

# Dialogue

## In Living Color

**Color consultant Laura Guido-Clark shares her insight on color's psychological and emotional impact and why she likes to think of color as a living thing.**

**by Steven Heller**



**B**erkeley, CA-based color consultant Laura Guido-Clark's love affair with color began at age 10 when she saw "The Wizard of Oz." As Dorothy entered the Technicolor world, Guido-Clark says she went with her. She realized then that color speaks volumes and can take you on powerful journeys.

Having studied medicine and interior design in college, she realized the two fields demanded similar traits: observation, experimentation and empathy. Guido-Clark was always interested in how design could improve, alter and heighten the human experience, and although her path was circuitous, each and every experience helped her build her career as a color, material and finish specialist. I asked her how color can make a product and the world better.

**What is the language of color?** I am happy you refer to color as a language. I see it as an intuitive, universal language and view it as a multisensory experience. It precedes words. It acts as if it is a verb. It can communicate to people across all cultures. It is an energy, and it is an entity.

**How do you speak to your clients?** I speak about color with my clients as if it were someone they would want to know. It is a friendly, accessible medium, and I probe to understand how they need to engage and communicate with their customers or clients.

**Who are your major clients, and what do they want?** My major clients cross many industries such as consumer electronics, automotive, fashion and contract furniture, and they include brands such as Samsung, LG, Toyota's Caltex Design Research, FLOR, Mattel, DWR, Coalesse, Pablo Design, American Seating, Emeco, Heartwork Inc. and Herman Miller Healthcare. They want relevance, to speak to their consumer and to develop a relationship based on desire and human connection through the surface expression.

**How do you go about giving it to them?** By listening and observing. I have trademarked a process called Climatology, which focuses less on current market trends and more on why they exist. Climatology takes comprehensive temperature

The Navy Chair, a collaboration between The Coca-Cola Company and Emeco, uses 111 recycled Coke bottles. The color palette Guido-Clark created is an intersection between the classic colors that emphasize the heritage of the brands and nature-inspired colors that celebrate the product's sustainability.

readings of emotional, political, economic and social influences that make profound differences in everyday life. By distilling these influences into human needs, I can respond with inspired design solutions in color, materials and finishes that resonate with the human spirit.

**When I think of color, I think of the film "Funny Face" and the idea of "Think Pink." Is color a fashion or a trend? Or something else?** I think it can be used to represent a trend ... a prescient method of expression to address specific human needs. An example of that is how the recent economic instability brought about a rise in colors that are bright and optimistic, sometimes even neon, to help buoy our spirits.

But color is more than fashion or trend. It is a human need. It is light. Theoretical neurobiologist Mark Changizi, who runs a research institute called 2AI, determined that we see in color so we can sense emotion or health on the skin of others. It is the reason we see color differently than many animals and insects.

**When I studied psychology, I was surprised that one of the first classes was dedicated to hue. What are the psychological implications of color?** Each color has different implications. It is important to understand that color psychology and symbolism (which is our conscious associations with color) are different. There are actually many ways that color can affect us, physically, such as red ... psychologically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. When thinking of color psychology, there are two things to consider: the first is the psychological properties of color, which are universal, and the second is the relationship with colors in combination.

**Is there something called "good" color or "bad" color?** Actual color is neither good nor bad. Color is contextual. As we all know, in life it is about relationships. Color can evoke a negative memory that could make you feel it is a "bad" color. We have done exercises where we ask someone to take a color they hate and then select

The Pixo Lamp, designed by Pablo Pixo, is a mini lamp with a big personality. Guido-Clark wanted to treat each color distinctively. The hyper yellow green emits an energy and is called GLOW, while the other, called Azure, is deep and calm like the ocean.



Heartwork is a new office furniture company that believes you put your heart into your work. Guido-Clark wanted to create a color palette that celebrated that concept. The yellow is a wake-up call: "Good day sunshine!"



**"I see [color] as an intuitive, universal language and view it as a multisensory experience. It precedes words."**

another color they believe works with it and suddenly they do not dislike the color (at least in that combination). This is not uncommon.

It is important to understand that colors in combination elicit a response. I do want to clarify that you can make a "bad" color choice if you are asking it to achieve a specific task. A good example of this is when a local fire department changed their fire trucks to blue. The result was that people didn't pull over as quickly or as much because red is an easier color to see and also raises your blood pressure and excites you to move.

**What is your rule of thumb in terms of color selection?** Wipe the canvas of your mind clean. Keep open to all new possibilities. Think clearly of your goal and end desire. What do you want color to achieve emotionally, physically and psychologically or spiritually? Be simple and purposeful. Value your intuition. Experiment, experiment, experiment.

**Is color contextual?** The answer is a resounding "yes." A great example is Josef Albers' color study. It is almost impossible to see a color by itself without taking into consideration its surroundings. The green in each of the boxes appear to be different shades of green and yet they are the same. We perceive them as different because of their background color.

**Is there really a "neutral" color, or do all colors come with meaning?** All color has personal meaning and can conjure memories. I think of neutrals as the kind of kids that play well with others. They often work easily together and are not craving as much attention.

**Do you have a favorite color?** For many years I loved the color green for its connection to nature and the way it made me feel calm. But recently, after launching a non-profit, Project Color Corps, I have been so moved by people and their generosity that I have come to love shades of reds and pinks, the color of the human heart. ■