

# WHY BLUE SHIRTS?

## TV Color Guide Explains Use of Tints in Video

By ROBERT METZ

**I**F haberdashers are doing a big business in the sale of light blue shirts, the trend can probably be traced to the increasingly frequent television appearances of this year's political candidates. Experienced television campaigners have learned that white shirts cause a disconcerting glare on viewers' sets, while pastel colors appear as white.

The politicians' awareness of this fact emphasizes one of the recurrent problems that plague video production departments—the proper use of color in black and white telecasting.

Although scenery, props, costumes and people, all come in color, the final product on the TV screen is seen only in shades of gray. Artists and designers are constantly faced with the question: What will be the gray response on the sets in the home to the colors used before the cameras?

Since no designer has an opportunity to test hundreds of variations of color, the National Broadcasting Company has prepared a color-reference book which does the job for him. The ten-page guide, edited by Robert J. Wade, executive coordinator of production development for the network, gives the television equivalent of 192 variations of color.

### 192 Colors

Mr. Wade says the book's purpose is to "prevent mistakes before they can be made." He cites the case of a female singer who turned up at a dress rehearsal shortly before telecast time in an expensive and exclusively designed gown of ultramarine blue. The set on which she was to appear was painted in grayed-gold. Only then did the director learn that both of these colors give nearly identical gray responses, and that the glamour girl blended into the background.

Since she could not be asked to change her dress, the set had to be repainted at the last minute—a process that consumed time, money and the production staff's peace of mind.

The N. B. C. Book of Color resembles the books of fabric swatches found in tailor shops. It contains 192 chips of color; twenty-four hues, and four tints and three shades of each hue. A tint is a hue plus white. Shades are produced by adding a complementary color to a hue. Adjacent to each chip in the book is the color's gray equivalent as seen on the picture tube. There are fourteen shades of gray used, ranging from TV black to TV white.

Mr. Wade recalled one unfortunate experience of his own when he was designing sets. He selected a greenish-yellow tone for the walls, and to give the effect of wallpaper stenciled a design in reddish-orange on top of it. The result on the television system was walls in one tone of gray.

### Re-Education

Designers must also avoid colors in scenery that make too contrasting a pattern in grays when televised. The problem has often occurred when stripes or plaids are used.

On one occasion dark brown stripes were used on a light pink wall, and were so sharply delineated that performers on the set had the same distracting effect on the eye as someone walking in front of a picket fence.

When using the chart, artists must keep in mind how color is modified by textures, but most of the visual values of color learned in other fields must be disregarded when working in television. For example, some tones of red which appear dark to the eye have a fairly light gray equivalent on video. The converse is true of many tones of green, violet and blue.

In addition to teaching production workers how to avoid mistakes, the color book also aids in mixing correct grays. If gray gets too close to black it becomes as difficult to light as white. A pure black suit appears as a solid mass without lapel or pocket details.

There have been occasions when producers have had all scenery props and drapes made in shades of gray. However, Mr. Wade points out that though the use of colors may not be perceptible to the video audience, actors are more at ease in surroundings that make customary use of colors. Since many performers have custom-made wardrobes for use in the various show business media, costumes of gray are out of the question.

### Dividends

Even if these hurdles did not exist, there still would be the problem of humans, only a few of whom come in shades of gray.

While many designers experienced in television have learned what not to do with colors, the guide should be particularly useful to guest artists. For many of its "prestige" productions N. B. C. commissions well known designers from the opera or the legitimate theatre. Consulting the color book will give them knowledge that others have gained only after years of trial and error.

Six months of research went into the book, and each of the seventy-five copies cost approximately \$80. But with most production costs forever on the way up and sponsors becoming more cautious, the investment should return many dividends in saved time, money and nerves.