

Why So Blue? Crucial, vibrant, beautiful cobalt: one writer's

Crucial, vibrant, beautiful cobalt: one writer's tribute to an ocean hue **BY PEGGY PAYNE**

F COLORS COULD GET OSCARS, ONE BRILLIANT SPLASH would dominate, year after year. Imagine: "For special effects, the Oscar goes to ... cobalt!" From the celebrity audience rises a supermodel-tall typhoon of color; she whirls across the stage. Awed presenters step back. Cobalt needs no microphone. From deep within her spinning vortex comes a bell-like voice: "I want to thank the ocean, and the amazing sky. And a few gorgeous flowers—you know who you are."

Cobalt seems to thrum with mysterious power, which is the reason, I'm convinced, that this deep, rich blue turns up again and again as a—or *the*—color of any season. There's no other that gives off such a radiant, almost mystical aura or that has such eerie chemistry. Certainly there are other admirable hues—tangerine, emerald—having their brief moments, and you can no doubt argue well on behalf of your own favorite. But cobalt is the one that persistently draws a crowd and holds an uncanny attraction.

Mrs. Obama wears it. Kardashians wear it. Even lobsters are wearing it: A Nova Scotia fisherman's catch of a natural-born cobalt lobster made the news last summer.

I am so entranced by this shade that my husband complains that I only pretend to show him many different color choices when in fact they are all cobalt. The color is so unmistakable that it regularly finds its way into the headlines of taste-making publications: "Killer Cobalt," "High-Voltage Cobalt," "Electric Cobalt," "Crazy for Cobalt," "The Icy-Hot Shade," "This Season's Haute Hue."

A startling array of products is now available in this obsessively mystifying shade: bricks honestly, who buys blue bricks?—water bottles, kitchen tools, contact lenses, and even a diaper-changing pad. "Paris has been saturated in cobalt," said a writer at fashionista .com of a recent Fashion Week. Retail giant and trendsetter IKEA goes so far as to paint its retail buildings this mesmerizing hue (with, admittedly, a touch of yellow for contrast).

Consumers have even been warned of late not to get in too deep: "There's no reason to take the cobalt craze to the extreme," warned one Web site, suggesting its use for accessories rather than total immersion. Singer Beyoncé, who named her firstborn Blue, is frequently seen in cobalt. All very well, says one of her critics, but "is it OK to constantly rerun the same cobalt nail polish?"

So what are the specifics of its power to seduce? For one thing, it's elemental: Cobalt is a full-fledged element with an atomic number, an atomic weight. The same cannot be said for celery or ecru. Cobalt is a metal that has magnetic properties, is used for batteries, is found deep in the Earth and in meteors. The name comes from Old German *kobold*, which means "mischievous spirit." This spirit is a component of vitamin B12, and with some tampering,

it becomes radioactive and is used to treat cancer. Small amounts are important for health; large amounts are poison. It is both crucial and lethal, and beautiful.

Its vibrancy gives it a spiritual aura, from High Church to New Age. It is "a divine color," said Vincent Van Gogh, who used it liberally in his famous *Starry Night*. And of course, with its alchemical response to light, it's a staple of stained glass. Those who ferret out or assign psychological meanings typically say it's the color of clarity and truth.

But, truly, no ferreting is needed. We have only to look. One bit of blue sea glass alone convinces me that this is the color of beauty, truth, clarity, magic. Cobalt reflects the very spirit of the shore.

Peggy Payne's previous novel, Sister India, *was on* The New York Times *list of notable books. Her third novel,* Cobalt Blue, *was released in March 2013.*