

# COLOR DESIGN STRATEGIES

DISCOVER FASHION CUES IN IMAGES YOU LOVE

BY LINDA LEE

**H**obbies are meant to relieve stress, but for some sewers, deciding what to make and getting started bring on stress. You know you want to sew an ensemble that expresses your style, but you can't seem to pull it all together. You end up sewing random pieces that don't coordinate or, even worse, not sewing at all. There's a solution for that.

People who sew for enjoyment tend to value individual style. They want to look fashionable, but not like a carbon copy of everyone they run into in their community. However, you may not feel confident about bringing together hues, prints, and silhouettes that are new to you.

Happily, ideas for clothing can come from the most unlikely sources. Rather than reaching for the obvious, such as a fashion magazine, or wandering through the garment racks at the mall, try checking out more modern media sources.

Your camera or phone holds more enticing visuals than you can count. You took the photo because something about the subject touched you: The image triggers an emotional response,

so save it. Interior design magazines, Pinterest, blogs, travel photos, and the artwork hanging on your walls are all ready for you to reexamine.

Chances are, if you review the artwork you have collected, there is a unifying theme. It may be that you like landscapes, people, or specific color themes. Whatever it is, you have a look, and that look can be used as inspiration for what you sew.

Learn to see photos in a new way: You can translate what you observe into fabric, color, and texture combinations you never imagined. The idea is to look around you, look deep into images you like; read, research, and rethink how you approach your next project, and most of all, break out of your normal plan and play. I'll walk you through my process, and you'll see that finding and developing your inspiration can be as exciting as sewing and wearing the resulting ensembles.

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*Linda Lee, owner and designer of The Sewing Workshop in Topeka, Kansas, teaches sewing and wardrobe building through Sew Confident!, at [SewingWorkshop.com](http://SewingWorkshop.com).*

# Start with a Picture

Captivating photography isn't hard to find these days, in print or online. Other types of graphic images make good inspiration, too. When I find a picture that intrigues me, I spend time considering what makes it "work." Those aspects can be a starting point for a successful ensemble or even a wardrobe capsule.

## BREAK IT DOWN

As an interior designer, I seek out appealing images of rooms. It's interesting to see how all the elements work together. Let's analyze this cover of *Anthology* magazine. There is a lot to see in the way of color, pattern, and texture mixing.

**Main colors:** The use of two colors of fresh green in the cacti and the lighting effect on the green of the drapery fabric are the most eye-catching aspects of the image.

**Supporting texture:** The floor-standing white cactus looks like a hand-crocheted piece of art and is engaging.

**Pattern contrast:** At first glance, you don't really notice the rug, but the simple black-and-white stripe is the perfect contrast to the bold greens and wavy motif of the drapery fabric.

**Extra accents:** Don't forget the pink accent color of the hat and the cactus flowers. Or maybe you like the one blue book on the end table or the drop of yellow on the lamp or the bird. Without these small touches, the greens would overwhelm you.

Looking deep into this photograph helps you forget that this is a room setting and allows you to see the mixtures of color and texture in a different way.

## CHOOSE FABRICS

How do you translate this to a look for an ensemble? To begin, I found striped fabrics, inspired by the rug. From there, it was easy to find a couple of shades of green linen and a white knit with a lot of cable-like texture. The pink accent came in the form of accessories—a scarf, belt, and shoes.

*Knit and woven fabrics, in textures and colors that reflect the inspiration photo, form the basis of a wardrobe grouping.*



*Take a close look at an inspiring photo and pick out the elements that speak to you.*





Technical illustrations make it easy to plan fabric pairings and garment combinations. A story board brings all the pieces together visually.

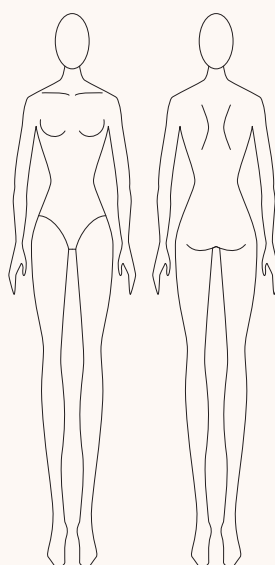
**Try the paper-doll method:** If you have no idea how to draw the human figure, you can purchase sketch pads with fashion figure templates already drawn for you in various poses. These are called croquis. Sketch over them with colored pencils, or better yet, paste small pieces of your fabrics on top of the figures and see what you like.

## PLAN GARMENTS

Try these ideas to help you decide how to use the chosen fabrics before committing to cutting and sewing.

**Start with the schematics:** Photocopy the technical drawings that are usually included in your pattern instructions. Enlarge them or trace them on vellum and then add color. If you are computer savvy, you can take photos of your fabric and place the photos within the outlines of the drawings. Alternatively, color them in with colored pencils, markers, or crayons. Make a few copies of each style and try various fabrics to determine what you like on top versus on the bottom. Should the stripe be vertical or horizontal? Is the accent color a major player or an add-on?

**Make a story board:** Another approach is to work the old-fashioned way—cut samples of each fabric in the general proportion that you might use them and build a composite of images on a bulletin board. Move them around, stack them on top of one another, cut them up, and walk away from it a few times. When you come back to it, the ideas will likely come together.



## CREATE THE CAPSULE

Now that you have a plan, the garment sewing is the easy part. You already know what works together, and the fun can begin.



*Mix coordinating tops, bottoms, and jackets, plus contrasting accessories, to create many artful outfits.*

*All patterns from SewingWorkshop.com: Striped eTee, lengthened; white eTee, shortened; long Florence Jacket; Shapes Nine Lives sleeveless jacket; striped Valencia Pants; green Quincy Pants.*

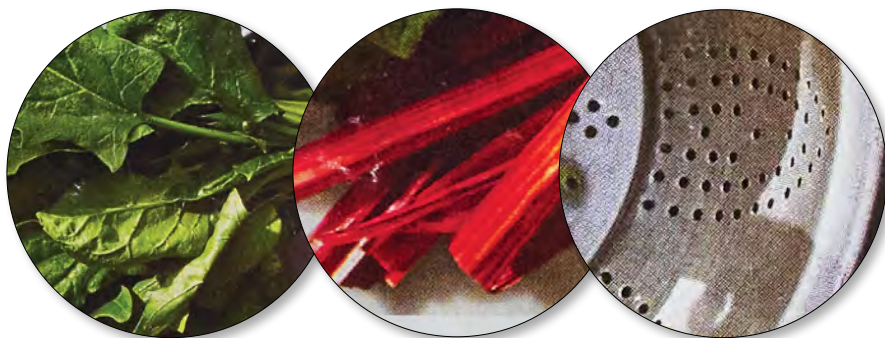
# Food for Thought

Once you're comfortable analyzing images that include textiles and other familiar motifs, try expanding your field of reference. You'll soon see how satisfying and enjoyable it is to interpret your favorite visuals in a wearable art form.

I tore a stunning page from *Living* magazine that showed salad greens; I found the mix of colors and textures delicious. The photo has nothing to do with clothes, but I wanted to make an ensemble that translated the overall visual appeal. My plan went through a couple of drafts; embrace that as part of the process as you design your ensemble.

## FIND FABRIC

I started by finding a print fabric that felt like a mixed salad—bits and pieces of color and small motifs. From that, I pulled in the dark green from the primary lettuces and loved the hint of reddish color from the stalks. But what about the colander? The steel gray color and the holes were the inspiration for finding a gray fabric with a plissé texture. I don't think I would have thought of mixing gray with the greens and reds if I had not found the colander hidden in the photo.



## DEVELOP THE STORY

I built a story board using colored illustrations of the garments; I envisioned that the starting garment would be the “salad” top. The red stems would become pants, and the colander would inspire a gray jacket.



**Revise and edit:** As I continued to work on the ensemble, I made significant changes: I didn't make the print top or the green tank. Instead, I used the print fabric for pants and I pulled in an existing top to bring in the red/orange and a bit of green. The gray jacket remained as originally planned.

**Toss in some extras:** My original plan never happened, but the process took me in another direction that ultimately became an ensemble. Plus, that gray jacket goes with anything. I made red pants and paired them and the jacket with a different print for a new look.



*This collection of separates shows that your interpretation of a photo doesn't need to be at all literal—but the results are still cohesive.*

*All patterns from SewingWorkshop.com: gray Tremont Jacket; print Valencia Pants; red Chesney Pants; print Trio Top; red Eureka Top.*

# Jacket Journal

Keeping a journal is another practice for recording your ideas. In this case, I kept a photo of a boro jacket.

Based on this garment, I decided to make a pieced and layered jacket using a variety of denims and old shirtings. My original plan and the final garment were completely different. But having that record of my thoughts, making sketches, pasting in scraps of fabric, and working out the mechanical techniques I wanted to use before tackling the garment, helped me get started. I discovered what I really liked instead of trying to copy something that isn't me.



A simple notebook offers a place to collect and develop ideas, including sketches, swatches, and technique samples. The author's creative process culminated in a denim jacket with plenty of personalized elements.

Pattern: SewingWorkshop.com Chicago Jacket.

Photos: Mike Yamin.

# A World of Color

Color—and combinations of colors in prints—are what we tune into first when we look at ensembles. If you find yourself in a color rut, remember that inspiration is all around you and may come at unexpected moments. These resources will help when you're looking for ideas.

**Forecasting services:** The Pantone Color Institute (Pantone.com) is the universal source for fashion designers, interior designers, car manufacturers, and other industries to keep up with the trends. Every year, the Institute promotes the Color of the Year; if you like it, challenge yourself to build it into your wardrobe.

**Fashion advertising:** The major newspapers produce special edition fashion magazines at least twice a year. The fashion shots are outrageous, but the ads are fabulous.

**Seen-on-the-street images:** I especially like fashion photos that focus on street scenes, where I can see what “real people” are wearing. These appear on Instagram, as well as in print.

**Paint company marketing:** Check out the free brochures at paint stores. There are always color combinations for exteriors and interiors that have been well thought out and are usually new and different. These same paint companies have apps that are fun to use: Take a photo of anything and put it into the app. It will capture all the colors in the photo and new combinations will emerge.

**Feathered friends:** Have you ever studied photos of birds? They are some of the most beautiful creatures in terms of color. Just google “images for colorful birds” and you won't believe what appears. Birds with yellow and purple breasts, bright green back feathers, blue headaddresses and red beaks. Fantastic—and you can take fashion notes from them.

**Wardrobe websites:** One of the most popular websites devoted to wardrobe planning and style advice is TheVivienneFiles.com. This site offers wardrobe ideas based on color palettes drawn from works of art, nature, and more.

**Hue history:** Every color has a story, and Winsor & Newton, a manufacturer of painting materials since 1832, shares these at WinsorNewton.com. I love learning about the history and impact of colors such as “Seeing Red: the World's Loudest Color.”

**Home decor specialists:** Tricia Guild of DesignersGuild.com is another color expert. Her use of color in interiors is unique, and she is definitely someone to follow for inspiration. You may love a color but believe that you can't wear it—but remember, it can always be incorporated through a pair of shoes or a bracelet.



*Color combinations you might not have thought up are all around, in nature—including birds' bright plumage—and interior design magazines (Vogue Living, bottom left).*