



Karen Haller is a colour psychology and design psychology expert in business branding, interiors and colour. She advises taking a holistic approach to the use of colour, using colour with purpose and keeping the overall effect in mind rather than seeing colour in isolation. There is no 'one size fits all' solution when it comes to the use of colour; there is no formula to follow, but there are some principles that should help guide design teams towards a solution that works for their site.

Start with the behaviour you want to elicit and work back. In a healthcare environment this means looking at the type of space under consideration and its purpose as well as the medical condition of those using it. Dementia patients, for instance, might need more recognition clues than other patients.

Don't overdue it. Using colour isn't about filling every available bit of space. Strive to achieve balance with thoughtful use of colour. Often less is more. Haller uses the analogy of a box of chocolates - you might want one, but if you eat the whole box you will feel sick.

Association of colours. Orange stimulates appetite and if this is a requirement it should be applied in key places and in proportion. In a dementia facility it might be used on the door to the eating area as a recognition clue. Blue is not a good colour to use around food. Blue is a cold colour and it keeps the mind alert but shuts off appetite. It is also associated with poison. Universally calming colours that might be suitable for day rooms include soft, warm blues (but not if food is to be served there) and soft, warm greens.

Above all, don't treat colour schemes as an afterthought. Haller advises, to achieve the best results from using colour for health and wellbeing it is necessary to examine the choices in more detail, not superficially, and then to test and measure how people are reacting to the colour and tweak it if necessary.

Charles Spence is Professor of Experimental Psychology and Head of the Crossmodal Research Laboratory in the Department of Experimental Psychology at Oxford University. He is the co-author of a book titled 'The Perfect Meal', sub-titled 'The Multisensory Science of Food and Dining'. His psychology goes beyond the use of colour to subjects such as the weight of the cutlery and the shape of the table. He stresses the importance of the eye appeal of the food and advises staying away from red, which he describes as an avoidance colour that makes people eat less.

He also comments on blue, referring to the 1930s 'blue tray meal deal', an all you can eat offer designed to get people to eat more that actually made them eat less.

The colour of the plate used is also important. If food served to dementia patients appears insipid, serving it on a coloured plate provides contrast and improves the appearance. A study in Salford found dementia patients ate more from a coloured plate - and that colour was blue!

Similarly, although angular black plates or slates are trendy and hugely popular for serving main courses on the high street, when it comes to desserts, round and white is perceived to be the best option.



Colour by design

The use of colour within a catering facility should not be a random choice but a carefully thought-through and applied part of the design process. Hospital Food + Service finds out why.

Practical applications

Paul Hirst is Design Director at Restaurant Design Associates (RDA), a leading design and installation company specialising in the catering, hospitality and retail industries. RDA works with its clients, which range from NHS Trusts and contract caterers to international blue chip companies and independent coffee shops, to design practical and aesthetically creative spaces. Hirst discusses use of colour in some of RDA's recent projects.

The use of colour in the hospitality and restaurant environment is an essential component in establishing the right image and creating the appropriate ambience for a catering space. This is also true in terms of encouraging spending levels. Major food retailers and restaurant chains use colour very carefully as a means of attracting customers to their outlets, through creating a clearly defined, instantly recognisable brand image.

Colour can also be used as a tool to change space perceptions and stimulate our sensory organs by creating a greater or lesser degree of intimacy or mood. For example, the colours in the blue spectrum are thought to make a small space seem larger, but also less formal and intimate. Blue shades are also thought to be an appetite suppressant. In contrast, warm and dark colours are believed to make a space appear smaller, more personal and intimate, and can stimulate appetite.

Colour can play a strong part in defining a restaurant's image, be it a fast food outlet or hospital dining space. Casual dining and fast food outlets tend to favour bold primary colours such as red, yellow or green. Red is particularly

favoured as it is a strong, powerful colour, and although technically not the most visible, it has the quality of appearing nearer than it is. If you look around, you will find red used somewhere in most major casual dining chains.

Muted, subtle colours that are neither too bright nor too light can help to create a restful, leisurely image and encourage dwell time, whilst introducing red, black, purple or gold into a design can help to portray an upmarket, trendy, stylish image.

Colour can be used to create a strong image on food service counters within hospital restaurants and signage schemes. For example, the use of burnt orange and yellow is especially appropriate for bakery areas or breakfast areas, creating a cheerful, relaxed atmosphere.

The use of green, which is grounded in nature, is particularly good for fruit and salad bar areas through portraying an image of being fresh and natural.

One of RDA's recent restaurant designs - Ellerby's at York Hospital - involved the use of white and creams to create a perception of cool and calm. Selective colours - mostly shades of green and olive - were used to punctuate the space, particularly with furniture, signage and flooring.

The overall effect was a spacious, calm and airy environment which has since attracted major positive feedback from staff, patients and visitors.

There is a general belief among designers that colour can create an emotional response, define space, affect comfort and alter perceptions of volume and weight. The careful selection of colour is therefore critical in almost every aspect of restaurant design.