



Pantone Predicts a Green 2017

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Pantone annually announces something it calls its Color of the Year. And last year it extended the concept by picking not one but two colors, with 2016 predicted to be dominated by those shown at right.



At the time the firm stated that, "Providing contrast to the current restless and hectic lives people are living right now, the harmonious shades of our Pantone Color of the Year 2016 evoke feelings of calmness, well-being and understanding." Apparently, we didn't experience "restless and hectic" lives before and won't in the future?

Well, here we are again and this time around the color for 2017 is PANTONE 15-0343, dubbed Greenery, as shown above. Pantone tells us that, "Greenery bursts forth in 2017 to provide us with the hope we collectively yearn for amid a complex social and political landscape. Satisfying our growing desire to rejuvenate, revitalize and unite, Greenery symbolizes the reconnection we seek with nature, one another and a larger purpose."

It's gotten to the point where we're beginning to wonder just what this Color of the Year initiative is really all about. In the same vein, one could envisage a culinary "authority" declaring coriander as next year's global condiment of choice. So, why not the smell, sound or taste of the year?

The fact is, you could pick just about any PANTONE color at random and make up a backstory about its significance for the coming year. The world's a big place, made up of many cultures. Is it still appropriate for a Western "authority" to tell us all what color will be globally significant for next year? Or perhaps people in other countries and cultures can make up their own minds? Seems like it's time to move beyond such cultural hegemony.

Then there's the yearly focus of this pronouncement. Once upon a time yearly trends were a thing but increasingly we live in a world dominated by "fast fashion" and even speedier iterations of what's hot, which come and go in a matter of weeks or days — a year is an eternity in modern product life cycles. This makes such prognostications increasingly seem like something from another era.

Admittedly, this initiative remains an excellent one for Pantone to receive free media attention. But for designers and consumers, what compelling reason is there to collectively embrace a particular shade of color?

Just to put things in perspective, that charming Hermès Birkin bag in the photo below, which Pantone provides as an example of Greenery, will set you back about \$10,000. Which, as it happens, is almost exactly the global median income per person. Owning such a bag may thus be just the thing to "evoke feelings of calmness, well-being and understanding." For some of us. Who says money can't buy happiness? Not Pantone.





The Forgotten Failed Branding of Mother's Day

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In 1948 Anna Jarvis died in a Pennsylvania mental institution, broke, blind and almost deaf. She had devoted her life to defending a particular view of motherhood, incarnated in her popularization of an annual Mother's Day. It turned out to be a losing battle.

Her mother, Ann Jarvis, had not only born 11 children, but during the mid-nineteenth century had been very active in community work, creating "Mothers Day Work Clubs" to raise health and sanitary standards.

Ann also organized the nursing of soldiers on both sides of the conflict during the Civil War and subsequently gave lectures with such titles as "The Great Value of Hygiene for Women and Children" and "Literature as a Source of Culture and Refinement." Underlying all this would seem to have been a sincere commitment to acknowledge and help mothers.



Not the kind of motherhood Anna Jarvis had in mind. Woman of Willendorf, fertility figure, Paleolithic Period.

Image credit: Don Hitchcock



19th century ephemera. Also not the kind of motherhood Anna Jarvis had in mind.

It was an unusual fusion of roles for the era and one that daughter Anna placed at the center of her novel conception of a Mother's Day. In her view this was to be a simple, elegant acknowledgement of the importance of the role of mothers both within and without the home, expressed in such acts as the gift of a single white carnation or a hand-written letter.

Despite the significant number of her siblings, there was nothing within this conception of Mother's Day that echoed ancient and still-observed practices celebrating female fecundity. And while the family was a religious one, also absent was the fascination with the Virgin Mary that became so prominent amongst

American Protestants of the era, who viewed her as "pure and powerful, compassionate and transcendent, maternal and yet remote" (see *The Valiant Woman: The Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*).

With a remarkable sense of how to launch and maintain a brand, Anna began by trademarking the term "Mother's Day" and setting up the Mother's Day International Association to first establish and then grow the celebration under her control. After much lobbying, in 1914 she was successful in getting Mother's Day accepted as a U.S. national holiday honoring mothers, with countries worldwide soon following.

However, with the growing popularity of such an observance came commercial interests only too happy to profit from it. Single carnations were soon superseded with elaborate floral gifts and hand-written notes were replaced with often cloyingly sentimental cards. These were in turn amplified by gifts of chocolates, candies and all sorts of unrelated gewgaws.

Alas, all this apparently drove Anna into a frenzy and she spent the subsequent years battling those tarnishing her original vision by protesting in stores, launching boycotts against commercial interests viewed as exploitative and threatening lawsuits. In 1935 she even accused first lady Eleanor Roosevelt of somehow taking advantage of the holiday for her own nefarious ends. All this turned out badly for Anna, who saw her original conception of the Mother's Day brand slip from her control and mutate into something quite different.



Vases: Ultimate Royal Spring Lilies for Mom

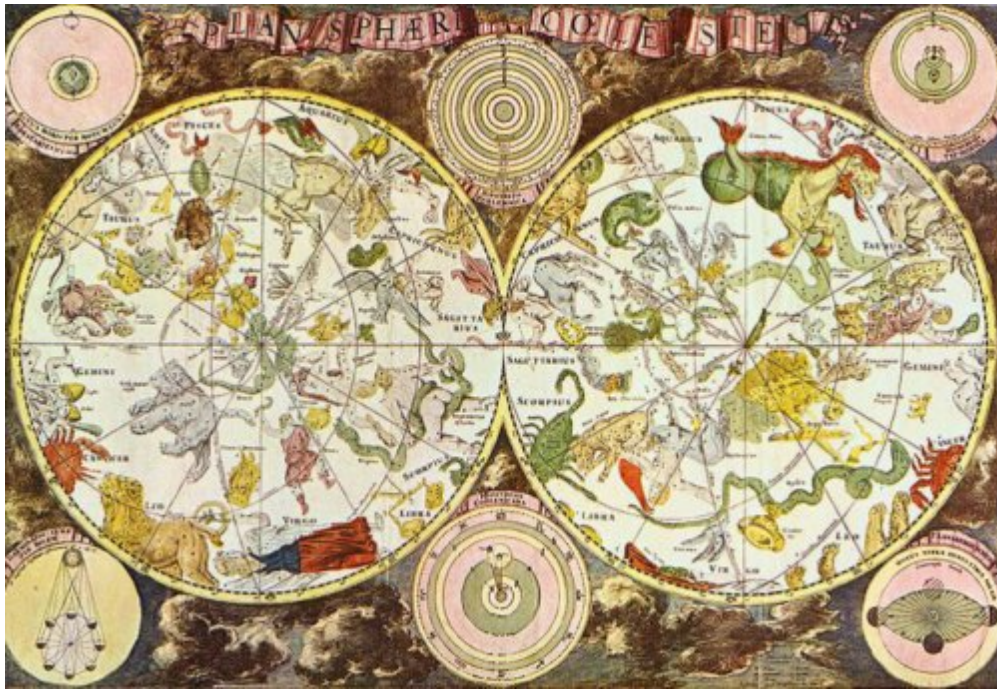


But more than 100 years after the official declaration of Mother's Day, where are we now? Americans are expected to spend upward of \$2 billion on Mother's Day flower arrangements this year. Cards aren't as popular as they once were but sales should still reach over half a billion. Total anticipated spending? A cool \$21 billion.

Anna would no doubt have found that irksome. And she wouldn't have been thrilled to see her original emphasis on acknowledging one's own mother expanding to include wives, daughters, siblings, girlfriends and just about anybody female. But on the plus side is that the often overly-sentimental aspect of this day has slowly diminished in recent years, to be gradually replaced by a less one-dimensional image of mothers and motherhood.

This is simply a reflection of the long-overdue acknowledgment of women's role in the home, the workplace and society at large. From that perspective, the modern-day woman that's on the receiving end of all these cards and flowers is starting to look more like Anna's own mother from a hundred years ago, who managed to effectively balance the roles of mother and activist.

Top image credit: [The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit](#)



Design Inspiration: Astrology and the Zodiac

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Design inspiration for astrology and the symbols of the zodiac? Really? Sure, since as a designer anything that's a significant part of the zeitgeist is fodder for creative work. And in this case there are three categories of related imagery: the actual constellations; the signs of the zodiac; and characterizations of these symbols.

With examples going back thousands of years in cultures across the globe, the possibilities for fresh design directions are almost endless, whether for client work or a portfolio piece.

Before getting to the imagery of the zodiac, what's the context for belief in a system such as astrology, which posits that the alignment of the planets can tell us something about ourselves? Are we not unique individuals, free and in control of our actions and destiny?

Or is our fate to a significant extent already ordained, with our ability to freely invent our future thus constrained? And if the latter is the case, is it possible to determine the degree to which our path is predictable, via a system that reduces our individuality by categorizing us?

There have certainly been no shortage of such systems over the centuries. The Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates was convinced that human behavior could be explained in terms of [four body fluids](#), a concept that lived on into the 20th century in psychological form, via the [five temperaments](#) of William Schutz.



Phrenology head from *The Household Physician*, 1905.

Image source: Flickr

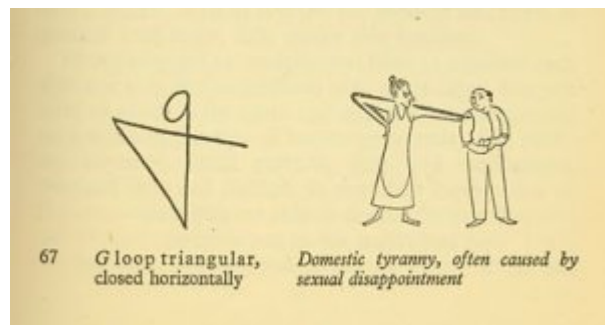
But the 19th century was without a doubt the golden age, when it came to systems that attempted to reduce the infinite complexity of what it is to be human to a more manageable set of divisions. Franz Joseph Gall, for example, came up with a system known as [phrenology](#), based on his belief that 27 "organs" in the human brain determined personality.

Practitioners, known as phrenologists, thus ran their fingers over the skulls of their patients, in search of telltale bulges or dents, and made use of a craniometer for taking measurements. All very pseudo-scientific in the grand 19th century tradition.

I suppose there are stranger ways to make a living, although nothing comes to mind at the moment.

A similar now-discredited pseudo science is [graphology](#), which claimed to tell us essential truths about ourselves via our handwriting, as shown at right. And you thought penmanship didn't count! Beyond that craziness there are the many psychological classifications of individuals, thanks to everyone from Sigmund Freud through Neurolinguistic Programming and 1990s pop psychologist [John Gray](#).

But when it comes to reducing us all to a few simple classifications, you just can't beat astrology. I can almost hear you groan, but wait — I bet you know what your astrological sign is and can name at least six of the 12. And there's a good chance you also know what some of the personality traits of your sign are: emotional, loving, generous, creative, romantic, resentful, superficial, secretive... whatever. Which just goes to show how embedded this ancient belief system remains in our otherwise apparently enlightened culture.



Because astrology is indeed very, very old. Mankind has been observing the heavens since day one and eventually came up with the [zodiac](#), a celestial coordinate system based on 12 constellations. Western astrology can be traced to Mesopotamia in 1700 BC and while having lost its authority to explain and predict the affairs of nations and events on earth, remains potent as a peripheral belief system for many, with a physical manifestation of this being the popularity of zodiac symbols as tattoo designs.

While exact numbers seem elusive, a survey by the [National Science Foundation](#) indicates that almost half of all Americans believe that astrology is either "very scientific" or "sort of scientific." Thankfully, only a few expressed a belief that the world is flat, so that's something.

Given the long history of belief in astrology and the continuing popularity of horoscopes and the signs of the zodiac, not to mention growing interest in the Chinese zodiac, it can't hurt to know your Taurus (not the car) from your Gemini (not the bitcoin exchange).

We invite you to check out our pages of design directions:

Zodiac Symbols: Vector

Zodiac Symbols: Illustrations

