

# Introduction

When we buy clothing, choose makeup, or decide on a hair colour, we ask ourselves this question: which colours look best on me? If a colour isn't flattering, we want to know so that we can stop wasting time and money. Perhaps you are still buying something because it looks pretty or practical, or someone said you should buy it. I used to do this too. I had no personal guidebook when I shopped. I was certain that I had found my colour answers on my own. If anyone knew what was flattering, wouldn't it be me?

I wore colour casually. I did not know that colour choices could change every part of my life, I had never heard of such a thing happening to anyone else. I had a good job and a great family. How much difference could it possibly make? I looked like everyone else. I never asked myself if my choices had any real connection to my colouring and shape.

There would have been no point in asking. I would not have known how to answer. Let's ask another question, one for which every person can contribute equally legitimate answers at any time. If I could see myself objectively, what impression would I make? Would I look like a capable person and good listener? Would I look like someone who loves to learn and values health in appearance?

Let's expand the question with a similar situation in your own life and ask you to chime in. Imagine that you attend a meeting. Across the table from you are two women that you have never seen before. One is dressed in the clothes you wore ten years ago. The other is wearing

## RETURN TO YOUR NATURAL COLOURS

what you have on right now. You wonder, who are they, what are your expectations of them, and what decisions have you made about them before they speak. Are they equally intelligent, healthy, happy, and rested? What space will you reserve for them in your life?

By comparing two versions of you wearing different clothes, makeup, hair colour, and jewelry, we can learn more than from one picture alone. This is essentially what PCA is. It's a chance to try on different versions of yourself in order to compare and select the best you. It is a judgment free zone in which to see if it's time to change the way that you see yourself. Over time, people will have formed assumptions about you based on the way you look. This is a subconscious process, but it can be reversed if you make a conscious change.

Comparisons are vital in visual decision-making. Nature designed us to analyze incoming data before sending it to the brain to form an image. Imagine that someone says to you, "I love your blouse." It may be well intended, but don't put too much stock in it. There could be a lot of reasons for this remark. They might love the colour yellow or they may wish to make you happy with their comment, but ultimately, they can't tell if it's truly flattering unless they have a side-by-side comparison with other colours or other shades of yellow. However, if we received affirmation in a yellow blouse, we buy more of that particular yellow, or perhaps any yellow because we feel that we look great in yellow. If two people commented positively about the same blouse, we never forget it but this does not conclusively mean that we look good in that yellow.

Other people play a vital role in our lives, as mirrors for the effects of our decisions, helping us stay on course or change our coordinates when needed. Where appearance feedback is concerned, their opinion is often influenced by personal factors in both of our lives that are unrelated to how we look. If we reflect back on compliments that we have given, we might recognize a moment of searching for the balance between supporting a friend with the words they hope to hear and remaining true to ourselves, a situation with many possible outcomes. Today, your ideal choices may look like all of the others. It may seem

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as though you're drowning in a sea of misleading marketing, and the kindhearted but false advice you've gotten over the years. It is time to quiet the storm, to make the invisible, visible.

In our interactions with others, it is our responsibility to determine whether or not they speak purely from a desire to help us make better choices, and how knowledgeable they are regarding colour. One viewer's idea of leaving us better than they found us will be to say something kind, something that validates our choice. When we shop with this friend, they say that everything looks great and we should buy it all. The next friend's incentive will be to tell the unadulterated truth because that's what they would expect from a true friend. Neither approach helps to improve our decisions. What will help us move forward are a structured system and an unbiased approach.

I had lived most of my adult life convinced that I was an Autumn because I was drawn to warm natural colours in clothing and cosmetics, and felt that they suited the yellow in my skin and green in my eyes. My PCA experience was akin to waking from a deep sleep, a blonde trance that lasted twenty years. I was not especially attached to blonde hair. It became a habit and I had no conviction that hair colour was especially important. I assumed that changes came with age. My younger self had gotten lost, left behind in the busy days of career and family, as happens to many women. I no longer knew who I was, what I should keep, and what I should let go. Women often come to understand their colour awakenings as a metaphor for many other awakenings.

Speaking from personal experience, I know that the first step to resolving a problem is to confront it. What I had to face once I had my Dark Winter palette was the flat beige façade that I had presented to the world and to myself. At a restaurant after my analysis, a woman asked where my makeup had been done. In the mirror, I could not deny the slim adult face with sparkling eyes, one that I had never seen before. My immediate reaction was conflicted. The new colours of red and purple left me feeling uncomfortable and almost clownish, compared to the beiges and browns to which I was accustomed. The internal tension

took a few days to resolve. Thankfully, I forged ahead. In the first few months, I had to accept all of the clothes that I had bought on impulse or just because they fit. All of my inappropriate choices stared me in the face.

On the way home from my PCA, I recall the deeply dissatisfying sensation of, “It can’t be. I cannot have been so wrong.” The very same day, I was on the phone asking my hair colourist for an appointment. When I met with her, I took control. I knew just what I wanted. Over time, she and I worked together towards a new me, using her expertise and my vision.

I began my colour journey as many do. I was a woman who bought what she liked, alternating between giving colour little thought if the fit and price were right, to being guided by a conviction about my colouring that was based on a vague impression, or set of impressions that had accumulated over time. A better alternative had never been presented. I didn’t know how colour related to me or that anybody could know, let alone how customized the detail and nuance could be.

When I had my first PCA, during my training, what changed immediately was this: I had a frame of reference. Colour wasn’t random any more. For the first time in my life, I had a strategy that could compare me with anything I wanted to buy and I could hold it in my hand. This feeling of empowerment needed more adjustment time than improvements in my appearance or how others reacted. As a colour analyst, my deepest wish is to help you feel the same renewed confidence and inspiration when you shop for your own appearance.

I am not a fashion insider. I am a consumer just like you. Once I had my colour analysis, I felt that I was no longer on the outside looking in, trying to figure out how to manage my appearance, being led by fashion magazines and following trend. I had a formula that worked, and would keep working for the rest of my life, because it was about me. Perhaps you will recognize my former shopping scenario: buy a garment to solve a problem > brief respite, feel better > no longer feeling satisfied, revert to questioning, seeking > shop more > same result > spend more > feel poorer and more uncertain than ever. This is called

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retail therapy. You shop for many different reasons but you can take control whenever you like. Your colour analyst will join you and show you a new path.

When we learn our Season, we begin hearing, “That jacket looks great on you.” or “You’re glowing today.” Comments like these made me appreciate the power of it. A new language was being used. No longer did I hear, “That’s a nice jacket”. The clothes had stopped wearing me. The separation between my clothing, hairstyle, makeup, and me was evaporating, as if the pieces were being glued back together. I was back and learning to have control over how I looked.

When casting the actor for an advertisement, the company looks for the person who is believable to endorse a particular product. I began questioning whether I was presenting a believable endorsement for myself. The story we tell others with our appearance is the one that we hear as well, and no longer believing the story of my own appearance created uncertainty and a space that change arrived to fill. New choices slowly replaced old ones and today, I look back on another version of myself.

A client, whose transformation was jaw dropping (not a term I use lightly) said: “When my appearance changed, it changed what I could picture myself doing. I used to say, “That would never happen.” Suddenly it became “Sure, I can see myself doing that, who couldn’t?” I saw that my communication skills improved instantly. Having had a PCA should go on a resume. Your EI [emotional intelligence] appears to have jumped up a few notches. The day I hire a receptionist to represent my business, a PCA is going to be her first stop. This is part of her professional manner, no different from her voice on the phone or how she hands a pen to a client.”

The PCA process is the same for men as for women, with equally transformative results. In do-nothing colours, he is someone you might overlook in a group. Put a man you have known for years in his best colours and suddenly you do a double take. How long has he been here? How can it be the same man? Fully present, he becomes someone who is creating his own life with intention and sound decisions.

*Season Snapshot*

**Matt**

This is the story of Matt. Men often accompany wives to their PCA appointment. Eventually, many of them sit in the analyst's chair. I met Matt at Bonnie's draping. I would have described him as a tall, back-to-the-land kind of guy; quiet, medium colouring, 40 or a little older. The overall impression was vague. I couldn't have picked him out of a crowd two days later and I had just spent several hours with the man.

Two years later, Matt came in to have his own PCA. The instant the black drape landed across his chest, I sat up straighter. Out of the fog, the man appeared. I had literally not been able to see him. The only words that still applied from the earlier description were tall and quiet. In soft and safe colours, he was so nondescript that half of his presence was erased from the room. In his True Winter colours, he was a king. Now and again, I see family and other group pictures of him on Facebook. Almost always, he's standing in the back and is the only man in the photograph that you notice.

PCA offers you better choices that stem from the only important starting point: you. It won't matter that black widens your silhouette once you know that you are a Soft Autumn. Who needs black when your drawers and closet can be filled with dark olive, butterscotch, soft navy, gravel gray, green pine, stone, oak, and soft Merlot? If black is necessary, your colour analyst is there to help you find strategies for wearing it successfully.

Over the course of time, we have evolved a language of associations between shape and colour that is ingrained and powerful. In order to relax into the deeply peaceful and spiritual meaning of the forest, we need to recognize familiar patterns. The green canopy far above us, filtering the light, with straight, brown trunks inhabiting the space around us, fulfills our expectations. Pillars of sunlight warm the forest floor. We feel the shadowy greens that encircle us. More

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than supported, we feel carried. Every breath is redolent with moss and resin. The sounds of songbirds add another layer of sublime majesty. Without any one of these, we would not have the same experience of sanctuary and grandeur.

Nature created the same flawless colouring in you. By the miracle of genetics, your skin, hair, and eye pigments are designed to dovetail with one another. Your appearance, your voice, your personality and your reason for being here fit perfectly together and allow you to share your gifts with the rest of us. As we move through stores, looking at racks of garments or cosmetic displays, the question we ask is, “In all this selection, where am I?” Before we can answer that, we must address, “Who am I?”

Each Season offers great possibility for unique self-expression. My experience has shown me clearly that we are all separate beings who exist as part of a Season family and a larger human family. PCA offers ideas that become a wellspring to communicate the loves, thoughts, feelings, curiosities, aversions, and explorations that make you unique. Imagine that this book is your best friend, who not only wants your best outcome but also might know it already. Let colour be a first step to making you feel like a complete and free human being.