

Colours worth sharing

Why Resene's colour charts
have become a tool for
connecting with others.



When we talk about colours, we're often at a loss for words. Most people manage to get by with just 11: black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, orange, pink, purple and grey. Those who deal with colour at a professional level, like architects, designers and painters, are often able to provide a higher level of specificity, wielding verbal variants like emerald, violet or taupe. However, even these colourful descriptors still only represent a tiny fraction of the colours that human beings can distinguish.

In just five letters, the word 'green' alone encompasses the tremendous number of distinct variations of the verdant hue that people with standard vision are able to perceive. But linguistically, English only has verbiage for about 300 of them – and most of those have been borrowed from elsewhere. Emerald, celery, caper, olive, lime, mint, fern, forest, artichoke, seaweed and sage, for example, are all words we use to describe different varieties of green which have been introduced to the colour lexicon for their similarity to the noun they represent. Others, such as malachite, are named for the organic chemical and mineral compounds used to create the hue's pigment. All of which is to say, even if your colour vocabulary is well above average, you'll still be limited in how to describe a specific hue you may be keen to use in your project.

But then, you also have to factor in that communication is a two-way street. One person's olive may very well be another person's seaweed; so even if you can summon the words to describe the colour you're thinking of, there's no guarantee that those words are going to share the same meaning for your client.

Being able to see an unfathomable variety of different colours and distinguish between them all is also an entirely different story. If you were to move incrementally from absolute, fully saturated green to absolute neutral grey, there may be no noticeable change in each step. Some people may only be able to detect a discernible

did you know?

Company founder Ted Nightingale was inspired to brand the first waterborne paint in New Zealand 'Resene' because of the main ingredient of paint: resin.

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difference in every ten steps – or possibly every hundred steps – depending on their eyesight. Painters and designers, though, can train their eyes to perceive even the slightest differences in shade, tint and tone; and that means that if you consider yourself a colour professional, you may be equipped with a much broader palette of perceivable hues than the average person.

You or your client could also be among the hundreds of millions of people worldwide with a colour vision deficiency, which is most commonly referred to as 'colour blindness'. There are many different types of colour blindness, and while it's extremely rare for it to impact the entire spectrum, each form significantly affects how colours are perceived between viewers.

If we can't be sure that we're visualising the same things, or that we're even perceiving the same hue if it's right in front of us, talking about colour becomes rather tricky – or, it would be, if not for a very handy tool that we often take for granted: Resene colour charts.

The real deal

Part of what makes Resene colour charts such valuable tools is that the swatches aren't just a highly accurate representation of what your chosen paint hue is going to look like – they're the real thing. From Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen to Resene FX Metallic, the colour swatch chips are made using the same paint you would use on your projects. Being able to rely on what you see on swatches, charts and fandecks as true representations of the actual paint colour you're after means you actually get what you see.



above: Resene still has the BS101 (2660) and BS5252 standards today. However, they've gotten much more sophisticated. Today, Resene gives each colour electronic spectral 'coordinates'; and once those are created, they become fixed. "Colour reflects back to your eye part of the spectrum of light, so if the light changes, the colour changes. If we change the pigments, we have to ensure that the metamerism remains the same – that it's still a match under a range of lights," says Resene Technical Director Colin Gooch. Resene Moon Mist (wall and plinth tops) and Resene Flax (tabletop and plinth sides) were among some of the first colours offered by Resene.

opposite: After 75 years of creating beautiful colours, Resene has a lot to celebrate – including these cheerful and timeless favourites. Wall and plate in Resene Sorrento with arches and floor in Resene Zumthor, table in Resene Chenin, cake in Resene Paper Doll with ribbons in Resene Japonica, chair and cake stand in Resene Green Meets Blue, party favours and gift boxes in Resene Japonica, Resene Sorrento, Resene Pearl Lusta and Resene Green Meets Blue and wrapped gifts in Resene Wallpaper Collection EAR202 (small) and Resene Wallpaper Collection OY34401 (large).

-  Resene Pearl Lusta
-  Resene Zumthor
-  Resene Moon Mist
-  Resene Flax
-  Resene Sorrento





Resene Pearl Lusta

Resene Black White

Resene Sorrento

left: Resene SpaceCote waterborne enamel was a breakthrough product for Resene, one that is incredibly popular today. “Not only did we design the paint, Resene designed the pigment that went into the paint – which is the thing that gives Resene SpaceCote some of its magic,” says Colin. Wall and plinth sides in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Juniper, plinth and tabletops in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Blue Smoke and party favours and gift boxes in Resene Green Meets Blue, Resene Japonica, Resene Pearl Lusta and Resene Sorrento.

Resene Juniper Resene Blue Smoke Resene Green Meets Blue

A very important person in making that happen is Dianne Connell, Resene’s Colour Controller. For the past 30 years, Dianne has maintained the overall control of Resene’s meticulous colour standards. She works with Resene’s marketing team to monitor the progression of colour trends and identify the hues that will make up the latest edition of the Resene The Range fashion colours fandeck and helps with the update and creation of other charts as needed.

Creating a new fandeck is a big task, one that includes researching potential new colours, selecting which ones will get mocked up, working through the laboratory formulas and approving proofs of the final products. Each fandeck takes over 12 months from first research to finished fandeck, and it’s Dianne who makes sure each and every hue meets Resene’s exacting colour standards. But how those standards came to be is another story.

A royal standard

At the end of 1979, Resene released the British Standard Specification 101 Colour Range. As its name suggests, the hues were part of a standard developed in the United Kingdom to identify and code colours for special purposes – particularly for building and decorative paints.

“This was a watershed colour chart for Resene because it required us to make the move into tinters. Prior to that, we only had a few different colour charts available, which were mostly focused on certain products such as Stipplecote concrete colours and semi-gloss enamels,” says Colin Gooch, Resene Technical Director.

Before tinters, the process for making paint was much less refined. As Colin puts it, “they would take some sticky stuff, mix some pigments in and then hope that it would come out to the right colour.”

It was a difficult thing to get a certain colour right, he says. “Most pigments were powders, which were difficult to control. Powders tend to stick together; you have to grind and grind and grind to get them to separate, so it’s quite a tricky and lengthy process and you could only have a relatively small number of colours available for that. If you ran out of a colour, it could be weeks before the next batch was ready.”

But when tinting systems came into existence in 1969, it was a game changer. These pre-dispersed pigments were much simpler to use – you just needed a base and to pour the liquid tinter into it. Plus, you’d have a formula that could be replicated time and time again, so you’d never run out of a colour.

Another thing that was different was Resene’s approach to the standard itself. Other companies would just pick which colours

they wanted to use in their work, as producing all 101 different colours – and doing it consistently – was too daunting a prospect. But Resene had the full range on offer.

“We put a lot of work into the system of building colour, but then once we were able to get technical in doing that, the better the aesthetic and the more creative we could get with the colours we were able to produce,” says Colin.

Insatiable desire

While offering up those first 101 colours was a ground-breaking move at the time, it wasn’t long before the appetite for even more colours grew.

“The decision to do BS2660 was driven by the architects,” says Colin. “David Launder, who had recently returned from the UK, brought the chart and presented it to Tony Nightingale, who was in charge of Resene at the time. He was particularly keen on having us replicate some of the strong colours. But Tony determined that we would do the whole lot. It was a ‘build it and they will come’ sort of idea.”

“The swinging 60s brought an explosion of colour and pizzazz. Resene Hippy Green came out and using bright splashes of colour like that suited the times. Younger architects, in particular, who wanted to make an impact were really interested in using these colours, so we had to get it right.”

Strength in numbers

Colin says the release of the BS5252 colour chart was another significant milestone with a whopping 252 hues on offer. However, the chart was still just a Resene version of the British system. The real magic happened when Resene began creating a system of its own.

“There are only a limited number of colours that can be derived from natural sources. “It’s manmade colours that have expanded

the colour palette,” explains Colin. “Ochres are very stable, they’ve taken on everything that Mother Nature can throw at them. Red oxide will stay red forever. But manmade pigments are far more delicate and tend to fade more. So, the challenge has always been to create synthetic pigments that can resist the elements – to try to recreate the beauty and durability of natural pigments, and do it consistently.”

“When we started making our own tinters and when tinting production was brought in-house, it caused us to really beef up our expertise in that space and it gave us the ability to be more creative. We created new bases like red and yellow when everyone else was using white, which allowed us to get into bright greens and blue reds. It allowed us to expand our colour base and our core colour offering, which is a significant part of Resene.”

Colours for every surface

Another crucial development came when Resene began expanding from decorative paints into industrial and heavy-duty paints. “The tinters for the architectural paints were somewhat delicate, so we decided to make a set of industrial tinters that we would match to the architectural colours. Architectural paints were mostly waterborne or solventborne, but protective coatings had to go into all sorts of different bases and be made of all sorts of different things.”

Colin says this choice was among Resene’s greatest challenges, but it was a decision that laid the foundation for the biggest colour development in the company’s history. In 1985, the Total Colour Multi-finish System was launched. Combining an extensive range of colours with interlinked tinting systems for both interior and exterior, the flexibility and adaptability of this colour system was welcomed with open arms by specifiers and decorators alike.

“The launch of the Resene Total Colour System was significant to the business. The ability to offer colour across the entire range, decorative, architectural and industrial, was a world first – one that wasn’t matched for more than 15 years,” says Colin.

“All we wanted to do initially was make good paint. But in order to make good paint, you have to make good colour – the two go hand-in-hand. Other companies looked at colour as an adjunct to what they produced. What Resene looked to do was to create the good colour first, and then the product had to live up to that colour.”

“Resene also decided to go lead-free at a time when everyone was still using lead, so we were trying to combat making the same calibre of colour in products without lead, which added another layer of difficulty. There are always challenges to keeping up with

Resene’s first colour chart was for its Stipplecote cement paint – a product that company founder Ted Nightingale began formulating in his garage. Wall and box in Resene Pearl Lusta, table in Resene Vanquish and ribbons and party favours in Resene Japonica.



did you know?

Resene was the first company to offer a full range of testpots in New Zealand in 1981. The range of testpots has grown since those early years, and not only do these iconic 60ml containers give designers and their clients the freedom to test out Resene colours in situ but they have also helped many small businesses and artists to experiment with colour in their own work and many DIYers to add colour to their small projects.

-  Resene Japonica
-  Resene Vanquish
-  Resene Hippy Green

health and safety requirements, as they can also affect colour stability, but making everything in-house gave us – and continues to give us – the ability to be more agile.”

Continuing to innovate

Since the establishment of the Resene Total Colour System, having enough colours to choose from is no longer a common issue. In the 1980s and 90s, Resene began to focus on finding ways to present and curate their collection in a way that was more useful for specifiers.

First came the Resene Whites colour range, which brought together classic, contemporary and favourite colours that appealed to designers who were seeking subtlety in their projects, making it easier than ever to get just the right white. Resene Black White, currently Resene’s most popular colour, was part of that initial collection but only reached number 1 status in recent years. 1999 saw Resene Managing Director Nick Nightingale launch what has since become the epitome of colour tools: the aforementioned Resene The Range fashion colours fandeck.

Let’s get physical

Mixing paint colours is called subtractive colour, so the colour you see is the colour that the paint does not absorb. For example, yellow paint appears yellow because it absorbs all colours except yellow. Mixing ‘light’ colours, which are identifiable by electronic RGB values, is called additive colour. This means that the object gives out (emits) colour. A television uses additive colour because it emits colour. Even if the room is completely dark, if you turn the television on you can still see the colour. Due to these different colour systems and the limitations of the RGB colour system, the RGB colour system portrays some paint colours better than others, which is why it’s always best to view a physical colour sample before making your final choice.

“Creating the fashion range, which produces new, up to date colours every two years, has allowed us to link our colours with the latest fashions. It also meant that we needed to continue innovating and putting new colours out there so that we wouldn’t go stale – and now, people associate us with our fashion colours,” says Nick.

“The full colour range can also be overwhelming, so having a smaller fandeck with those innovative isolators that allow you to view the swatch with neutral surroundings makes it much easier to use it for creating palettes of coordinating colours.”

A few years after the first The Range fashion colours, Resene created the first The Range Whites & Neutrals fandeck, with favourite Resene whites and neutrals and multiple strength variations for each colour. It was the first of its kind in the world and instantly became a go-to colour tool for neutral colour choices.

The gold standard

After 75 years of development and innovation, Resene colour charts have become a phenomenal way to give us words to describe even the most minutely differing hues. And given that they’re produced with a technical level of sophistication that eliminates subjectivity, using them as a reference for sharing colour with clients means that there is no longer any grey area in the conversation. Today, when someone mentions Resene Duck Egg Blue, we can be confident that the same calming, pale shell hue appears collectively in our imaginations.

Golden rules for choosing colours

1. Electronic colours should be used for ideas, inspiration and visualisation only.
2. Use real physical colour samples for colour specification.
3. Ensure that your chosen Resene colour is tinted into Resene paint using the exclusive Resene decorative tinters and formulation to get exactly the colour you chose. It’s the only way to ensure that your specified Resene colour will be accurate. Don’t settle for anything less.

Resene Merino

Resene Duck Egg Blue

did you know?

Resene was started in 1946 by an Eastbourne builder, Ted Nightingale, who needed an alkali resistant paint to cover his concrete buildings. There was nothing available at the time, so in typical Kiwi style he developed his own – in a cement mixer in his garage! In response to demand from other builders, Ted commenced producing his paint on a commercial basis under the brand name Stipplecote.

More and more, Resene colour charts have been morphing into a system for communicating colour far beyond paint and coatings. “There have been a number of other industries, from laminates to linens, cushions to curtains, and many more that have moved to using Resene’s colours for their own products to help them coordinate with Resene colours. It’s become more of a standard for colour, not unlike systems like Pantone,” says Nick.

Part of what makes Resene’s colour charts a particularly suitable system from a regional perspective is that they’ve been designed to work with – and to withstand – our unique lighting conditions. “The light in our part of the world puts a lot of demands on our colours. Getting great reds is always a challenge, but yellow and orange are a challenge here as well because you have to factor in UV light levels,” explains Colin.

The names that are given to Resene hues are another important part of why people are drawn to using them as a colour language. Resene runs regular competitions to gather in more colour name ideas and keeps a running list of many thousands of options. “We’ve always used evocative names, but we really wanted to give colour personality – and I think we do a good job of that,” says Nick.

Technological advancements have also given Resene the ability to innovate in the digital realm. Tools like the Resene Colour Palette Generator (www.resene.com/palettegenerator), Resene Find-a-Colour (www.resene.com/findacolour) and Resene ColourMatch (www.resene.com/colourmatchonline) have given instant inspiration and answers to questions that might once have been time consuming to find answers for.

“We have never allowed the size of the task of changing to daunt us from changing. The need to change is constant – if you want continuous improvement and continuous innovation, you have to be willing to change,” says Colin.



above: Some of the most important colour charts from Resene’s history, including Stipplecote cement paint colours and the first Resene The Range fashion colours fandeck. Background in Resene Merino.

“While Resene’s commitment to innovation and quality is part of our success story, we can’t overlook the important role that architects, designers, developers and those in the construction and painting industries have played in our progress,” adds Nick. “They’ve been instrumental in pushing us to keep evolving and trying new things, and it’s the enthusiasm and excitement that they share in our colours and products that make us want to keep developing what we offer.” **BW**

Resene has been gathering together an archive of memories, and we would love to add more. If you have any old photos, historic or personal anecdotes, please share those memories with us at www.resene.com/help-us-find-our-history.

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