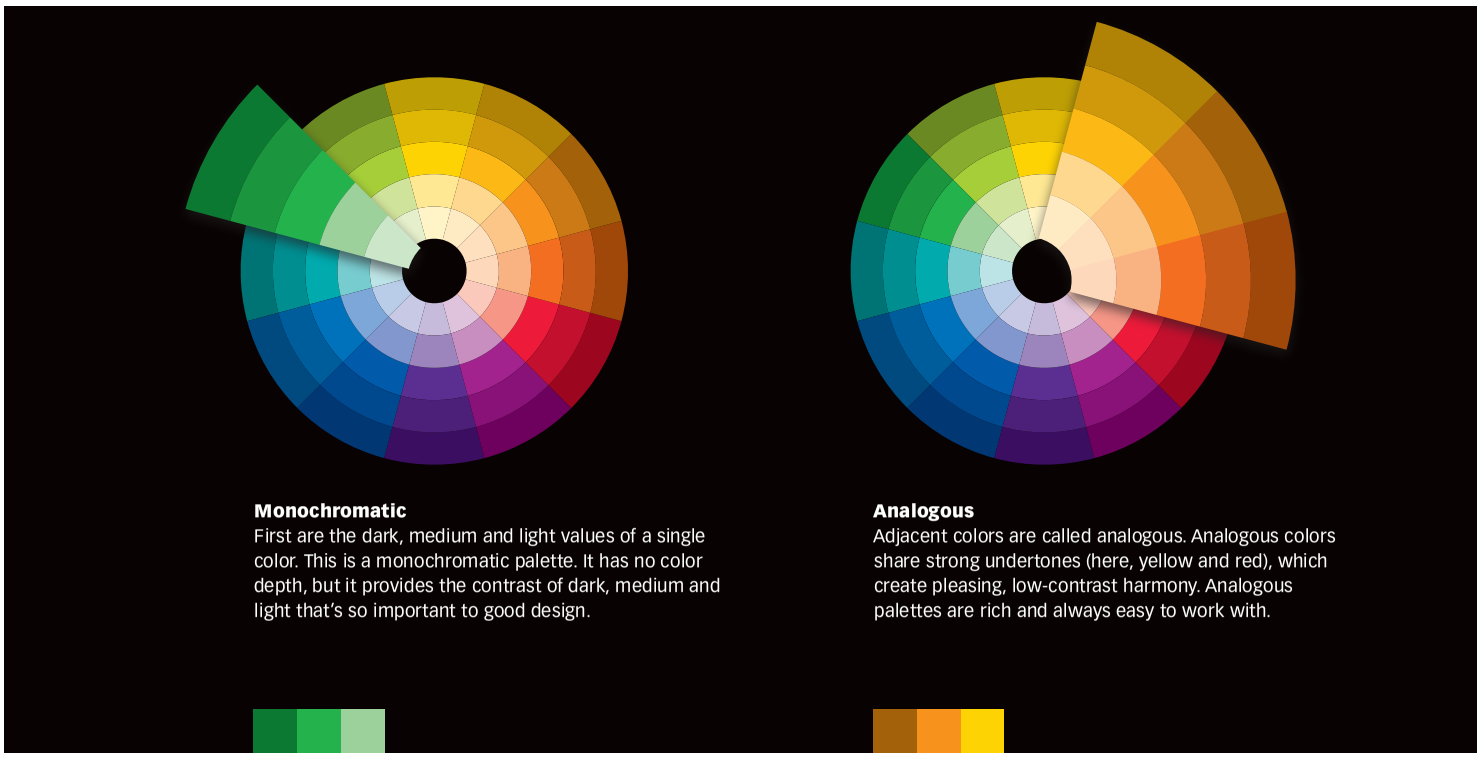

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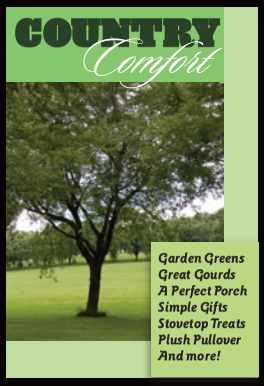

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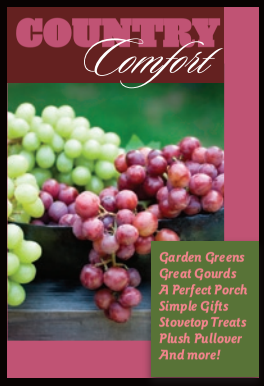

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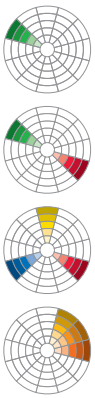

5 Monochromatic

6 Complementary

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8 Analogous

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11	C30 M0 Y64 K0
12	C26 M0 Y47 K0
13	C60 M25 Y0 K0
14	C50 M15 Y0 K0
15	C15 M5 Y0 K0
16	C0 M55 Y20 K0
17	C30 M85 Y75 K55
18	C20 M80 Y35 K5
19	C60 M28 Y90 K30
20	C0 M75 Y95 K0
21	C25 M75 Y100 K20
22	C0 M30 Y97 K0
23	C5 M48 Y96 K0

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