Man with a pram: our survey of bright fashion and retail shifts

SPRING RELEASE: A look at the top players in store design, packaging, men’s tailoring and fabric technology — (more than 64 pages of sharp coverage)

THE NEW SEASON STYLE CHECKLIST 2016:
Phlannel T-shirts, time with Kaptain Sunshine, Bugatti’s buyers tips, a cozy weekender at Mt Fuji, Teatora outerwear and Suicokes in your satchel

Our debut TIMEKEEPING and PENMANSHIP supplement... a 32-page SPECIAL on why it’s all in the wrist
As spring beckoned in Europe, the design world headed north to the Stockholm Furniture & Light Fair where, despite long, dark Baltic winters, Nordic producers were on sunny form. Finnish company Poiat revealed a new vivid copper-orange palette for its Lavitta chair, the Republic of Fritz Hansen presented one of its classics in bright coral and the creative director of Fredericia-based brand Menu told us that he felt his peers were eschewing pure, functional forms and moving towards the colourful playfulness of the French and Dutch design worlds.

They are, he said, “almost Italian in their outlook.”

Do some nations feel at liberty to play with colour more than others? It’s a question I pondered when flicking through the swatches of ochre, burnt umber and earth-red of a rare cloth-bound book, The Colours of Rome. Put together by John Sutcliffe, it is an exploration of the social, environmental and human reasons our cities — and cultures — adopt certain colours.

Southern Europe is defined by vibrant tones but it doesn’t necessarily choose them. Hues aren’t just a question of national aesthetic preference but a complex mix of history, happenstance and necessity. There’s a reason the plastered façades in the Provençale village of Roussillon are painted red: it was the centre of the ochre industry and surrounded by mines that produced the pigment for export.

As an artist, Sutcliffe has spent many years in Greece and his new book (launching at the Manhattan Fine Press Book Fair in April) is a similar enquiry into the colours of the Cyclades. While these islands are now synonymous with bright whites, blue and red geraniums, historic streetscapes suggest they were once an array of pinks, yellows, greens, blues and purples. Sutcliffe spent many happy days discreetly scraping paint samples from “crash corners” of buildings to rediscover the colours. (These samples are replicated on hand-painted swatches in the book.)

So why the contemporary preference for blue and white? Sutcliffe suspects it is a product of the tourist industry’s drive for uniformity. The penchant for blue is more complex: he argues that it is the Greek national colour and points out that industrial production techniques for ultra-marine came about around the time of Greek Independence in 1832, triggering a patriotic azure painting splurge. And, of course, there’s the sea:

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