

DEPTH IN DESIGN...JUST HOW DEEP IS IT?

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Webster's Dictionary says: *depth is the measure or distance downward, inward or backward.* From this, we understand that most people discuss depth as measurable, "seeable", discernible. If we look up **three-dimensional**, the dictionary says it is something *having, or seeming to have, the dimension of depth...* That is the case in our study of Depth in Design.

Depth in Traditional Designs is achieved by set-patterning, placement of colors, tints, textures and forms, etc. Depth, not the most important characteristic of Traditional designs, is more easily achieved by the designer and noted by the judge. However, according to Amalie Ascher: "Pleasing outline and orderly arrangement of materials, placed to emphasize depth, are typical aspects of massed-line composition."

The Handbook implies that Depth is **the most important characteristic** of Creative Designs (HB pg 127, 130). It does NOT tell us, however, just how much depth is needed in a design to qualify/quantify it.

We are, here, more concerned with **Depth in Creative Designs**. Let's go from "flat to fluffy", so to speak...

(We will only work with flat and "not-so-flat" in this study (Collage, Plaque and frame-of-reference-limited designs; "regular designs" don't have a depth problem as a rule.)

All Creative Designs have General Characteristics in common:

1. Eclectic in concept
2. Result of creative idea of designer
3. **Use of "plastic organization"- molding areas of solids and spaces with other elements within design into a 3-D concept having great DEPTH:**
 - a. **suggests spatial separation; fore-,middle- and rear ground**
 - b. **"juxtaposition" of components (layering)**
 - c. **incorporating space, then piercing it with form or line (usually diagonal)**
 - d. **uses color contrasts for tension**
 - e. **uses texture for tension and interest**
 - f. **uses transparent forms**
 - g. **interest is equal throughout design**
4. Structural clarity (no filler)
5. **More than one center of interest/point of emergence possible**
6. Degree of Abstraction varies (none to moderate)

Collages are basically 2-Dimensional, but they are supposed to have implied, if not actual depth. How do we achieve implied depth? Overlapping and spatial placement of components, colors, tensions, textures and forms...those characteristics as listed in **bold, #3** above.

Any time one component is placed or situated in front of another, depth is implied. (juxtaposition). The same holds true if we use a transparent form, be it some man-made component or of plant materials, with another component behind...seen through it...it implies depth.

When we place receding colors (blue-purple) in a design, we create depth; also when we place darker colors to the rear of brighter ones (shades and tints), depth is created.

Use of varied textures enhances depth: rough, uneven surfaces, even though they may be flat-woven, imply depth in the warp and weft of fabric, as an example: burlap vs silk, corduroy vs satin, even a linen homespun vs a polished cotton. Light reflects off highly textured surfaces differently than from flat shiny ones...creating depth.

When there is a transition from “mass” to “edges” depth is created...where the design “tapers off” into the surrounding area (this does **not** mean using “filler, soft transitions of baby’s breath, etc). This transition technique is especially true in flat work such as Collages where the design components stop and the background picks up, depth is created... until you get to the next design component where depth is interrupted by the component and the focus of the viewer’s eye is brought forward.

Examples:

1. On a medium blue Collage background, and knowing that blue is a receding color, the overlapping placement of pressed and dried Queen Anne’s Lace is seen through, becoming a transparent component; the white comes forward, the blue is seen behind, creating depth. When your eye goes from the mass to the edges, depth “happens”.
2. Using more solid plant material as a component, such as Sansevieria, hot-glued to the surface of a collage background painted with bold-colored geometric patterns, depth is created when the green of the plant material stops and the background color shows...a transition of colors from the green of the Sanseveria to any of the bright colors used. The Sansevieria creates a sharper more defined edge rather than a tapering or softer transition (as in example #1). But, depth is still created by the change.

When we use Dynamic Balance (a Rhythm/Balance technique), we create depth by forcing the viewer to look at two areas back and forth...and the placement of these two areas of tension can create the depth we need. Think of a black and white checkerboard-patterned tile floor; we know that looking at it slightly out of focus can cause the contrasting colors to shift front to back....making 2-D in to 3-D...even when you know that the floor is flat-surfaced!

Placement of some flower forms/other components in profile or even in reverse in your design, creates depth.

According to and paraphrasing Amalie Asher, depth of design “happened” when Georges Braque and Juan Gris added 3-D items such as bits of wood, metal, buttons and rope to raise the surface of a painting. (Picasso, in 1912, is credited with “inventing” the collage.)

Plaques, on the other hand, usually have more actual depth, as they are not required to be as low-relief as **Collages**. Having limited actual depth does not mean that these designs don’t have to imply even more depth than is actually there, though.

Everything said about **Collages** pretty much applies to the **Plaque**, with the exception that **Plaques** can have more *actual* depth. We can use different, thicker components such as reeds. We judges, must define what the HB means by low-relief and very low-relief.

In some other design types, the actual frame in which the design is placed/staged *can become* the “frame of reference” which of course means that you cannot exceed the dimensions of the frame itself...say 4” deep x 34” tall and 28 “ wide...so, again, how much depth is enough in this type design? Obviously the designer has to make it appear that

there is more depth! A **Framed Spatial**, as an example, is limited, by schedule requirements, to dimensions of the frame. All components must fit in 4" (or whatever the frame depth is) of depth allowed. Depth is more easily achieved here than in the flat work of the Collage and Plaques...still, all the principles will apply.

What is Depth related to?

Space? Certainly the total space available is considered (frame of reference) as well as the spaces and solids the designer creates within the design or is inherent in the components chosen for the design...creating space/depth on a flat surface requires a creative thought process. On a flat surface, making it appear that low-relief pieces of plant material are piercing and reappearing on the surface of the board it is mounted on creates depth by both *shadow* and implication, for example.

Balance? When we look at a design, we judge to see that the design is balanced front-to-back, side-to-side and top-to-bottom...so depth comes into play in the "front-to-back" of balance. We need to know that there is something in the back of the design, just as we were taught to "finish off" the back of the more traditional type designs for depth; Juxtaposition of components: separation or IMPLIED separation of fore-, middle- and rear-ground. Another point to consider: though the HB doesn't so state, a Collage, and even some Plaques, should be well balanced no matter "which way is up".

Contrast? Textures, colors, forms; all contrasts give depth. Using them on a flat surface, again, takes some creative manipulation of the components. NOTE that too great a contrast COULD result in your design looking as if it were merely "plopped" on a background/backboard in the case of a collage or plaque.

Dominance? This implies that one component subjugates the others and is in control. Colors can be the controlling factor. If not careful, however, the background can become dominant...if featuring a color, is this a bad thing?

Form? Remember that the definition of form is that it is 3-D. Place the humble daisy, cut from its stem at the calyx, stem side down on your mounting board...depth is created because of placement of the ray petals around center disc...place that same daisy with the stem side up (face-down) and the ray petals will hold it slightly above the flat surface, and raise even more slightly, the stem part...creating depth as well as giving a different texture.

We usually think of leaves as 2-D, flat components, but even the Aspidistra, when laid flat on the mounting board will have some depth (where the center vein is thicker than the left or right of the leaf), as will others such as Salal, Holly, Lemon, fern, etc.

Rhythm? Certainly the design, even if flat on a surface, has to have rhythm, which is related to line. Where does the eye travel on this flat surface? Does it seem as if the eye is traveling forward and back? Is placement of components, spaces and solids (both real and implied), rhythmic, logical, balanced and pleasing?

Dynamic Balance? This technique of combining rhythm and balance creates tension areas in the design ...move or remove one area of tension and the design is either dramatically changed or destroyed as is the rhythm and balance.

Remember the old movie sets? They were mostly painted on flat surfaces and used as backgrounds/backdrops (much as is done in the stage theater today) with a rocks, trees or

bales of hay strategically placed so that it looked like the “cowboy” was coming from a distance away into the picture...juxtaposition of components; creating depth. recall making the shoe-box dioramas in elementary school? this is the same principle!

Have you been to Disney World and seen how depth perception is “made” by using scaled down buildings, disappearing lines, etc? (Cinderella’s castle is not really as tall as it appears to be...it simply and gradually gets smaller at the top to appear farther away.) VANISHING POINTS and PERSPECTIVE...we’ll leave those for another day, another study, but do consider them in your design work.

Try the fashion models’ “trick”...rarely do you see a model present herself in a position called full-face-front...there is always that half-step back with one leg slightly behind the other...for several reasons, but in the case we are discussing, for depth, as if she were a floral design. I would implore you to place your design in its allotted space and then give it a small turn to one side or the other...to make MORE depth...it will appear less flat faced, for sure. (It also might look better just slightly off center of the allotted space.)

Can’t we trick the viewer into believing that there is more depth to our designs than there actually is, in the same ways? Look back at how depth is achieved in Creative designs. Add Collages, Plaques and other such depth-dependent designs in your next Flower Show Schedule...if not that, then do have a workshop and study DEPTH.

I have heard it said that “if a component/s in a Collage casts a shadow, then there is too much depth”. What do you think of that statement? What about a limited depth of 1/4” in a Collage? How do you feel about that? Would it stand to reason that the larger the dimensions (height and width) of a Collage or Plaque, the more proportionate the depth could be...think of a small 8” square collage...it certainly couldn’t handle 1/4” depth, but a 36” square one could handle the 1/4” and perhaps even more... discuss this. Try it in some example works. What do your judges say?

A “veteran” judge said that if you could place a glass across the top of a Collage design without crushing the components, then it was “flat enough”...think that one completely through before you agree. What if the designer uses “fat” cattails instead of the smaller, thinner ones we get from the florist? the glass could certainly rest on the fat ones and not crush the design below...

The above statements give you plenty of “fodder” for a council discussion on Depth. You be the judge/you **are** the judge!...how much depth is deep enough? Have you decided? What is your *perception* of depth? What is your preconceived notion of what is required of those designs with limited availability of space for actual measurable depth?

Is your interest in Depth peaked? What do the “experts’ and other research have to tell us? If you want more information, refer to these pages in your personal library books or check them out from your Garden Center library:

-Esther Veramae Hamel: (Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting) pgs 318, 324, 327, 348, 412, 467

-Betty Belcher: (Creative Flower Arranging) pgs 76, 107

-Amalie Ascher: (The Complete Flower Arranger) pgs 30,32, 206

-Bob Thomas: (Essence of Floral Creativity) pgs 13, 58, 70, 107, 112, 128, 132, 145

NOTE: One of the reasons NGC does not recognize the popular florist Pave` design is lack of depth....HOWEVER, a pave` component could be a part of a creative design (example: an Oasis sphere covered in white daisy mum heads=a white, round, rough textured form in a Creative design.)

