

## Color Theory 1 - Value

I told you last week that each Friday I would have a color-centric post. Sometimes it will be specific to the color palette, some will be about color theory and some will be color exercises. On the color theory posts I'm likely to get a bit esoteric and, at least once, preachy.

But that will come later. Today I want to start with a discussion about the one concept that matters most at the end of the day:

### VALUE

You can learn everything you want about color and color theory and you can create the most exciting color palettes but in the end it is value that will most likely determine the success of your choices.

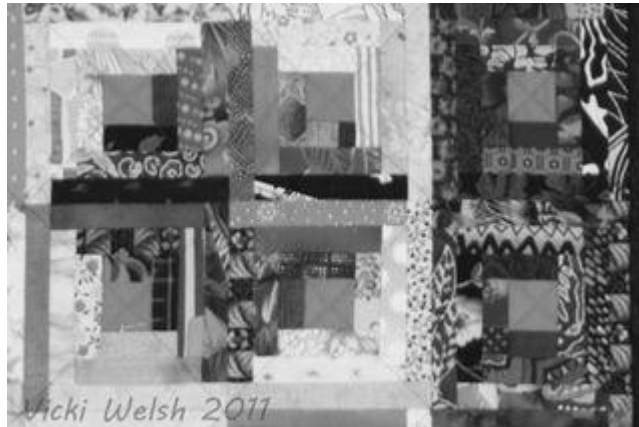
In simplest terms **value refers to the lightness or darkness of the color**. Black is the darkest value and white is the lightest value.



As quilters, our favorite way to use value is in scrap quilts. We put the lights and light medium scraps in one pile and the darks and dark-mediums in another and create two-toned blocks. My On A Whim quilt is nothing but a simple value study. I don't even need to convert it to a black and white photo for you to distinguish the light and dark patches.



But take a closer look and you will see that my choices of light and dark were not always “right”. Also some prints contain both light and dark values. Depending on where the print motif falls in the piecing, it could put a light value color in a dark area.



The easiest way to see this is by converting the image to black and white. You can see some dark values in the light areas and light values in the dark areas. My opinion is that this is what makes a scrap quilt magical. Imagine how boring that quilt would be if I had only used solid black, white and red fabrics. It would certainly have been boring to piece.

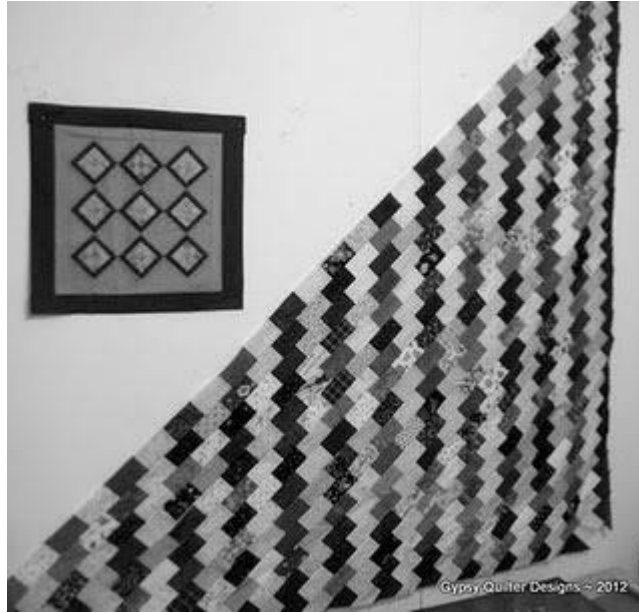
Converting images to black and white is an easy way to see values changes and I do this often. Another thing I do is to stand back and take my glasses off. I'm blind enough that when I look at something sans glasses the patterning is blurred so all I really see is the value. Squinting works too!



[Gypsy Quilter](#) posted this quilt yesterday that she is working on. She pulled loads of blue scraps to make this diagonal brick quilt. But she was concerned because some of the blues are reading as light as the tan pieces.

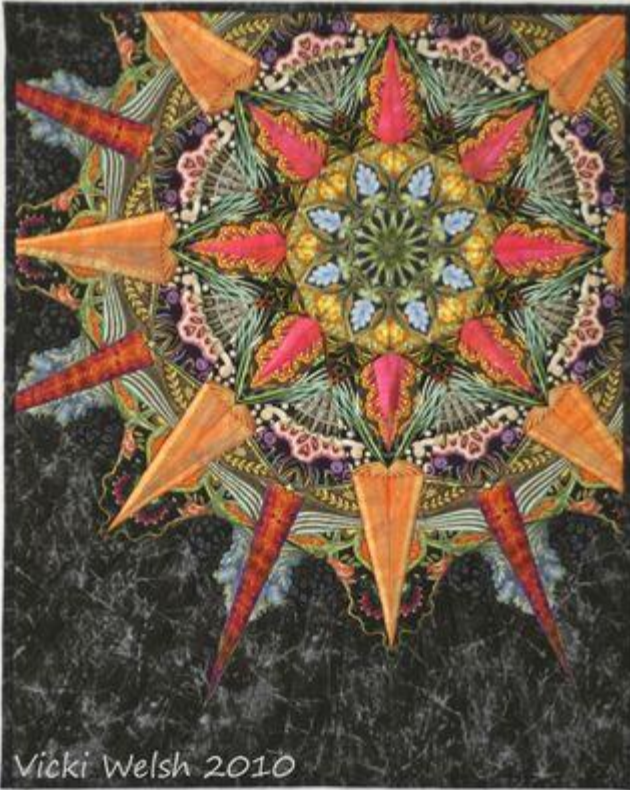


Here's a close of where she shows that spool print fabrics that's included with the blues (darks) but it seems to read more as a medium. To me, that's not a problem at all! It's those kinds of patches that make the quilt sparkle.



Let's take a look at the whole quilt in black and white. Sure there are a few blue bricks that are reading as light values but our eyes still see the design and it makes the quilt more fun (IMHO). But it's all personal taste. If those patches bug her then she should take them out and replace them. Because, at the end of the day, quilting is about having fun. So lets not get too awfully serious about it!

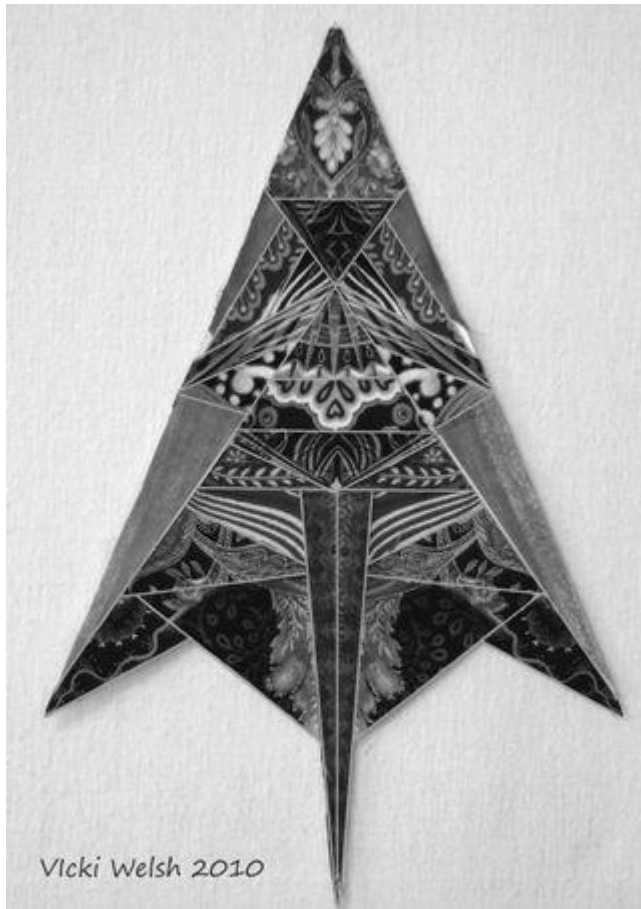
Value changes are used most often to highlight the piecing lines but it can also be used to disguise them.



In my kaleidoscope quilts I use value to blur and enhance piecing lines depending on the effect that I want.



This image shows my piecing lines highlighted in yellow. Look at the 4 pieces inset at the bottom between the 2 orange spikes. For 3 of them I have used their dark backgrounds to obscure the piecing lines and for the one that the top I used the light value of the wavy pale blue lines to blend with the light values of the green motif in the piece below it. By paying attention to the values of adjoining pieces I was able to give parts of this an appliquéd look.



The same photo in black and white. If you can ignore the white over the piecing lines you can see that value in side-by-side pieces helps to obscure the piecing lines and focuses attention on the patterning in the fabric.

I think that's about enough for today. Later we will talk a lot more about value and will do some exercises. For now I will leave you with a couple of points:

- Value is a great tool that you can use to either highlight or obscure piecing lines
- Value is more important than color in determining the success of most quilts (there are ALWAYS exceptions to every rule).
- You can generally see if a set of fabrics has good value contrast by taking a photo of the fabrics together and then converting the photo to black and white.