



I CANNOT IMAGINE HOW A COLOR WILL LOOK IN THE DESIGN. I HAVE TO PUT IT IN PLACE AND THEN DECIDE.



COLOR *As I See It*

BY ANN JOHNSTON

There are millions of colors out there in the real world. Even though our eyes can distinguish minute differences, we can't distinguish them all. You mix colors if you use paint or if you use a computer program. I mix colors with dye and put them on white fabric. Even small variations in hue and value make a solid-color fabric more lively. One of the attractions of hand-dyed fabrics is that the mix of hue and value is unpredictable; it shows the hand of the maker and the possibility of infinite variety.

My printed and painted fabrics are not only one-of-a-kind in color and pattern, but they are the outcome of my personal experiences, my

WAVE 4,
42" x 37".



own marks, and color preferences. More and more frequently, my hand-dyed fabrics are the inspiration for the design of a quilt. It makes sense; my experiences are in the fabric. I haven't used any commercially dyed fabric in my quilts for more than 20 years, so most of the colors I use in my quilts are not on anyone's color charts.

The hard part about dyeing fabric is that I have to decide which colors to mix out of all these millions. Should I plan the quilt, and then dye the fabric? Should I dye the fabric, and then plan the quilt? I have piles of colors at hand, already dyed, which I use to audition colors. Then I dye more as needed. Often the design changes as I get more ideas from the new fabrics. Knowing that both hue and value are relative affects the choices I make as I plan a quilt.

Hue refers to the name of the color; the name is one of the ways we describe the qualities of the color. How one hue looks is partly determined by those around it. You may have noticed that when you paint the walls in a room, the same hue looks different on each wall. The same color has a different character depending on its surroundings.

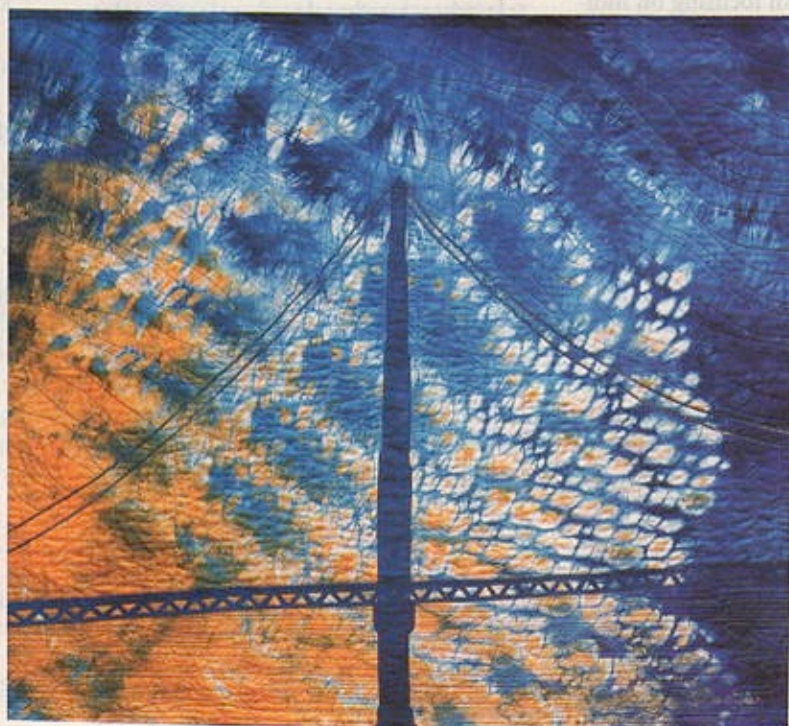
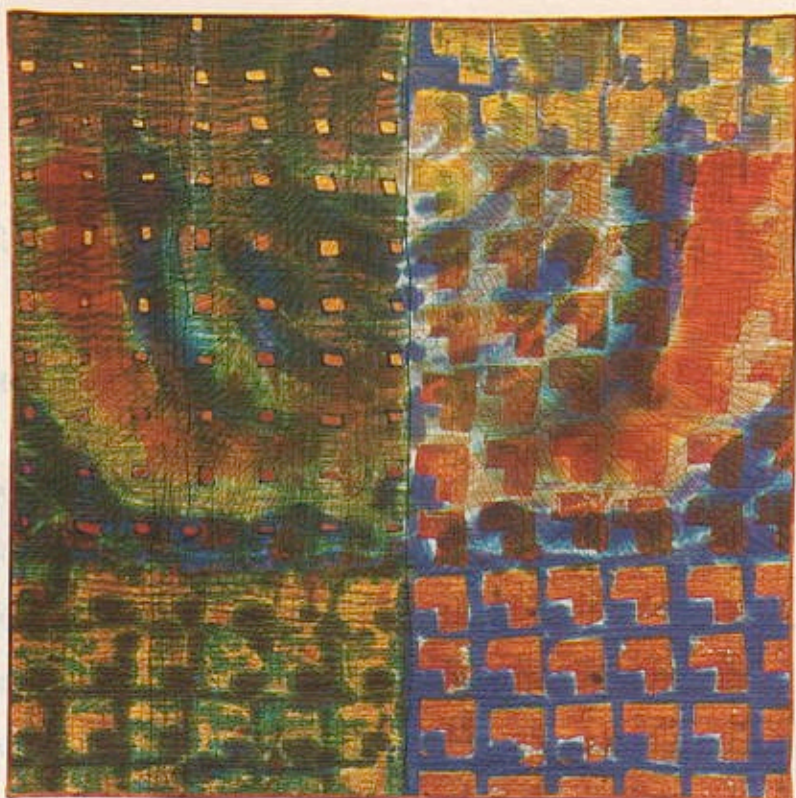
How many times have you decided what binding to use by matching a color in the quilt, and then after the binding was added, you realized it

didn't work? All the colors in the quilt influence your decision, not just one. When I plan a quilt, I cannot imagine how a color will look in the design. I have to put it in place and then decide. When the next fabric goes up, I may revise my earlier choices in order to make colors work.

Value refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. Value is most easily seen in a black-to-white scale; however, one value will always appear lighter or darker depending on what surrounds it. Colors have value inherent in them. When many colors are present, it's harder to distinguish value differences, but it is critical to be able to see them so you can use them to enhance your designs. I vary the values in a quilt design to create a pattern or a focal point, and to add complexity and variety.

Complementary colors are not only opposite on the color wheel, but they are opposite in character and temperature as well. A hue is intensified when it is placed next to its complement. When strong complementary colors are placed next to each other, our eyes react. The colors actually vibrate if you focus closely where the hues meet. Using complements is a challenge in composition that I have enjoyed exploring. It is a combination that can make your eyes tired, or it can be soft and smooth as in a sunset.

When you pick a fabric color, you



**Clockwise
from above left,**
*BLUE LINES WITH
ORANGE SKY,*
27" x 20".

SUNDOWNER,
52" x 52".

ORANGE SKY,
8" x 12".

BLUE BRIDGE,
38" x 42".

*DOUBLE
CROSS 3,*
28" x 36".

also pick a value. It is important to pay as much attention to value as to hue, remembering that both are relative. The hue of a color will get our immediate attention, but the subtle value pattern within a design will determine how interesting the whole design is to the viewer.

Ann has been dyeing fabric and making quilts for more than 25 years. Her award-winning work has shown internationally for more than a decade. Ann lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon. See Extra Credit.

