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Heraldic Design Core Style - Why Group Theory Makes Better Armory
(or, how to register what you want and comply with SENA!)

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Introduction

Who I am

I am Viscountess Krysta of Starfall, and I have been active in the West College of Heralds since 1985. I have served the College as Greencloak, Compline, Vesper, Black Mark, and now Green Crown, which is the clerk of the College. I have also been on Brachet staff - commenting on the names and devices submitted by other kingdoms, and I am currently on Laurel staff as a Letter of Acceptance and Returns editor and proofreader, and on Wreath staff participating in the decision process for the registration of armory - devices and badges.

What SCA "Core Style" is based on

Our "core style" is based on the dominant style in medieval Western Europe, the Anglo-Norman style.

What SENA does

SENA is structured to encourage "core style" design that would look like heraldry to a mid- to late- middle ages person from northwestern Europe, possibly excluding Germany and Poland. The cultures in these two areas developed some different ideas about contrast in heraldic design, and also about pictorial representation. (examples from Rolls…)

Tinctures and the contrast theory

Tinctures and their Classifications: Tinctures are primarily divided into colors and metals. Colors and metals are said to have good contrast with one another. Each tincture may be depicted in a variety of shades; contrast is determined not by their shade, but by their categorization into color and metal. Shades that are overly pastel may be considered too light to be registered; baby blue is not an acceptable shade of *azure*.

The colors are *azure* (blue), *gules* (red), *sable* (black), *vert* (green), and *purpure* (purple).

The metals are *argent* (white or silver) and *Or* (yellow or gold). We capitalize *Or* for clarity, but do not capitalize other tinctures.

Other heraldic tinctures (eg. sanguine, tenne) may only be registered as part of an Individually Attested Pattern.

Furs are a group of named patterns used as tinctures. Furs are treated as a single tincture; a fur may combine any listed color with any listed metal. For example, *gules ermined Or* and *vairy argent and sable* are both considered single tinctures. For the purposes of classification, ermined furs are grouped in the same way as their background color. *Ermine* (a white background with black tails) and *erminois* (a yellow background with black tails) are metals. *Counter-ermine* (a black background with white tails) and *pean* (a black background with yellow tails) are colors.

Proper is a term used for a charge in its "natural" or "standard" tincture. Items that were used in *proper* tinctures in period armory may be used. A list of proper tinctures is found in the Glossary of Terms. Any animal (not including monsters) that can be brown in nature can be blazoned as a *brown X proper*. Such an animal would be expected to be completely brown, as opposed to drawn naturalistically. Similarly, tools that can reasonably be wooden can be described as a *wooden X proper*, and are brown. Brown is considered to be a color, not a metal, and it is not identical to black or *sable*. While a few monsters have a defined *proper*, most of them do not because they do not exist in nature. Thus, monsters constructed from animals which can otherwise be *proper* may not be *proper*.

For example, a *rose proper* is defined to be *gules barbed vert seeded Or*. Some proper animals include: *a brown bear proper, a brown falcon proper,* and *a brown rabbit proper.* Tools and other wooden objects include: *a wooden staff proper, a wooden barrel proper.* A heraldic *dolphin proper* is green with red fins while a *natural dolphin proper* is light grey (effectively argent).

In general, charges that do not have a heraldically defined *proper* may be described as *proper* when a normal person would be able to color them appropriately from knowing only the sort of item with no further color description. So, a tree, a thistle, and an elephant can be *proper*. On the other hand, a female American kestrel, an Arctic fox in winter phase, or a bay horse cannot be *proper*.

In heraldry, good contrast is defined by the ability to identify a shape or a line of division at a great distance. So, tinctures that are "dark" (the colors and color-based furs) contrast well with tinctures that are "light" (the metals and metal-based furs).

Furs such as *vair* and *potent* are two different patterns of multiple pieces in blue and white by default. As they are made up of multiple pieces, divided evenly between a color and a metal, they are treated as neutral and are considered to have good contrast with both colors and metals, as long as they do not share a tincture with the color or metal.

In like manner, a field that is equally divided between color and metal are considered "neutral" and may have charge(s) placed on it of color OR metal, as long as the charge(s) do not share a tincture with the field.

There are some colors which have VERY poor contrast with each other - so poor that at any distance it is hard to tell there are two colors or how they are divided on a field. Some low-contrast complex line combinations which have been ruled unregisterable, even when there is no overlying charge, are: sable and purpure, sable and azure, azure and purpure.

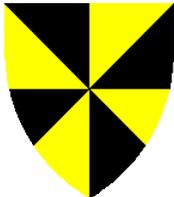# Charges - ordinary and downright odd

http://heraldry.sca.org/armory/lessons/index.html

(from Heraldry for Non-Heralds - Cormac Mor, Wreath King of Arms - http://heraldry.sca.org/armory/newprimer/)

There are eight ordinaries in heraldry. They are:

	Pale		Chevron
	Fess		Cross
	Bend		Saltire
	Bend sinister		Pall

The field divisions are based on the Ordinaries, and are named after them, including per pall, not shown here - except for gyronny, which isn't named after a regular ordinary, it is named after a peripheral ordinary called a gyron:

	Per pale		Per chevron
	Per fess		Quarterly
	Per bend		Per saltire
	Per bend sinister		Gyronny

With the exception of gyronny, each of these field divisions can be two colors, two metals, or any combination of fur variants that are the equivalent. Due to gyronny's more complex nature, it must be one color (or fur equivalent) and one metal (or fur equivalent). As a side note to my Viking readers, pre-heraldic Viking shield designs frequently used gyronny, particularly a variant on it called gyronny arrondi:
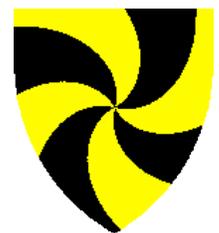
The field divisions above are all done with straight lines, but you can use different types of lines to achieve the same result. Here are some of the various *complex lines of division*:
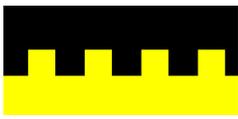
	Dovetailed		Embattled
	Engrailed		Indented
	Invected		Nebuly
	Raguly		Rayonny
	Urdy		Wavy

These lines of division can also be applied to charges!

You can do other things to the field besides divide it. You can scatter small charges all over it. As long as they're identifiable and adhere to the rule of tincture, the sky's the limit on what you can scatter. There should be at least seven of them, and should be spaced relatively equally about the field, as in this example:
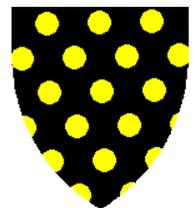
Apart from the ordinaries, there is a separate set of charges known as *subordinaries*. These charges are also known as *peripheral ordinaries*, as they stay along the edges, or periphery, of the field. They are:

Chief	Gyron
Base	Bordure
Tierce	Orle
Quarter	Gore
Canton	Flaunches

Charges: There are many specifically "heraldic" depictions of real animals, birds, and everyday objects that can be used as charges, and there are some charges that just are charges in heraldry - you don't see them in the world. There are also some specific combinations that create heraldic "monsters" which were common charges, but do not and did not exist for real.

http://mistholme.com/pictorial-dictionary-of-heraldry/#alphalist

The charges need to be described in enough detail that an artist could draw the device from the words. So, the things we need to describe are - how many, what tincture, what layout in relation to other charges if there is more than one, and what orientation relative to the top and bottom of the shield shape. Sometimes the placement on the shield shape will be needed too, if there is only one or two things, or they are not right in the center.

Some odd charges:
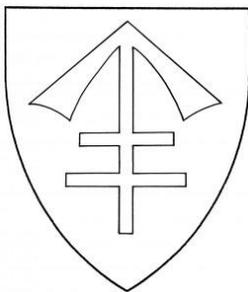
Polish Cypher charges   Stirrups   Yoke   Rake head(s)
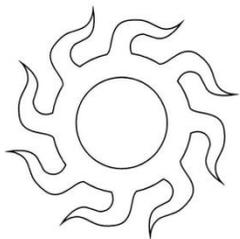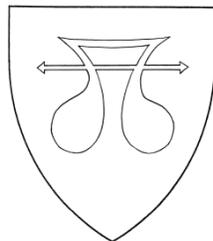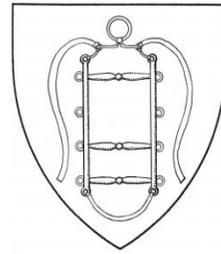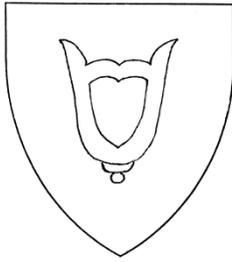

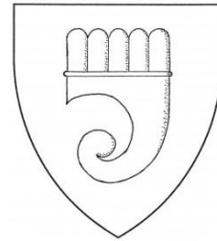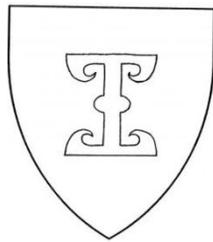Attire in annulo   Water-bouget   Fleam   Maunche   Ape Clog
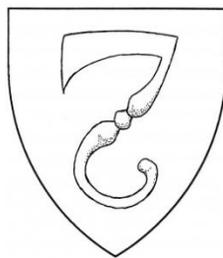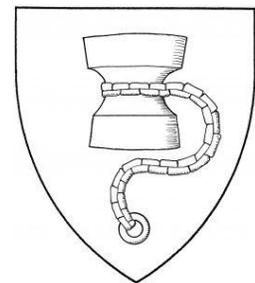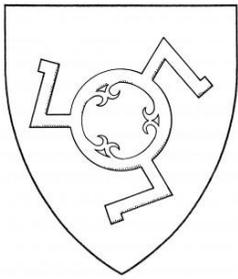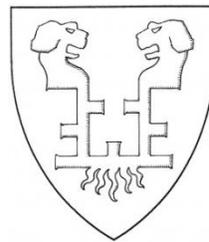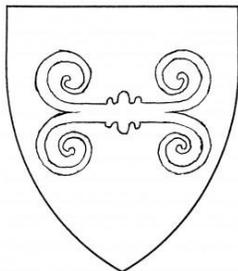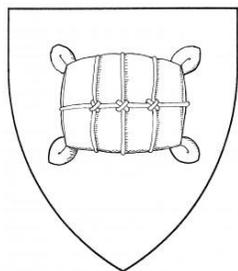
Trivets
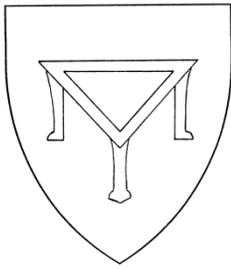
Crampet

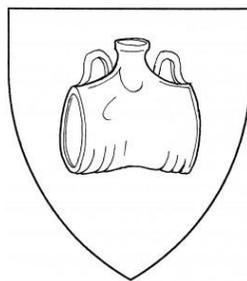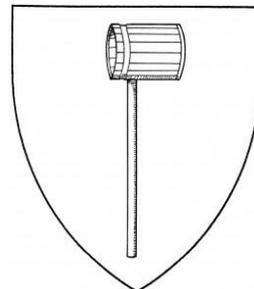Bridle

Clarion

Heraldic panther

Zule

Pair of dog-headed andirons

Anille
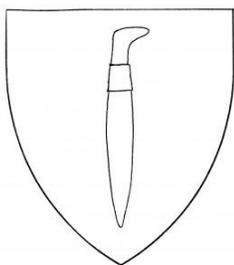

Bag of madder

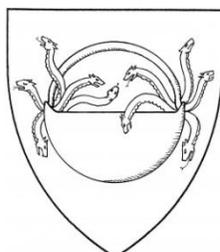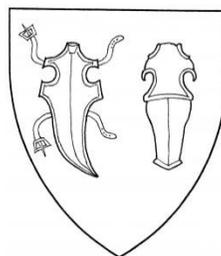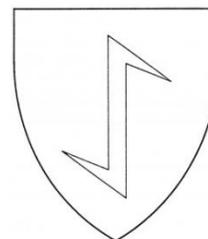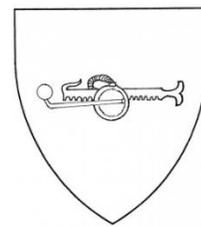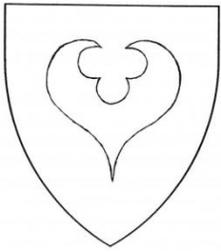Leather bottell

Brewer's scoop

Burnisher

Caldera gringolada

Chamfron

Crampon

Cranequin
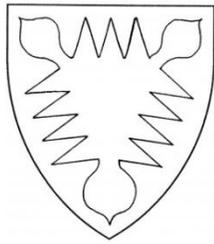
Seeblat Nesselblatt Schneke Schnecke issuant Vegetable lamb
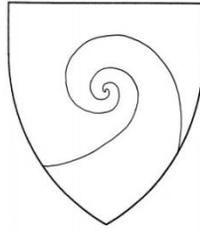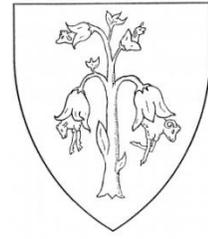
from base maintaining

on its outer swirl three schneckes

Building your design - look, an Onion (or a parfait...never mind)

Armorial Design is a process of layering. In the core style we try to follow, there are some limits to keep the design identifiable.

- No more than three layers - the field, even if divided, is one layer. Anything laying on the field is layer 2, and anything on the layer 2 items is layer 3.
    - A few charges, like the heraldic panther (which has spots) and the double-rose may appear to add a fourth layer
    - Pierced charges may appear to add a fourth layer
- No more complex than eight different "elements" (counting tinctures and charges, but not field divisions or divided charges)
        http://www.heraldica.org/topics/glossary/atlas.htm

III. Group Theory

   Which parts are comparable? AKA Conflict checking

When you compare one design to another, you compare:

- the field to the field,
- the primary charge group to the primary charge group;
- the secondary charge group to the secondary charge group
  - (and peripheral ordinaries CAN'T be primary, so even if that is all you have, they compare to the SECONDARIES),
- the tertiary charge group to the tertiary charge group.

For most designs, you will need to find 2 differences ("distinct changes" or DCs)

- Some very simple designs only need one, called a "substantial change" or SC
- A badge that is "fieldless" is automatically one difference from any other armory, even other fieldless badges, so only needs one DC)

Distinct Changes can be generated several ways, by having a different:

- Number of charges in a group
- Tincture (of at least half the field or group)
- Type (of at least half the group)
- Line of Division (type)
- Line of Division (complexity)
- Position (on the field or in relation to other charges)
- Orientation (direction relative to the top and bottom of the shield shape)

How to apply "art brain" to heraldic design

   "Art brain" wants to see a picture - landscape, or things riding things, or animate things holding inanimate things. Heraldic art lies more in the depiction than the composition. While it is important to draw all elements of a design boldly and clearly, some heraldic stylization can contribute TO the identifiability of a charge, while feeding the art brain.

IV.   How to Break the Rules (and get away with it!)

Germany and Poland (from Bruce Draconarius of Mistholme, Batonvert Herald Extraordinary's Regional Style Overview 2014
http://mistholme.com/miscellany/regional-style-overview-2014/)

German: Germanic armory includes the regions of Germany, plus Switzerland, Scandinavia, and others. There was a wider reliance on field-only armory here – many of our stranger field divisions are from German heraldry. (Note that, when a strange field division was used, the field was almost never charged.) As for the tinctures themselves, the use of furs was rare. Charges peculiar to Germanic heraldry include the nesselblatt, the seeblatt, and the frauenadler. Human figures were commonly shown, and frequently used the head and torso only (e.g., an armless demi-woman). Many of the more common charges were used in uncommon ways: attires bent in circles, sea-lions with their tails over their heads, chevrons issuant from odd points of the shield, etc. Up until c.1540, Hungarian heraldry was strongly influenced by German heraldry (barely distinguishable, actually). Then it began to develop the features which characterize it today: Many of the usual tinctures were seldom used; ermine and vair were almost unknown. Most fields were blue; most shields had green mounts or trimounts. Violations of the Rule of Contrast were common. Central ordinaries such as chevrons were uncommon; the usual motif was a single primary charge atop the mount. If there were secondaries, they were arranged around the primary, usually in chief. Turks (usually severed heads or otherwise bloodied) were found in roughly 1/6 of all Hungarian arms.

Polish: There are examples in period Polish heraldry of many of the "standard" charges: eagles, swords, bull's heads, spears, etc. But Polish heraldry is best known for its "ciphercharges", which possibly derived from tamga or runic marks of the nomads of Scythia. Heralds from outside Poland tried to blazon these cipher-charges as combinations of Western charges, such as crosses, broad-arrows, and horseshoes. Society heralds do the same: a cipher-charge can only be registered if it can be so blazoned. Fortunately, most can. Whatever the charges, Polish heraldry was frequently limited in tincture. About half of all Polish armory had a red field; about a third had a blue field. And 90% of the armory used argent charges only.

Some sources for period Rolls of Arms

Several here: http://heraldry.sca.org/armory/newprimer/h4f1.shtml

http://www.silverdragon.org/HERALDRY/ZurichRolls/zroadt2v.htm

http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/fr/csg/1084/282

If you want a design that is in violation of the core style rules, you can submit it using an Individually Attested Pattern. This requires finding depictions of actual period armory, drawn in period (not modern computer art showing the emblazon based on the period blazon). All elements in an Individually Attested Pattern must be found in that single time and place, including charges, arrangement of charge groups, and lines of division. Documentation under the Individually Attested Pattern rules does not exempt a design from conflict, presumption, or offense rules. Only independent devices count as examples. Multiple depictions of the same design, or of arms cadenced from an original device, are not independent examples. In general, three closely matching examples of the exact practice are sufficient to demonstrate a pattern. When closely matching examples are not found, six examples that bracket the submission in complexity should be sufficient.

V.   Design Practice and Q&A

So to practice good heraldic design, simpler is better. Contrast is your friend. Use the rules to your advantage.

Group theory helps us to design better armory because it keeps the designs simple and uncluttered, and discourages overly pictorial heraldry. It also enables us to compare two pieces of armory to assure they are different enough.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION