

Colors not easy to choose; men's style change

• COLOR MARKETING

Q: It seems to me that I'm seeing greater uniformity in color selections offered by retailers, both in fashion and home furnishings. For all the color around, I rarely see a gold, orange, greens other than the teal, or periwinkle, a red that used to be popular years ago. The same uniformity becomes apparent in showcase houses and most magazine advertisements. Why, on the one hand, are we all encouraged to be ourselves, yet pressured to conform to trends? Help me sort this out.

A: You've touched upon a major social trend of our times. It is called by sociologists, discontinuity, which means we are living in an age with strong contradictory forces as our society shifts its entire economic focus and its place in the international scheme of things.

In this setting, certain individuals are becoming more aware of their needs and wants while many manufacturers are concerned with avoiding costly risks in bringing products to the consumer market. The more

elements that can be controlled or anticipated, the more comfortable the manufacturer or retailer feels.

Color, more than style or design, has been recognized as a nearly controllable element in the marketplace. Nearly every large manufacturer tries to read trends by monitoring sales and researching the marketplace. Fewer color decisions are made by creative individuals.

Instead, color decisions are worked out by fashion coordinators, buyers, suppliers and merchandise managers. It is the coordinators, in particular, who nearly all belong to the same trade and professional organizations, subscribe to the same color forecast services and attend the same exhibits or events that remotely might influence color.

In the past few years, this tendency has accelerated. So it's no wonder they all appear to walk in locked step!

When you add to this the coordination, or packaging of product lines, you can understand that color has to fall into suitable categories of color to be coordinated.

There's also a further irony in col-



all about color

Helen Diane Vincent

or marketing. The sources being monitored for possible trends fall into contradictory areas: the very high-style expressions of mostly highly civilized French designers or the off-beat, alternate life-style statements by a variety of rebels in almost any field or profession. Of course, only few companies are willing to take risks on new color ideas. But those who do manage to become style leaders as far as the business community is concerned.

Until these discontinuities are reconciled, there are two ways you can achieve your individualized look in your home: take full advantage of customizing services offered by paint companies and certain smaller manufacturers. Trade up into more expensive and usually imported products, if you can afford it. Also consider hiring a knowledgeable interior designer, who knows how to get the most out of resources and coordinate them to suit your taste.

In fashion, it's quite another matter, other than getting a skilled dressmaker or tailor.

• ADVENTUROUS MENSWEAR

Q: My husband, who is 28 years old and has reddish blond hair, insists on wearing the newer more flamboyant styles in colorful, double-breasted sports coats and the draped, pleated trouser. It's a terrific look and acceptable among our friends. But I'm concerned how he'll come across in the business environment, even though the suits themselves are expensive. He's an insurance salesman and so far, doing quite well.

A: Menswear styles, which have gradually evolved from their begin-

nings in the 1980s Edwardian era, are about to make the biggest change ever seen before. But the shift in generally accepting the new styles hasn't been completed yet.

Until then, one should proceed with some caution before wearing the new look in a business environment. It can be more acceptable if the coloring is subtle. But I wouldn't even risk that much due to the unspoken dress code exercised in most serious business environments.

Until these fashion innovations are fully accepted, I would suggest for business going along with the more conventional look, even buying as expensive a quality as possible.

I would reserve the newer styles for private life. There's not much point in sacrificing potential business advances for a pleat or a color.

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