

Pretty Pink – From Powdered Wig to Power Suit



Women are free to wear blue — but men can't wear pink? Those days are long gone. Thankfully so, because the growing presence of pink in more and more areas stands for something: openness, understanding, and also humor, joy, and lightness. And this isn't just true in fashion, even though that's where it started.

Pink is more than just fashion

Fashion – and with it, color – reflects the spirit of the times. When a generation longs for freedom, you'll likely see flowing fabrics, loose hair, and soft silhouettes. When resilience is in demand, it's all about sharp cuts and muted tones. As gender roles begin to converge, so do traditional color codes like blue for boys and pink for girls. Men take parental leave, women rise to leadership positions – almost an old hat by now, perhaps even a pink one.

Men are no longer fur-wearing, beast-hunting cavemen, and women no longer just homemakers. Women hold their own, and men show their softer sides – sides they've always had, just not as socially accepted as they are today. Nowadays, women – in fact, society as a whole – value qualities in men like flexibility, gentleness, and the ability to handle household tasks. Maybe that's what pink stands for. But still...

Is pink really a feminine color? Where does it actually come from? When and how did it first appear? Why do baby girls wear pink? And are we perhaps tapping into something primal now that pink is becoming trendy for men? These and other curious questions are what we'd like to shed some light on.

Was Pink the First Color in the World?

In 2018, researchers made a surprising discovery: they found bright pink pigments in rocks over a billion years old. What looked like harmless color stains turned out to be fossilised remains of cyanobacteria — tiny microorganisms once known as

blue-green algae. Long before pink appeared in fashion or pop culture, it was already here — a silent trace of an ancient ecosystem.



In 1,1 Milliarden Jahre altem Gestein hat ein Forschungsteam der Australian National University 2018 leuchtend rosa Pigmente (Porphyrine) entdeckt.

When Pink Was Still Ochre

The fascination with pink goes back a long way. Thousands of years ago, hunter communities in the Andes of ancient Peru used red ochre to dye their leather clothing pink – an early sign of the color's symbolic power. Interestingly, archaeological findings also show that it wasn't just men who hunted; women played an active role in providing for their communities as well. The pink pigments weren't only used for clothing, but also to decorate cave walls – a reflection of identity and shared culture.

In ancient Egypt, pink ochre was a valued part of everyday life. It was used in cosmetics to protect the skin from sun and wind, and to highlight lips and cheeks with a soft pink hue — a beauty ideal with practical benefits.

With European expansion, pink gained further significance through colonialism. Red pigments were in high demand, especially for beauty products, prompting traders and colonial powers to search for new sources across the globe. Pink thus became not only an aesthetic ideal, but also part of a global network of power and trade.

Where Does the Term „Pink“ Come From?

Pink was originally the English word for carnation. To „pink“ means to fray or perforate, referring to the frayed petals of the flower. This flower name has been known in English since 1573. The color term „pink-colored“ first appeared in 1681, and the term „pink“ for the color itself was used as early as 1828.

When Boys Wore Pink

From the Middle Ages onwards, red was considered a symbol of masculinity in the Western world – a man stood his ground, and blood was often shed. It represented power and authority, often associated with conflict and violent confrontations. Intense red, formerly known as purple, was reserved for the ruling classes due to its labor-intensive and expensive production. The childish version of red was pink – a softer red that gave the infant time to grow into their adult role.

“Two metres of pink fabric make a gentleman,” the philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli is said to have said in the 16th century.

The color pink held another, albeit similar, meaning in the world of men: it represented strength, but more importantly, it was a symbolic color of political influence. Rulers who wore pink presented themselves as powerful and sophisticated on the diplomatic stage.

Blue, on the other hand, was the color associated with girls; it was linked to the Virgin Mary and her blue robe. It was also considered the color of fidelity – a vital quality for girls and women in the Middle Ages.

This trend persisted for quite some time. As late as 1918, *Ladies' Home Journal*, a leading women's magazine in the U.S. at the time, wrote: “The ge



In 1606, painter Jacob Bunel portrayed French King Henry IV in a luxurious light red-purple robe. “Red means the ruler is willing to fight and shed his blood for the people, for the country.” — Stefan-Maria Mittendorf, art historian

nerally accepted rule is pink for the boys and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.”

Over time, circumstances changed. Monarchies fell, democracies emerged. Fabrics and dyes became easier to obtain and no longer had to be laboriously produced using natural pigments. Industrialisation gave people outside the wealthy elite access to income, among many other shifts. For centuries, the general population had to make do with muted colors and simple clothing — but now, new possibilities arose. Old structures broke down, much changed, and with it, people's sense of fashion and color evolved as well.

But first, the two World Wars gave rise to a new and somber spirit of the times. Etiquette books and fashion journals advised mothers to dress their children in gender-specific colors to reinforce traditional gender roles. But which color should represent which gender? Surveys at the time still showed divided opinions.

From the 1960s onwards, however, pink became firmly associated with girls and light blue with boys. There are several theories about this shift in color conventions. One popular explanation suggests that the workwear of craftsmen, factory workers, sailors, and others helped to “masculinise” the

color blue. Meanwhile, the launch of the first Barbie doll in pink packaging in 1959 reinforced pink as a girls' color — suddenly, pink became every girl's favourite.



Lionel Messi's pink jersey featuring the Inter Miami CF logo.

Associating boys with blue and girls with pink is still seen as unshakable by most parents today — and by many soccer fans as well. When the men's national soccer team took the field at the 2024 European Championship wearing their new pink jerseys, it definitely sparked conversation among fans. Pink jerseys for soccer players?

Interesting Pink Things

In 2023, the Pantone Institute, which announces the trend colour every year, chose the intense, pulsating shade „Viva Magenta.“ By the way, in 2020, it was Classic Blue.

June 23 is a holiday in the USA: National Pink Day.

The pink ribbon is an international symbol of solidarity with women affected by breast cancer.

Pink lakes can be found all over the world. The pink colour is caused by salt-loving microorganisms such as algae and bacteria, which produce pigments in highly concentrated saltwater.

To curb unpredictable and aggressive behaviour from inmates, prison walls were painted pink.

The city of Jaipur in India is known as the „Pink City“ due to its many heritage buildings painted in pink.

Pink is appetising; pastries served on pink plates are believed to taste better.

Has the Pink Jersey of the German National Team Signaled the End of Masculinity?

But no, because pink jerseys are not new in men's football. Juventus Turin first wore pink in 1898, before switching to the legendary black-and-white stripes in 1903. And Argentine football star Lionel Messi wore the pink shade „Pantone 1895C“ on matchdays for the US club Inter Miami. His pink jersey was named by the New York Times in the fall of 2023 as the „hottest piece of sports apparel on the planet.“ Color expert Nils-Holger Wien commented that the new German national team shirt was „perfectly in tune with the spirit of the times.“

By the way, pink is a color mixture made from red with a touch of blue and white. It combines blue and red, the masculine and the feminine, with a bit of white for transparency and lightness. This is a beautiful and contemporary symbolism that gives us hope that stereotypical boundaries will continue to blur.

At the 2022 Bond premiere, Daniel Craig led the way by appearing in a stunning pink velvet jacket.

So, we can look forward to seeing whether James Bond will soon be racing around in a pink Aston Martin or if BYK-Gardner will launch new equipment in pink instead of the traditional blue. In both cases, the quality will remain unaffected. ■

Carola Gaulke, BYK Instruments



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