

ORANGE

THE SWEET AND SOUR COLOR

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The colors of mangoes and curries welcome the guests . . .
and the rains.



Orange manifests its influence in a different way from the other colors. While red says “I’m here!,” yellow is exuberant, and blue is laid-back, our research revealed that orange is generically “nice”. Actually, of all our investigations, opaque orange was the most upbeat and least dramatic of the colors. There were no flare-ups, no surprises. There were no in-depth insights at the critiques. The color simply supported a warm and welcoming congeniality. (Real estate agents suggest planting orange marigolds in the front yard in order to sell a house faster.) Orange, rarely absent in Gregory Nava’s **My Family/Mi Familia**, for example, becomes the visual translation of the emotional glue that holds the generations together (See page 118).

As light, however, orange has a double-edged quality. How we feel at sunset is not just a romanticized cliché. Something actually happens to us physically when we watch the intense brightness of the near-white sun transform itself into a glowing rich orange in the sky. Glowing orange light (and its associations with the sun) can take us on a visceral ride that warms and expands our emotional field.

There are other kinds of orange skies, however, that come at a time of day when the sun is higher in the sky. They are the skies of **Blade Runner** and **Gattaca**. Their light signals air poisoned by pollutants. The sky on page 114 is an example of an atmosphere not created for a film. It was taken at 1:00 p.m. during the Los Angeles fires of 2003.

Orange light in an interior, on the other hand, can read as romantic. Annie Savoy (Susan Sarandon) throws orange scarves over the lamps in her bedroom to create a romantic atmosphere in **Bull Durham**.

Orange is also a color that celebrates the working class. Think of how often we see it in inexpensive restaurants and movie motels. Watch for how many versions of orange you’ll find in **Thelma & Louise** (see page 129). Variations of orange even manifest in the rich terra-cotta colors of the earth along their route through the American Southwest.

Although earth colors are not spectrum colors, they are included here because they have a familial relationship with orange. Terra-cottas, siennas, ochres, and umbers have a kind of primal influence in how we

react to them. We respond positively to the colors of the earth. We feel familiar with Clint Eastwood's tiny adobe house in **Unforgiven**, for example. This is a place where mud is a daily part of living. It is as if this home grew out of the ground on which it sits, and Eastwood takes time to idle on the adobe walls so they register in our senses. Look carefully inside and you can see how the house tells the history of the man (see page 153).

Versatile orange can also read as exotic. Think of the luxuriant silks of both **Monsoon Wedding** and **Bend It Like Beckham**. Actually, Alfonso Cuarón used lush saffron and oranges brilliantly in **A Little Princess** to define the young heroine and contrast her character with that of the muddy greens worn by the headmistress of a repressive school for girls.

The film **Elizabeth** offers an opportunity to see the color as a character arc: if you fast-forward through the film, you will visually be able to follow orange's role in the queen's rise to power. From the first time you see her as an adolescent to her becoming one of the most powerful monarchs in history, watch for the orange that defines her to evolve from sherbet to blood (see page 123).

After more than twenty years of color investigations, my students and I have concluded that we do not expect orange to stimulate analytical activity. If Thelma and Louise had only known . . .

Think About This:

**Orange in an orange is healthy.
Orange in an afternoon sky is not.***



*Photo taken mid-afternoon during Los Angeles Fires, October, 2003.