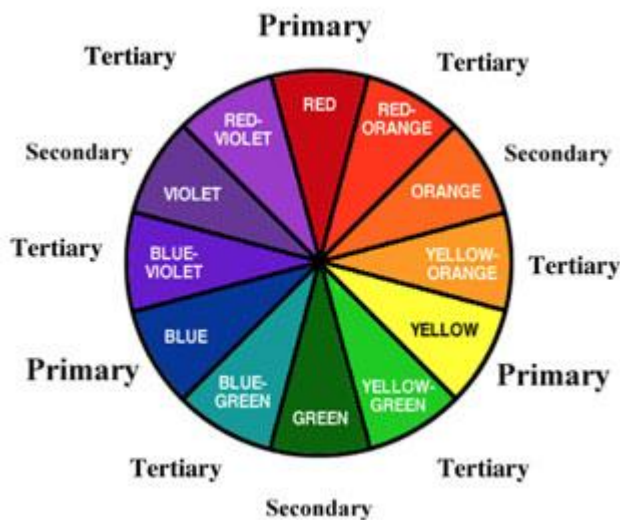


Colour

The Colour Wheel

Red, blue and yellow are primary colours, and the colours directly opposite them on a colour wheel (green, orange and purple) are complementary colours.

Primary hues are considered pure, meaning they are not a combination of two or more separate colours. Complementary colours are a result of mixing two primary hues.



The connection to photography is that colour begins with light, and photography is recording the light that reflects from a subject. Understanding colour leads to making photographic choices that will improve your images and communicate your ideas more successfully.

1. Hue

When we say a colour is orange, olive or pink we are referring to its hue. Hue is just another word for colour.

2. Saturation

Saturation (also called chroma) refers to the intensity of the hue. How pure is the colour? If the intensity drops, the saturation is diminished. Colours blended with white (a tint), black (a shade) or another colour will be less saturated.

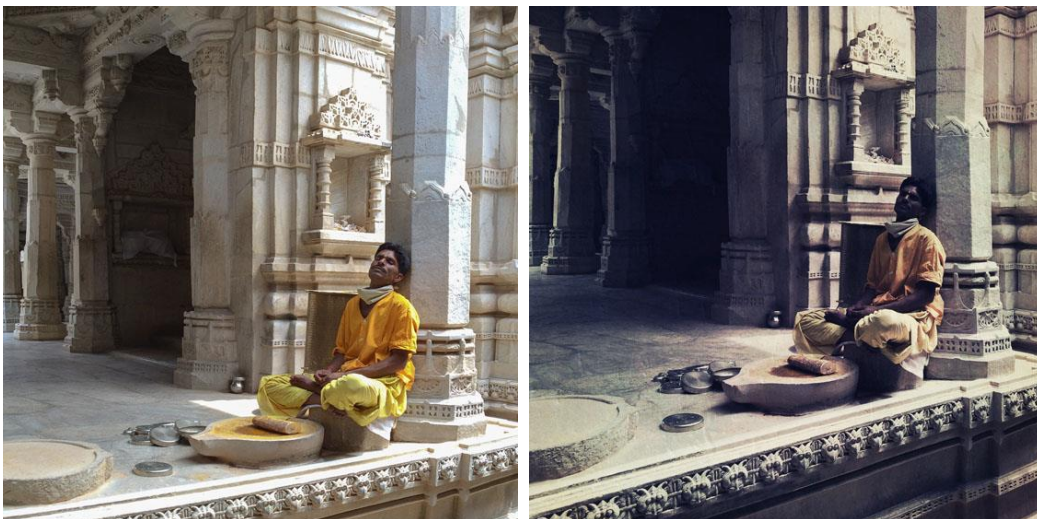


The second food photo is less saturated and doesn't make the food look very appealing. In general, photographs of food look better with rich saturation.

What drives the choice of colour treatment is more a matter of personal taste, what mood the photographer wants to convey or even how the image relates to another in a series of images.

3. Luminance

Luminance refers to how bright (light or dark) a hue is. In photography this is generally controlled by exposure. A blue object that is underexposed will be darker (less bright) than the same blue object if it is overexposed.



These two images have a very different feel. The one on the left has a brighter luminance than the one on the right.

As a photographer, what is the story you want to tell? Is it about the vibrant colour of the pigment the man is grinding or is it about the mood of the location? That is for you as a photographer to decide, and luminance can play a role in the story.

4. Warm And Cool Colours

Colours in the red, orange and yellow family are considered warm. Blues, greens and purples are defined as cool.



Warm colours are more intense than cool colours. Warm colours tend to appear to advance towards us, while cooler colours recede. Warm colours are thought to be stimulating. Cool colours are more calming, and in some instances imply sadness.

Light, the most integral element of a photograph, can also be warm or cool. Think of how images made on an overcast day compare to those made during a beautiful sunset.

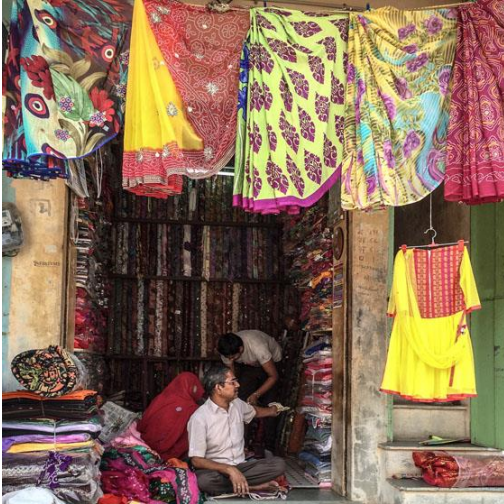
5. Harmony and Discord

The simplest harmony exists within a colour composition when three adjacent hues on a colour wheel are placed together, with the centre one being a primary hue.



An example of harmonious colours would be the primary hue blue, together with its two adjacent hues on the colour wheel which are blue-green and blue-violet.

The colours in the left image are considered harmonious. The photo contains the primary hue yellow, together with its adjacent colour wheel hues which are yellow-green and yellow-orange.



Using colours that are widely separated on the colour wheel creates colour discord. The combination of these colours are visually disturbing – they clash. Though the combination may be unpleasant, it can provide excitement. The image below demonstrates that excitement.

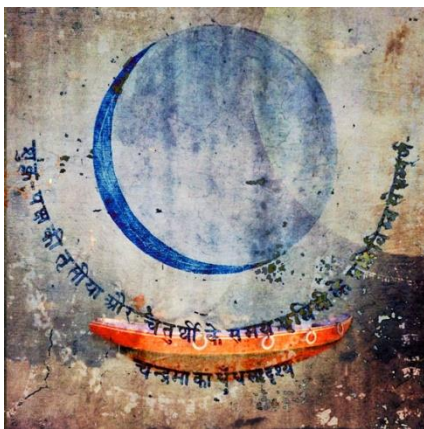
6. Contrast

Johannes Itten, a Swiss painter, educator and preeminent colour theorist, identified seven types of colour contrasts:

- Contrast of hue
- Contrast of light-dark
- Contrast of cool-warm
- Contrast of complements
- Contrast of saturation
- Contrast of extension
- Simultaneous contrast

The first five types are evident. The last two are more complex and simultaneous contrast does not apply to photography.

The image below represents many contrasts. Blue and orange are complementary colours on the colour wheel. They are also a contrast of cool and warm. The different shades of blue in the circle are contrasts of saturation and light/dark.



All those contrasts psychologically lead to a more interesting composition. If the circle were a solid colour blue it wouldn't be as interesting.

These basics of colour are a few concepts to keep in mind as you make and process your photographs. They will make your images stronger and help you tell your stories more effectively.