

THE ROLE OF SHAPE AND COLOUR IN CREATING THE VISUAL IDENTITY OF FURNITURE

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ABSTRACT

The visual identity of a furniture piece allows it to stand out from others with similar function. It makes it easily recognizable and memorable, which largely enhances its aesthetic qualities. Color and shape are two of its key elements.

The paper examines visual identity, its basic components and the relationship between them. The participation of color and shape in visual identity formation for easily memorable furniture pieces is analyzed.

Key words: visual identity, color, shape, furniture

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern world is oversaturated with furniture and product design with the same basic function. Thanks to this we can say that the needs of the user in terms of functional parameters, in general, are satisfied. Therefore it is essential to make one's choice according to the aesthetic qualities of the products themselves. Interiors and furniture with strong visual identity are more easily noticed than others, thus obtaining a great advantage in terms of aesthetic. It has a major influence on the choice of potential users. In furniture visual identity has such an importance, that it could become the exponent of the periods in which the products were produced and used for the first time. It could be a benchmark on the basis of which to establish a certain style, thus creating popularity not only of furniture, but of its author too.

Corporate identity is a type of visual identity. This type of identity is characterized by the fact that the layout and design of furniture are used to represent a certain company. Most often, corporate identity is expressed in (is characterized by) the use of colors and symbols on furniture, interior and

clothing, which are used by its employees and customers.

The report will present examples and examine and analyse different combinations of aesthetic qualities, forming a visual identity and will specifically focus on the use of colours and forms. The selected examples of visual identity were created in different historic periods and represent characteristic personal traits or traits of a certain style, period, movement or other. They are part of the examples, analyzed in the author's doctoral thesis and aim at presenting and tracking down the existence of mid 19th century visual identity.

The main objective of this report is to analyze and explain how color and shape are used as constructive components in creating and describing visual identity. The analysis is based on the personal experiences of the author, literature sources and graphic design programs that help to describe and present samples of color schemes for different specimens. It is important to note that the color values shown are not claiming for precision, because the source, from which they were described is electronic, and their aim is to give a basic idea of the used colors.

2. EXPOSE

2.1. VISUAL IDENTITY

The term visual identity nowadays is often used as a synonym for the concept of corporate identity, imposed primarily by the overlap of the two in the description and time of occurrence of these concepts. With the development of technology, materials and furniture markets and products in the last two decades, a boundary between these two concepts occurred, defining visual identity as a more comprehensive one. This limit is currently being expressed more clearly in furniture than in interior spaces, but could be traced to the early history of design, as is clear from the examples analyzed.

Generally the term visual identity describes a group or combination of aesthetic qualities and properties of a particular piece of furniture and interior space. These qualities and properties are created and described, in most cases, by combinations of colours and shapes, united in such a manner as to allow the object on which they are applied to be easily recognized and remembered

The common between the visual and corporate identity is that both aim to present and create a certain impression in the observer. The design created or answering their criteria is characterized by qualities such as character, clarity, conciseness, originality etc. The main difference is that corporate identity can only serve corporate goals, while visual identity could serve purposes other than corporate or even ideal ones, thus allowing it to describe a considerably larger range of furniture and products.

The selection and combination of color and shape for creating visual identity of furniture depends on factors such as manufacturing technology, functions, achievement of a certain effect and other purposes as well as

needs related to design. The report will consider examples from furniture design history to modern times, which aim at presenting different types of visual identity.

2.1.1. Chair №14 (fig. 1)

The chair was designed by Michael Thonet and was launched for the first time in production in 1859. The primary material of which it was produced was steamed and bent solid wood.



Figure 1: Chair „№14“ from 1859, designed by Michael Thonet

2.1.1.1. Shape Building

Due to the nature of the material and technology of elaboration, the curved, rounded shapes dominate, the section of most of the elements is circular without rough and sharp edges on the visible parts. The straight lines of the elements are combined in such a way that visual clarity and austerity in the entire shape of the chair were achieved. The

second bent element in the backrest forms an accent, which highlights the curve of the backrest and support the back of the sitting person.

2.1.1.2. Colors and Textures

The bearing wood structure is dark brown in color (fig. 2), corresponding to the stylistic currents during the period, when the chair was produced. This color gives a great visual weight to the furniture and additional visual stability to the structure of the chair. The accent appears to be a caned seat which is in a lighter colour range - pale yellow ochre. The choice of this color is dictated by the functions that the seat surface performs: first, informative and second – decorative.

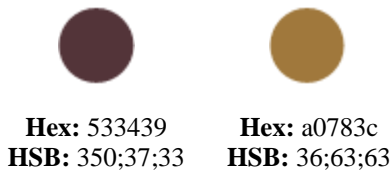


Figure 2: Approximate color scheme for Chair „№14“, made from the image

2.1.1.3. Visual Identity

The components that make up and describe the unique visual identity of the chair are related to the innovative production technology of the time, which allowed the use of a certain kind of curved, rounded shapes. Colours used give unqualified rigor, characteristic for this period, but also create a clear focus, obtained through contrast in color, which makes the chair, memorable and easily recognizable. Furthermore, in creating visual identity, structure and manufacturing requirements influenced the design of this chair – a small number of component parts for production for that particular period of time. The elegant but rigorous visual identity, with a pronounced accent, definitely describes this chair, turning it in a classic example in the history of design and a piece of furniture used by several generations.

2.1.2. Lounge Chair and Ottoman (fig. 3)

The design of these two pieces of furniture was created in 1956 and was the work of Charles and Ray Eames. Bent laminated wood, painted cast metal parts were included in the chair's structure, and supporting cushions of foam and leather were used for manufacturing.



Figure 3: Lounge chair and ottoman by Charles and Ray Eames

2.1.2.1. Shape Building

The shapes used in the design of the piece are complex and represent a combination of a few simple ones, used to create the impression of rhythm in the design of individual elements, with a "round - straight" sequence. The smooth transition of plywood surfaces create a sense of dominating curved shapes in this chair. This sense is reinforced by the fact, that the shape of the cushions replicates and highlights some of the edges of the plywood shells. The disadvantage of this iteration of the cushions' shape is the creation of multiple straight surfaces, which are subsequently removed by the use of buttoning on the upholstery. The resulting curved surfaces create a feeling of softness and thus invite the observer to become a user. There is a clearly designated boundary and underlined contrast between metal details and other elements. It basically consists in the fact, that for the shaping of metal elements straight forms are used, while the transition between the

surfaces is realized by curves with a significantly smaller size in comparison with other details. This creates a visual weight and stability of metal parts, thus giving stability to the whole design. Combining pieces of various materials and different shapes gives the design a slightly playful feeling and describes it as a three-dimensional puzzle.

2.1.2.2. Colors and textures

The general feeling, created by the color scheme, is of warmth (Fig. 4). Achromatic shades are used to connect the seat area and metal details, which step on floor and link the nut seat and backrest elements. This creates a feeling of stability and visual weight of the objects on which these gray-black colors are used. Shell elements have wood texture (described as shades of brown) that creates an additional sense of comfort. The use of a chromatic color on those elements highlights them, thereby achieving a strong accent, which describes the shape and forms a clear silhouette.

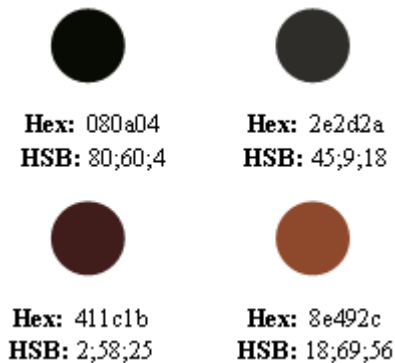


Figure 4: Approximate color scheme for lounge chair and ottoman, made from the image

2.1.2.3. Visual Identity

In this example, colors and shapes have a major importance for the formation of visual identity of seating furniture. Major factors that influence the formation of identity samples are clear lines, created by the particular combination and proportions of shapes and the strong accent, achieved through color. Additional factors that influence the

differentiation and development of visual identity in this piece are the popularity of the designers' names at the time this design was created, the history, describing the process of creating and the ideology the piece of furniture is based on.

2.1.3. Armchair „Poltrona di Proust“ (fig. 5)

The redesign of this chair is a work by Alessandro Mendini, created in 1978. The materials used for this object are solid wood and upholstery, both painted. Mendini used the term “redesign” for the presented example, because the design of this piece was based on shapes, techniques and colours of already existing works.



Figure 5: Armchair „Poltrona di Proust“

2.1.3.1. Shape Building

The forms used in this armchair are complex. The frame has a rich decoration in eclectic style. Due to the tight and solid link of the elements that form the main structure, an impression of great visual weight of the seat, backrest and armrests is created. Furniture legs, by contrast, look thin and slender compared to the rest of the chair. As far as shapes are concerned, the boundary between

solid wood elements and upholstery is relatively clearly defined, because the upholstered elements are more simplified than the wooden ones.

2.1.3.2. Colors and Textures

The colors used on this redesign are more than 10. They are applied dot by dot - a technique characteristic of pointillism. The great number of colors are saturated. The interesting thing about this chair is that the color has both unifying and separating role. The unifying feature is expressed by the fact that visually the line between different materials is blurred, but it also has a unifying effect on all elements of the chair as it creates a uniform texture over the entire area. The differentiating effect is expressed as a concentration of certain colors on certain parts of the chair, such as green color, which predominates on the left armrest and red color - on the right. The use of saturated colors makes the chair visible from far away and gives it a playful, even childish appearance.

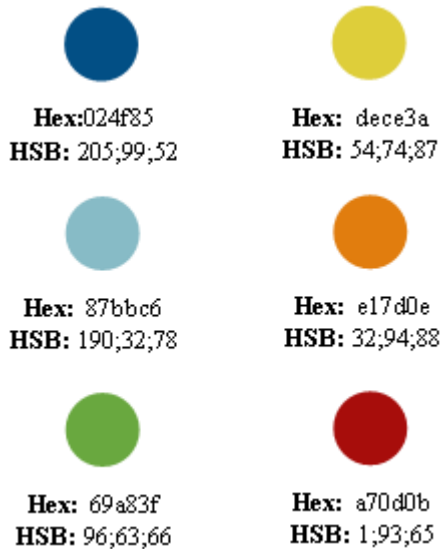


Figure 6: Approximate color scheme for armchair “Poltrona di Proust”

2.1.3.3. Visual Identity

The identity of this redesign is based on an original solution for mixing forms from one style and color from another. The use of the same texture on all elements of the chair

contributes to the categorical formation of visual identity of "Poltrona di Proust", regardless of the material. The fact that this example indicated the first steps of a new movement in design also contributes to establishing the visual identity of the chair.

This identity is more specific than others presented and could even be argued that this kind of visual identity is rare and is perceived as an exception, due to increasing complexity of creating

2.1.4. “Bookworm” Shelves

This bookshelf of PVC was designed by Ron Arad in 1992.

2.1.4.1. Shape building

The impression created by the proportions of the elements is one of mixing thin and thick lines. Thanks to the combinations between material and thickness used for the longest element, the shelf has the ability to be reshaped and to describe different silhouettes during installation (fig. 7).



Figure 7: Varieties of “Bookworm” shelves

2.1.4.2. Colors and Textures

The product catalogue offers a choice of five optional colours (fig. 8) – matt aluminium grey, matt white and gloss red, blue and

black. Their choice was dictated by the options offered by the material, the trends and fashion at the moment when this design was created. The use of the same color for different elements unites the design and makes it readily perceivable.



Figure 8: Color scheme of “Bookworm” shelves, made from site of distributor of the furniture

2.1.4.3. Visual identity

Shape plays a leading role in the creation of visual identity of this example, while color appears to be complementary. Factors such as getting a different aesthetic effect dictated by the potential of the material, as well as originality of the decision at the time of designing the piece, have their impact on identity formation of this object.

2.1.5. Desk ‘Halo’

The designer of this desk is Karim Rashid. Materials used are medium density fibreboard, painted with acrylic paint and polyurethane. It is in production since 2010.



Figure 9: Desk “Halo”

2.1.5.1. Shape Building

The forms used to create this piece of furniture are straight, simple, with an emphasis on clear edge. The design is minimalist; even the handles are embedded in it, creating a lighter accent rhythm in a side view. In a front view the desk is asymmetrical, with an emphasis on the so called “positive diagonal”.

Basic form for the design of the desk is the rectangle in different proportions.

2.1.5.2. Colors and textures

In creating this furniture, the blue gamut (fig. 10) represented by two materials is used. Namely, the relationship between them is the main focus of the piece. The semi-transparency of one of the materials, allows the desk to fit better in interior. It visually lightens its silhouette, creating an association with levitating top desk.



Figure 10: Approximate color scheme for “Halo” desk

2.1.5.3. Visual Identity

The combination of simple forms describes a clear silhouette. Emphasis is created

by the colours and materials outlining a distinctive, simple and slightly playful visual identity of this desk.

2.2. CORPORATE IDENTITY

Since this type of identity serves as presentation for commercial purposes; it has much more specific and restrictive requirements of creating and later use. The main objective of corporate identity is to define clearly and focus on the information that must be provided. That is why the description of the required information must be very brief and clear. One of the key elements of corporate identity is the logo, which is a symbol for the company and should represent its main ideas and goals. Most often building corporate identity for interior and furniture is based on colors and shapes set in the logo, which are also colors and shapes for recognition of the entire company. Depending on the company's activities furniture with its corporate identity can be used not only in its offices, but in other spaces for advertising. The following example is of such a type.

2.2.1. DJ Table (fig. 11)

The table is created for advertising purposes for the company "Red Bull". This is not a chance selection, since the chosen table is positioned above the dance floor and is expected to be clearly visible from the whole area of the discotheque in which it is used. Due to the specifics of this type of establishment, the company logo is placed at the front, the most visible part. This table was created by the Canadian company "Cocoon" in 2008.



Figure 11: Advertising table for "Red Bull"

2.1.1.1. Shape Building

The forms used in the design are straight, simple, describing a clear, ridged silhouette. Taking into consideration the specific use, the surfaces describing the visible storage spaces create dynamic rhythm that is hinted at the arrangement and layout of the feet. The strong contrast created between the forms of the piece of furniture and the company logo, make it stand out and be clearly visible.

2.1.1.2. Colors and Textures

The light-coloured wood, used for veneering of the table, complements the effect of clearly noticeable accent in the interior, in which it will be used. The selected saturated yellow color (fig. 12), used for the logo attracts attention even if caught with peripheral vision.

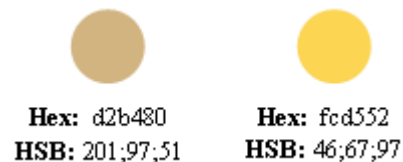


Figure 12: Approximate color scheme of the advertising table for "Red Bull"

2.1.1.3. Corporate Identity

Corporate identity is achieved by emphasizing the logo of the company by means of contrast, achieved through colour and form. Perception is facilitated by the playful

rhythm created by the shapes and saturated colour, used for logo.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the analysis of various examples of visual identity and corporate identity, with use color and shape, following conclusions could be structured:

1. Color and shape in most cases are the basis for creation of visual and corporate identities. Form and color allow proper formulation and specific description of elements, properties and techniques used to create visual identity.
2. Color and the shape are involved in different proportions in building and describing some of the visual identities.
3. Good visual identity can be achieved using various methods and techniques for color and shape.

4. Appropriate combinations of color and shape of different styles or periods could describe visual identity with a strong character.
5. Good corporate identity can be obtained using contrast in shape and color between the company logo and the piece of furniture on which it is placed.

Shape and color could build visual identity separately, but when used together to achieve a certain effect much more clear and definite result is obtained.

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