

STIR covers the spectrum with New York designer **Todd Oldham**, who first made his name in high fashion, creating colorful couture for celebrity clients such as Julia Roberts and Susan Sarandon. Now he's branching into home furnishings and décor, but without losing his adventurous color sense and his belief that interiors should flatter their occupants, just as an outfit should flatter the wearer.

From Fashion To Furniture

By KIM PALMER



STIR: You're known for your use of color. Why is color so important to you?

TO: I'm fascinated by it — the science of it, the metaphysics. It's interesting on every level, but none more so than combining colors and breaking color rules.

STIR: Do you have a philosophy of color?

TO: I wouldn't be so bold. But I do have some guidelines. Instead of choosing a color based on looking at a paint chip in your hand or against a wall, you should look in a mirror and hold it up to your face. You should use the same sensibility you use when choosing your clothes.

STIR: Why did you make the evolution from fashion to furniture?

TO: After many years in fashion, I felt I had said everything I needed to say. Switching to furniture was a shift in medium but not a major design shift. (Oldham's collection is manufactured by La-Z-Boy.)

STIR: Do you approach color differently when designing a dress than when designing a chair?

TO: They're related. I understand the temporariness of fashion and that you might not want that in furniture. But the idea that you have furniture for the rest of your life is confining. It's nice to be able to freshen things up.

STIR: What's your process for creating a color palette?

TO: The biggest thing that gets in the way is thinking about color. You have to feel color. I lay out the paint chips. They tend to talk to you. I also use a makeup library. I like staying in color genres, such as makeup colors; it's more compelling than color families. Makeup colors are designed to go with skin tones, and those shades have not been seen in home furnishings.

STIR: Where do you find color inspiration?

TO: Right now, I like the combination of colors in desert places. Those soft palettes are pretty inspiring. I also like ethnic colors — their bravery and their natural dyes. I'm intrigued by Scandinavian palettes these days. And India has one of the most remarkable color palettes.

STIR: How would you describe the color times we live in today?

TO: Definitely neutral-based. We live in a sea of toast, taupe, loam and beige. The furniture industry is blue-obsessed, especially the shades between cobalt and royal. There's a shift to greens, which is terrific; they look good on people.

STIR: What's your favorite era in color?

TO: My favorite is the palette of the '40s: mustard and paprika, slightly grayed. I also like the mid-century palette: crisp cherry reds and aquas. And I like the '70s, which was a strange hybrid of those two — murky mixed with blinding brights. That duality is always intriguing.

STIR: Do you have a signature color?

TO: There is a shade I'm known for. It's "Beetlewing" — sort of a phosphorus, antifreeze, lime extravaganza. It was created for a charity event featuring different designers and they put our faces on the paint cans. Ours was the No. 1 color. It's a wild, vivid green.

STIR: What color mistakes do people commonly make?

TO: Not being brave, wimping out, choosing something that's a pale shadow of what they want. Anytime we compromise what we want because we're afraid, that's a mistake. Even if you choose white, which is what is in most homes, there are many whites. Take the time to choose the right one. Warmer whites look better. Blue whites are not flattering to most people.

STIR: What are you working on now?

TO: I just finished a book, "Handmade Modern," a how-to primer. (The book is scheduled to be published by Regan Books in spring 2005.)

STIR: What colors do you choose to surround yourself with in your home?

TO: I like bold mixes. At home, I have light blue and avocado, oranges and mustards, and also tans and creams. It's bold but peaceful. I change colors whenever I get the itch. I'm constantly painting something.

STIR: Is there any color you really dislike?

TO: The minute I'd tell you, I'd start liking it. There are combinations I don't like. I'm allergic to teal and mauve. It's depressing. The '80s are back in a big way, but some things need not return. ■

"The biggest thing that gets in the way is thinking about color. You have to feel color."



The glass pear vase and Japanese-inspired "Snap" furniture line illustrate Oldham's signature bold color combinations. (All items from the Todd Oldham by La-Z-Boy collection.)