

Color and Design for the Bead Jewelry Artist

Mixing beads to make
projects pack a color punch!



by Kate Ferrant Richbourg

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So many beads. So many choices.

I love beads. Choosing each bead, sliding it on the stringing material, admiring the work in progress, and then clasping it all together into a lovely adornment can offer hours of enjoyment. Except when it doesn't.

You know the feeling. The bead bug bites. You get the urge to sit down for a few hours and create. And then , BOOM! You hit a brick wall. A huge, no-getting-around-it brick wall. Your muse is nowhere to be found and nothing you put together looks right.

Well, fret no more. This book is here to help. In it, I share my tips and tricks from one of my most popular classes "Color and Design for Beaders". You'll learn how to think about color in new ways, how to choose beads to make stunning combinations and finally how to string up those beads into the perfect piece .

-Kate

How this book works.

This ebook is based on my popular class on demystifying color for the bead jewelry artist.

When I teach this class there are usually 8-10 participants. Each person brings different points of view to the table. That variety of input and opinions really enhances the learning experience. If you belong to a bead or craft group, gather everyone (along with their beads) and work through the exercises in this book together. Even working with a couple of friends will enrich the process. Alone or in a group, whatever you choose, I am with you every step of the way. Questions, comments, thoughts and photos of your work are always welcome. Send them all my way to kate@katerichbourg.com . I'll be happy to help.

You are going to need a variety of beads to choose from, as a diverse selection is the key to success. Don't rule out any of your beads at the beginning. I find that the oddest beads become the most interesting elements in a color palette. Throw a lot of choices into the mix. You might be surprised at the outcome.

Part One. The Backstory:

Understanding Color and How To Make It Work For You.

In this section we'll tackle breaking the boundaries of traditional color use and come up with fresh approaches to thinking about color.

What you'll need:

Notebook or pad

Pen

Camera (if you want to take pictures of your bead mixes)

Bead Mat

Bowls to store your bead mixes

Baggies to keep your mixes together if you want to save them

"I try to apply colors like words that shape poems, like notes that shape music."

Joan Miro



Purer colors...have in themselves, independently of the objects they serve to express, a significant action on the feelings of those who look at them.

Henri Matisse



Questions, questions.

“Blue is for boys and pink is for girls.”
“If you have red hair, you can’t wear pink.” “No white after Labor Day.”
Haven’t we all heard these words of wisdom about color? With many of us color use is deeply ingrained and is defined by traditional uses or our own preferences.

To break free of these rules of design and color use, let’s examine some questions to help you come up with fresh approaches and new ideas.

Whip out your note pad and pen and jot down some thoughts to the following questions. There are no wrong answers. Your insights will be useful as we move through the exercises in this ebook, and will give you perspective and serve as a reference for the way you think about color and design.

Question 1:

Are you a process or project beader? Do you usually begin a project just because you like to slide beads on a string? Or do you begin with a specific outcome in mind like making a necklace to match an outfit?

Question 2:

What is your favorite color? Unsure? Take a glance at your beads. What are the colors that are represented the most? Do you have a bunch of beads that represent green in every shade? Do you have a special memory that triggers every time you look or think of your favorite color?

Question 3:

What is your least favorite color? Peek at those beads again. Do you have a color that is nowhere to be found? Dig a little deeper. Why is it missing? Is it a hard-to-find color in the bead world or is it something you don't like and won't use?

Question 4:

What's your beading style? Are you a symmetrical type of person? Is laying out a design on a bead board or mat an integral part of your design process? Or is randomness and asymmetry more your cup of tea? Do you delight in making a puddle of "bead soup" and then randomly string away with only a vague idea of the outcome?

Question 5:

How do you store your beads? On the strand? In boxes? In baggies? Is it easy to view your stash all at once? If your storage is not ideal at the moment, how do you picture your ideal storage solution?

Great job! Now set those answers aside for now, but keep your pad and pen handy. We have some more work to do.



What's in a name?

How do colors influence your designs? When do you think about color and at what point in your design process does it come into play?

In my design process, color almost always comes first. I am so dedicated to color and its influence on my designs that I sort and store all of my beads by color regardless of type. My bead stash is like my own little bead store. I have two storage options. One is a large wooden print cabinet. Some drawers are devoted to beads of the same color and some hold a hodgepodge of mixed beads. It's a great way to store beads leftover from projects without the guilt of not resorting them. Many times I gravitate to those mixes as a starting point for a project. Other beads are sorted by color and stored in plastic tackle boxes with removable lids. All strands are cut up so the beads are loose and ready to use. When I am ready to work I grab the boxes that I want, pop off the lids, pull out the drawers in my cabinet and my instant bead store is ready to use.

How do you store your beads? Take a look at your answer on the previous page. Are your beads organized so they are easy to work with?

"Mauve? Mauve is just pink trying to be purple."

James Whistler



If not, it can be a barrier to your design process. Getting ready to get ready to get started on your project can be a creativity drain. Take some time to commune with your beads and get them organized.

Game: So Many Meanings.

Take a moment and look around the room. The colors that you see all evoke a variety of responses. Moods, feelings, era, style, connotations... all of these things are responses that are provoked at least in part by color.



Pick up your pad and pen and make a list of some of the colors you see. Use their ordinary names, like white, light green, blue, yellow. Just be generic here. Try and make a list of at least five different colors.



Next go to the first color on your list. Maybe it's red. What meanings, feelings or emotions are associated with red? "Love," "heat," and "strength" are words that come to mind. Write down your impressions as quickly as you can without pausing to think about right or wrong answers. Jot down a few thoughts and move on to the next color until your entire list is completed.

Read it over. Are there any surprises on there? What random thoughts bubbled to the surface? Hang on to this list, as we are going to revisit it later.

Game: Name that Color.

In this exercise we are going to add a little zest and romance to those plain color names.

Pick up your pad and pen and draw a line down the center of a fresh page so you have two columns. Look around the room again. In the left-hand column make a list of some of the colors you see. They could be the same ones you used in the preceding game or new ones. Leave three or four lines between each color. Use their ordinary names, like white, light green, blue, yellow. Just be generic here. Try and make a list of at least five different colors.

Look at the first color on your list. Let's say it's blue. In the right hand column of your page, list fancy and exotic names for that color. Words that you associate with blue like "sapphire," "aqua," "cobalt." Take your time and use your imagination. Try to write at least three fancy names for each generic color. Complete this process for each color on your list.

Look over what you wrote. Are you getting inspired just imagining the color of cobalt in your minds eye, rather than just ordinary blue?

The result of these two games should spark creative activity in your brain. Instead of a bead mix made up of red, orange and pink beads, isn't it more inspiring to have a palette made up of cherry, tangerine and magenta? Or how about cinnabar, pumpkin and tea rose? What emotions or memories do these "romantic" color names evoke? The mix of the fancy names and associated connotations are a great starting point to use when you start selecting beads for a project.

"Colors must fit together as pieces in a puzzle or cogs in a wheel."

Hans Hofman



Part Two. Mix it up:

Making color palettes with beads.

In this section let's put some of the words and words and concepts that we have discussed in part one into action. It's time to open up the bead boxes and make color palettes.

To get the best results from the following exercises, don't think too far ahead in the process. For now just work on making interesting color mixes. Don't worry about the amount of beads you need or what the finished product might be. Be in the color moment and let your imagination take flight.

What you'll need:

- Camera (if you want to take pictures of your bead mixes)
- Bead Mat
- Bowls to store your bead mixes
- Baggies to keep your mixes together if you want to save them to use later.



Cinnabar



Pumpkin



Tea Rose

Game: Paletting. Put your knowledge into action.

Take a look at the list of fancy names that you wrote down in the "Name that Color" exercise. For instance, let's use the cinnabar, pumpkin and tea rose example. Let's associate words with those colors. **Cinnabar:** *ancient, smooth, artifact, exotic.* **Pumpkin:** *tasty, autumn, round, texture.* **Tea Rose:** *soft, delicate, fragrant, small.*

Finally choose a name for the palette based on the colors and connotations. I'll call the palette "***Silk Road.***" Now go to your bead box and pull some beads that correspond with the list above. Choose as few or as many as you like. I've made one, too. Below is my step-by-step example. The video on the next page will show you how I put it all together.

Seeing the Palette in action.

In the video on the following page I explain my thought process as I assembled the Silk Road Palette.

Tips to remember when assembling your palette:

Don't agonize over your choices. Listen to your instincts and many times your first choice is the right one.

You don't have to commit to a design right now. Beads can go right back into your bead box if the palette isn't working.

Work outside of your comfort zone. Try using a color that is on your least favorite list. How does it affect the overall palette? Can you build a color bridge to from beads you like to this bead to make it work?

Let the palette evolve. Mix a few beads and then if ideas aren't flowing, let the mix simmer. You can come back to it later with a fresh perspective.



Creating the Silk Road color palette.

“Why do two colors, put one next to the other, sing? Can one really explain this? No”

Pablo Picasso



Game: What's your neutral?

Remember your favorite color from the list of questions on this page? It's the color that you always seem to gravitate to and the one that takes up the majority of the room in your bead box. Picture that color in your mind along with some of the connotations, thoughts and feelings that you associate with it. Now jump over to your bead box and pull a palette that represents that color.

Here are a few sample palettes.



Now think about that color as your neutral. This color turns beads that you don't usually use into components that make your piece sing. Take a look at the palette on the top left. That palette challenged me. Particularly the beads in the center of the photo that have the flower design on them. But when you start to mix the beads with your neutral, the color and beads come to life. These palettes are a great starting point. The next step would be to refine your bead choices and to grab a bead board or mat and lay out a design. Remember, at this point you don't have to commit to a final project. This is all part of the creative process. Refine the design by mixing more beads, adding a clasp and thinking about stringing materials.



"Any color works if you push it to the extreme."

Massimo
Vignelli



Game: What's Your Starting Point?

Another way to build a great color palette is to find a focal bead or clasp, colorful picture or snazzy outfit as your inspiration and choose your beads with that inspiration in mind.

Identifying a starting point can make creating a palette so much easier. Study your inspiration and then pull your beads together.

I used the lampworked bead pictured below as my starting point for the palette on the following page. This group of beads will make a great statement necklace.





Pairing large lime-colored beads brings out the green in the focal bead.



Smaller lime rounds help balance the irregular shapes.



The montana blue beads add depth to the mix.



The palette needs a bit of light. The transparent light blue beads keep it from looking too heavy.



The small yellow rounds add a punch of color.



Small spacers add texture and filler to the design.



Another punch of color with rust colored pearls.



A couple of accent beads compliment the focal bead.



A final punch of mustard yellow in a bead with an interesting shape finishes the palette.

"A color is as strong as the impression it creates."

Ivan Albright

Part Three. Putting it All Together:

How to take your beads from a palette to a finished piece.

Now that you have had some fun putting together a variety of palettes, it's time to jump in and create jewelry.

What you'll need:

A bead board or mat
Stringing material (Soft Flex beading wire, nylon thread, waxed linen, leather)
Clasp
Crimping pliers, scissors, chain nose pliers, glue.





So many stringing choices.

There are a variety of options when it comes to stringing materials. My two favorites are Soft Flex, a nylon coated wire stringing material and nylon thread.

Soft Flex is a sturdy wire cable that resists kinks and stands up to wear and tear. It comes in a variety of diameters: .010, .014 and .019. I use .010 on beads with very small holes including small semiprecious, .014 with beads up to 10mm and .019 on beads over 10mm.



Close Soft Flex with 2mm x 2mm crimp tubes and a crimping pliers. Use wire guards to give an elegant look to the ends of the strands when clasp.



Nylon thread works perfectly if you are working with multiple strands. Stiffen the ends by coating with Hypo Cement or clear nail polish. Hypo tube is also necessary to seal knots before cutting the tread to keep it from unraveling. Waxed linen cord adds a nice touch when used for knotted strands or tassels.



Stringing using Soft Flex beading material.

One of my favorite stringing materials to use is Soft Flex. It's strong, supple and easy to use.

In this project I demonstrate how to close a bracelet using Soft Flex, crimp tubes, wire guards, crimp covers and a toggle clasp.

I use elements from the "What's Your Neutral" game from this page in the book. It's a good example of taking elements from a completed palette and turning them into a finished piece.





How to add a clasp to a piece of jewelry strung on Soft Flex Beading Wire.

Stringing a show stopper.

One of my favorite ways to string a bead palette is to make a multistrand centerpiece necklace using nylon thread for the body and Soft Flex for the end strands. Not every piece has to be this intricate, but this style is a great way to show off a great bead mix.

A muffin tin or other container with compartments is handy to keep your beads together while you are stringing. And when you are finished it will be easy to put the extras back where they belong.



Use a muffin tin or similar container to sort your beads so they are easy to work with.



Cut five 40" strands of size F nylon thread. Thread all five strands through the top hole of the bead.



Gather the threads and tie in an overhand knot.



Choose a bead with a big hole to cover the knot.



Start the strands with seed beads and 2-3mm beads.



Next string each strand with a variety of beads.



Bring strands together for a tighter weave by knotting or using two-hole beads.



String both sides.



Add a bead with a big hole to bring all of the strands together.



Tie an overhand knot at the large beads to hold strands in place.

Part Three. Putting it All Together: From Palette to Finished Piece



To add tassels, cut 5, 18" strands of waxed linen. Knot them together to secure.



Add embellishments of your choice. Use a half-hitch knot for security and embellishment.



Tie off all ends and seal knots with hypo cement. Let dry and cut away extra ends.



Cut 12" of Soft Flex and crimp a loop in the end.



Thread the nylon through the Soft FLEX loop and back through the bead below.



Tie a square knot to secure. Glue, let dry and cut away ends.



The finished piece packs quite a visual punch. The shape, color and texture of the beads all work together to create a lovely necklace based on the Silk Road palette.

Good luck on your color journey.

I hope that you enjoyed working through the exercises presented in this book. Remember that beads are the ultimate in recyclables and are easily reused. Cut up those strands and play with your beads!

Did you make a lovely necklace to share? Have a question to ask? Just want to reach out and say hi? Contact me at kate@katerichbourg.com, I'd love to hear from you.

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About the Author

Kate Richbourg loves jewelry. She loves to teach it. She loves to make it. She loves to wear it. Teaching and designing jewelry since 1992, she teaches at national shows, bead societies and bead shops and is published in a variety of jewelry magazines and is the author of the popular blog "We Can Make That at Home". She has also appeared on several episodes of the DIY and HGTV network shows "DIY Jewelry" and "Craft Lab." Kate is the author of the popular book Simple Soldering: A Beginner's Guide to Jewelry Making.

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