

Drunk on Sorbet

by Silvia Bombardini



Jacquemus, SS20 – via jaquemus.com

Fashion likes to fancy itself unpredictable, and as an industry for better or worse, it's around this unpredictability that its reputation is built. It aims to anticipate our taste. As we begin to warm up to it, fashion already has moved on to something else: this is the talent and the pride of trendsetters. Still there are some focal nodes to the revolutions of fashion – some certainties, that even this business which worships novelty seasonally returns to. This is one of them, a maxim: we're due pastels in spring. They're what as customers we always want more of, with newfound good reasons year after year, to justify to ourselves why we must buy them anew. And they're what from many brands we always get in

spades, about as ground-breaking as florals. But did we ever need them truly, as much as we do now? Was there ever a spring-summer season in living memory, more urgently wanting for, and set to benefit from, the reassuring and comforting tones of apricot or mint? When the powdery colour palettes for the 2020 spring/summer collections were being approved, and these clothes designed, it would have been impossible for designers and their teams to foresee the odd new world we live in now. Not even fashion, for all of its boastful foretelling, can't truly be faulted for failing to predict this. Still there's some irony perhaps, in taking note of how camo prints and army greens were all the rage on runways back then when there was no real threat for the most of us to face in our survivalist outerwear. Whereas now we're here, all dressed up in mauve chiffon cocktail dresses – yet the cocktail parties to wear them at, where I live at least, are still few and far between at best, and cautionary tales at worst. But whilst the reasons why these clothes were designed in the shades that they are may well have been in response to safe bets for spring/summer tastes and trends, or bets at least that would have seemed safe at the time of designing, the use we can make of them now, the use we can make of wearing pastels that is, is a more complex one. Pastels may even be helpful to our own wellbeing.

Now, the idea of making use of colours to make ourselves or those around us feel better in various ways, is anything but a passing fad. With its roots in ancient Egypt, China, and India, colour therapy evolved behind the scenes slowly but surely, from the Victorian colour healers who claimed to cure meningitis with tinted glass filters, to the infrared saunas we were all taking selfies in a few years ago – or what feels like a few years ago at least, when we were all still going out to spas. Nevertheless, chromotherapy was and is still a pseudoscience: one that has given no conclusive clinical results, and that the scientific community tends to disapprove of. As such, whilst its long history gives it some credit, it should be taken with a pinch of salt. In particular, the notion that prolonged exposure to a given frequency in the colour spectrum could cure what chromotherapists call an *imbalance* in one's mind or body, relies on the fundamental equivalence of each colour to a desired or desirable effect on the mind or body of whoever looks at, otherwise absorbs, or arguably wears that colour. This assumption is suspiciously simplistic. Your response to a colour, emotional first and only therefore possibly physical, may well be different to mine, and as much learned or conditioned a reaction as it is instinctual. Not only do our personal taste, age and gender affect it, but so does our cultural heritage, so do our subcultural affiliations. Here's an example, to bring it back to fashion: a gothlete and a lolita in the same infrared sauna will have quite different emotional responses to black or pink. On top of it, the reasons why the latter may associate pink with femininity, as most of us do, are also cultural more so than intuitive. Had she lived in 19th century England, the time and place whose silhouettes inspire her own style, she would have found that pink was a boys' colour then, when blue instead was worn by girls.

So don't go shopping for sorbet dresses expecting miracles for your mental health. Designer clothes are no real substitute for self-care – unless, of course, what you're curing is just a bad mood, that the short-lived

euphoria that comes from shopping in any shade, can usually be trusted to temporarily get rid of. Besides, even chromotherapy as it is practised today, or was until recently, by means of infrared lights, predicates upon the purity and intensity of what are often primary colours as directly proportional to their healing powers. It's not hard at all to be persuaded by this, if you've ever felt all of a sudden in a festive mood at the presence of multicoloured fairy lights in winter. No real potential is granted instead to the pastel colours we're talking about here, high in lightness and low in saturation, which as it turns out are not technically even *colours* per se, only pale *tints* of some. Still. If we're willing to give chromotherapy a chance after all, and perhaps even if we're not, we shouldn't be so quick to dismiss the powers of pastels. True, some may say that by desaturating a colour you'll weaken its emotional impact. But how do you desaturate a colour? By adding white to it. And although responses to colour are as we've seen subjective, white as the absence of any, tends to be widely perceived as soothing and calming. All the more so, interestingly, if not on its own but mixed with different hues. For most of us then, pastels will hold on to some of the symbolic, more personal associations of the primary and secondary colours they derive from, with the added bonus of a universal dose of serenity. We tend to associate them with spring, and want to wear them all the more when spring comes, because as if alive, like many living beings as well as ourselves that season, they appear to be colours in the process of reawakening: a middle stage between the pallor of winter – fairy lights aside – and the effervescence of summer. Though individual pastel tints can indeed elicit different emotional responses in different people, they do therefore communicate as well, as a general rule, feelings of optimism and delight. They might come across as frivolous as well – they are after all, the colours of most saccharine, non-nutritious foods: ice-cream, candyfloss, milkshakes. Here's a fun fact about junk food: the interior design of most joints that sell it is red because red is believed to stimulate the appetite. Anyway. After months of gravity, some frivolity and some sweetness might just be what we need. In fact, even justly sceptic about the therapeutic qualities of the colours of the clothing we wear, it won't hurt to direct our purchases toward those that some say might soothe us, even if ends up being just a placebo effect. Let's face it: we'd be shopping for pastels anyway this time of the year, the colour therapy theory gives us just one more good reason to do so. Here's some suggestions on where to start.

Pale Pink

In the research on humans' emotional responses to colours, the case of pink is a recurring subject. Pink is also the only colour of which recent studies have shown, that a pastel tint may be more effective than a brighter one to stimulate a desired response. You might have heard about the virtues of Baker-Miller pink – if nowhere else then from Kendall Jenner who, having painted her living room walls with it in 2016, summed it up for her social media followers as *"the only color scientifically proven to calm you AND suppress your appetite"*. She was referring to the work of Alexander Schauss, the scientist who, in the late 1970s, developed

a shade of bright pink which he argued would have a calming effect on the behaviour of the male prisoners whose prison cells were painted with it. Two military officers, Gene Baker and Ron Miller, took him up on his claims and tested the colour at a naval correctional institute in Seattle: when the experiments proved successful, Schauss named the colour after them. I was able to find very little scientific proof however, to back up Jenner's trust in the appetite suppressing abilities of Baker-Miller pink. And even if you'd be sold on just its calming effect, you might still be in for a let-down. Indeed, what's less well-known is that when the same colour was used to paint cells at the Santa Clara County Jail a few years later, Schauss found that it didn't work nearly as well there. Inmates in their bright pink cells seemed even marginally more aggressive after the renovations. This could have been the end of tranquilising pink, and further proof that emotional responses to colour are subjective and circumstantial. Except that in more recent years, a Swiss psychologist has been repeating Schauss' experiments with a lighter, paler shade of pink – which she named *Cool Down Pink* – to once again largely positive results. In prisons across Switzerland, Daniela Späth found that prisoners held in cool down pink cells were less violent and able to relax more quickly. Still, this practice of painting male prisons' wards pink it's not without its detractors. Again, pink has lost its masculine symbolic values in the early 20th century, and contemporary connotations of cuteness and docility have caused some inmates and commentators to perceive the pink cells as insulting and condescending.

Womenswear has long profited from, and arguably contributed to cement the femininity of pink in our collective imaginary. For those of us willing to give a cooler, pastel tint of it a go this spring/summer season, options on the runway abounded. Among many examples, take for instance a puff-sleeved, pale pink organza overdress worn at Simone Rocha over a pale pink satin suit with pale pink socks and slides. Or a silk organza pale pink skirt and jacket combo at Gucci, its gentleness offset when accessorised, as it was on the runway, with a riding crop. Perhaps more surprising but no less convincing were the couple of pale pink satin skirts, blooming with tone-on-tone, gauzy rosebud appliques, that opened the spring/summer 2020 Comme des Garçons show. Lastly, another pale pink highlight was an asymmetric silk dress at Prada, adorned with golden sequins curled into a fern or feather shape. The same motif on a sleek light lavender skirt, paired with a powder blue knit and modelled by Sara Blomqvist, closed the show.

Light Lavender

In chromotherapy, a violet light is recommended to soothe the nervous system. It is said to be useful for the treatment of headaches, psychosis, and oddly enough, urinary disorders. It also supposedly helps with meditation, and to achieve a more relaxed state of mind whereby we've left behind us the worries of the material world. In some instructional websites, the latter power of violet lights is backed up by evidence of the use of purple in the rituals of many religions across the planet. Whilst this is true, it might be misguided to interpret it as such as a colour unconcerned with worldly matters. If purple has been worn throughout history by many in the religious classes, as well as by nobles and royalty, it was often instead precisely for the

opposite reason. The rare occurrence of pure purple in nature made of it, before the invention of chemical dyes, one of the most expensive colours to wear. Hence it signified high rank, authority and wealth as much as if not more so than devotion. Mixed with calming white into the diluted tint of light lavender for the 2020 spring/summer season, it sheds some haughtiness in favour of coolness, but keeps to itself what's among pastels perhaps the most luxurious feel.

It is not by chance that we encounter it in couture collections the most. At Givenchy, it is a sculpted, voluminous gown of thinly pleated organza and lace, at Valentino, a feathered coat worn over a satin pale pink dress, itself worn over a red turtleneck. Light lavender is also a double-faced perforated dress at the Maison Margiela spring 2020 couture show, with flapping pale pink cut-outs. When it features in a ready-to-wear collection, light lavender still stands for the exceptionally precious. Most notably at Loewe, where a sheer lace light lavender dress with structured pannier hips is the *pièce de résistance* of a show, according to the press release, about *"patrician elegance, where extremes of femininity and luxury are pushed to ethereal heights"*. The dress also comes in black or lemon cream.

Lemon Cream

In *Theory of Colours*, published in 1810, German novelist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is as quick to sing the praises of yellow as he is to despise any tint of it paler than the brightest. Bright yellow, he writes, is *"agreeable and gladdening, and in its utmost power is serene and noble, it is, on the other hand, extremely liable to contamination, and produces a very disagreeable effect if it is sullied, or in some degree tends to the minus side"*. When looking at some superb lemon cream looks on the spring 2020 runways, one would have to beg to differ. But it is true that in daily life, if the wearer lacks the composure or complexion of a model, it is perhaps the most challenging of pastels to pull off. But it can be one of the most rewarding when done well. Possibly on more than a purely aesthetic level: lemon cream mixes the dose of serenity which comes with white, with yellow – a colour that according to chromotherapists, would have the power to stimulate our immune system and cleanse the liver. All things which, after months of solitary lockdown, we need all the help we can get with.

One good tip for lemon cream is that it benefits from contrasts. For example, it works best at Molly Goddard spring 2020 show, as a ruched tulle dress layered over a black cotton one. Or pinstriped with white, as it was at Thom Browne, and fashioned into yet another wide-hipped ensemble. Paired with a bright pink fascinator, coral lips, and worn over a silky light blue dress, a lemon cream oversize coat in felted wool with visible stitches, is in the Maison Margiela spring 2020 couture collection the polar opposite of the Loewe's lace dress: where the one embodies the allure of the aristocracy, the other, despite being couture, embraces a can-do, upcycling spirit more commonly found among the people upon which aristocracies have ruled. The same coat is also offered in tea green.

Tea Green

Green is, of course, the common denominator of nature: in the urban centres where fashion firstly happens, it tends to be welcomed as a sight for sore eyes. Perhaps all the more so in times of environmental upheaval such as the ones we live in now, does wearing green ground us in our priorities. For its associations with fertility and in many cultures good luck, green was once upon a time the colour of bridal gowns. And for its association with novelty, it lends itself to fashion with the greatest of ease. Indeed, as the colour of new growth on plants, green is strongly tied with spring and just as much as pastels, with related expressions of reawakening and renewal. A pastel tint of green such as tea green therefore, perhaps counterintuitively, does not dilute but rather *brews* this colour's symbolic values.

Unsurprisingly, tea green suits particularly well those collections and brands that take seriously, and take care to lessen, their own carbon footprint. The Maison Margiela spring 2020 couture collection, crafted mostly from reworked thrift stores' finds so as not to release into the world yet more new clothing, is a prime example of this. But the most vocal proponent of tea green for the spring/summer 2020 season, along with a bouquet of other carefully selected pastels, was Jacquemus without a doubt. With his combined mens- and womenswear show, held on a bright pink runway cutting through a field of lavender, the designer sold tea green to his audiences once more by way of contrasts: as embroidered tailored shorts and short-sleeved jackets to be worn with pale pink and pale blue shirts or a fading lemon cream pleated dress respectively, or as soft unisex blazers shrugged on on top of pale or bright pink tops. Best of all, as a floor-sweeping taffeta maxi dress. And after ten years in business, with no formal training beforehand, what better colour to celebrate the growth and good fortune of Simon Porte Jacquemus as a designer? Noteworthy tea green looks were seen again at Molly Goddard, Acne Studios, and Lacoste among others. At Batsheva, tea green tea dresses were paired with peach aprons, or tied at the waist with wide pale pink belts. In the same collection, a sleeveless baby blue dress printed all over with tiny daisies was styled layered over a lemon cream one.

Baby Blue

Blue is the colour of the clear skies and the clear seas. This purity, verging on chastity, is perhaps the reason why blue was originally understood as a token of the metaphorically feminine. Unlike fiery red, or indeed its younger brother pink, blue chills. It cools and it stands still. If they were both displeased, say with these traditional gender roles forced upon them, yet nonetheless complying with them, a gentleman would be red with rage, whereas a lady would just be feeling blue. To be 'feeling blue' in the English language, is a synonym for sad. But when lit up with white into a paler tint, blue too warms and softens. Baby blue is serene without being a downer, a pastel colour that according to many accounts, helps us to concentrate and encourages freedom – intellectual and otherwise.

The colour of jeans, blue in fashion is a crowd-pleaser: perpetually present in many shades of intensity across the board of designers and brands, regardless of the differences in their signature styles. But baby blue is at its most flattering when roomy and wide open, like the sky or the sea or the freedom. Consider for instance the baby blue dress with wing-like sleeves at Emilia Wickstead, or the bouncy, billowy baby blue parachute dress in Satoshi Kondo's first collection for Issey Miyake's spring/summer 2020 season – a collection featuring an abundance of pale pink, light lavender, and some lemon cream options as well.

Seafoam

Lastly, deserving of an honourable mention as a trending pastel in the 2020 collections, trendier than pastel on their own already are, seafoam fits neither too well under the green nor blue categories, for it is both green and blue in equal measure – as well of course as white. As such it brings within it, respectively, life-affirming, freeing and soothing properties. But aside from the colours that make it, seafoam has its own personal edge too. Depending on who's looking at it, or wearing it, and their circumstances, it can call to mind tropical waters as well as, perhaps more aptly this year, extreme clinical cleanliness. Aqua or turquoise would be seafoam's brighter tints. On the spring/summers 2020 runways, seafoam is pinstriped at Thom Browne, or single-sleeved and tied into a bow at Givenchy. Of course, as foam, it is particularly successful when fluid and bubbly – that is to say, ruched. Like a sheer ruched seafoam dress at the Preen by Thornton Bregazzi spring/summer 2020 show which, according to Vogue, might be made out of *“georgette that's made from recycled plastic bottles and textile waste”*. Hardly there could have been a better fit.

But most of the pastels discussed above also feature in Bregazzi's collection, as many of them do in most of the collections I've mentioned. Among them, especially broad in scope when it comes to pastels are Martin Margiela's spring/summer 2020 couture collection, as well as the seasonal offerings of Batsheva, Emilia Wickstead and Thom Browne. That's the expediency of pastels: they're collaborative tints. Unlike bolder hues, which one is always advised to adopt sparingly and conscientiously, pastels endorse one another when juxtaposed. That's why in many collections they presence at once in full spectrums.

Now, at the risk of echoing a platitude that's become commonplace over the past few months, it does bear saying one more time: we do live in extraordinary times. They say that once all this will be over, like many other things fashion as we know it will never be the same again – that the crisis will revolutionise the industry, more so than it routinely revolutionises itself, season in and season out. But in this interlude that we're living now, between the fashion that was and the new fashion that will come along if it does, we might well find comfort if we can in these sorbet tints. The last instances of a world that was, perhaps too naïve, perhaps self-indulgent – but also arguably at the same time, at least for the awareness with which their worn, the

first instances of a world that can be. Of a fashion that doesn't change simply in pursuit of novelty or as a consequence of market competition, but with a higher degree of attention to and respect for our moods and needs. Of a fashion moved by wellbeing rather than purely aesthetic values. Farewell thinning black. The time of comforting pastels has come.

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