



Formulating success

After more than 50 years working for Resene, Technical Director Colin Gooch is living history.

When Colin Gooch moved to New Zealand from Sunderland, England in 1963, it wasn't with the intention to take on a niche role as a specialised chemist for a groundbreaking innovative paint company. His first job after arriving in Auckland was for a resin manufacturer, Polymer Corporation, in technical service and sales. Resene, which at the time was known as Stipplecote, was one of his clients until Tony Nightingale offered him a job in 1970. These were very early days

in Resene's history, and the team was small, so it wasn't long after that Colin took on the role of Chief Chemist.

"There was just a sales manager at the time, an accountant, Tony and I – so it was a pretty lean machine," says Colin. "I was the sole chemist until we added a night shift, and then of course we had to find someone else to man those hours."

In June 1973, his role evolved further and he was named Technical Director. Just months apart, he was also made Fellow

in the Technology of Surface Coatings (FTSC). These aren't titles many 30 year old immigrants without a university degree can boast to hold. But then again, most people aren't like Colin.

"New Zealand was certainly a land of opportunity for me. I'm sure I never would have been able to occupy a role such as I do now had I stayed in England. Resene was my first job in the paint industry, and I worked hard. I did have ambitions of going to university, but it didn't work out that way. I was able to take a tertiary course through a professional organisation on paint, and it lasted about three years. They were only able to run that programme once, but I was fortunate to be able to do that."

Colin will always bring up the calibre of people he's been able to work with over the years as key to his advancements.

"I've made a career out of cultivating smart people," he says. "As the sole chemist, I knew that I needed to be exposed to other minds and other people, especially people in highly technical roles. And by working with good, smart people, the meeting and exchanging of ideas is always exhilarating."



Colin's favourite colour, chemically speaking, is chrome green oxide – a compound you'll find in Resene Fern. "It's incredibly durable; it's inert and kind so it never gives me any worries whatsoever. Plus, it's a pleasant colour."

Resene Fern

Resene Zen

left: Despite his abundance of knowledge about paints, coatings and colour, Colin says, "I can always learn something from everyone. No matter who they are, there's got to be something they know better than me that I can learn from them." Wall in Resene Zen and tabletop in Resene Flax.

"A lot of the sort of chemistry we do starts off as just that: an idea. You're doing mental experiments and wondering about putting things together. Sometimes it can be novel, and you go to the lab bench, and then it works – and the excitement of that is just the best. You think of something, and then it becomes something."

But Colin's unending thirst for knowledge and continuous improvement can't be overlooked, either. It's not a skill that can be learned at university; it's a quality you either have or you don't – one that's practically fused into Colin's DNA.

"No one really goes into chemistry thinking that they're going to be a paint chemist. You just sort of fall into it. There are so many disciplines involved, all the things that you really need to know. It isn't just the paint itself. We have something like 1,200 raw materials at Resene. The challenge that I gave myself is that I would like to be able to specify each and every one of them. I haven't achieved that, and I don't think I ever will – but it's a huge challenge, though. Someone might know slightly more about a certain substrate than I do, but I've got to be the one who knows the second most."

"Even if I knew everything I know now back when I started, I'd still only know 10% of what I want to know. The complexities that are revealed as you work just show how little we as humans know. Even the simplest of things are far more complex than you think."

"There is always a reason something works or doesn't work, and I have to find that reason."

According to Nick Nightingale, Resene's current Managing Director – and the grandson of the company's founder, Ted – Colin's contribution to Resene and the New Zealand paint and building industry is immense. "Colin has been the backbone of our technical team for over 50 years and is responsible for the many technical developments and innovations that have helped set Resene on the path to success based on quality and innovation. He and my late father Tony Nightingale challenged each other in way that I can only describe as creative tension. The challenges of innovation and the desire to be the best drove them, both had a love of colour."

"We would not be what we are today or even here were it not for Colin's efforts. On a personal level, I have relied on his sage advice and expertise for my tenure at Resene."

"I believe my title should be 'security blanket,'" Colin says. "A lot of my role now is in three areas: mentoring, looking at 'blue sky' opportunities and being the basket that things get thrown into when they become a bit too difficult."

One example of something others perceived as being 'too hard' was when the New Zealand supplier of galvanised steel changed their finishing process. It was a move that meant the paint systems being used no longer operated the way they were supposed to.

"We were definitely under some constraints there," says Colin. "The rest of the industry were able to fix the issue by switching back to a lead-based primer, but I didn't want us to do that. I conceived a possible solution, and I made it, and it worked, so we put it out on the market as Resene Galvo One. When the barrier came down on lead and chromate, other companies floundered. Resene Galvo One is still around today and popular as a galvanised primer."

"From conception to getting it right on the first try, and then having it go on to such strong success – I have always had such affection for that product."

Colin says that it's also the company itself and the things that make Resene unique that has made his path a successful one.

"When I was hired, the company was hungry. We wanted to take on the world – and nothing has given us greater pleasure than doing something better than others."

"There are companies that single Resene out to have 'blue sky' talks with us – and there are not too many companies of this level around. They set aside time to talk to us and they tell us how much they look forward to doing it. It's amazing how much a small company can establish being such a strong colleague to major institutions. Resene is not one of the biggest paint companies,

but it is one of the most respected – and we're thankful to have earned that sort of reputation."

For those who are considering a similar path, Colin offers up this astute advice.

"First of all, I'd point out that being a paint chemist is addictive – and if you take the right attitude into it, it's pure excitement. Get to know the basics, but allow your mind to jumble them up – and your mind will do some nice things in that interaction. People talk about intuition, but I think the mind is just making connections between stuff you already know. And be prepared to get dirty."

But he also recommends sticking to a medium-sized private company, like he did. "The freedom that you get in a smaller company is fantastic. I never felt any technical constraints whatsoever. That's a wonderful freedom to be given. I've never had to be confined to 'learning' our company's knowledge – I've gotten to make it." **BW**

style Laura Lynn Johnston

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Resene Colins Wicket, described on the reverse of Resene paint chips as 'a clever ochre green with a warm personality' was named after Colin. The hue itself was chosen because Colin's favourite cricket wicket is a slow wicket, which is captured in the colour.



Colin's insatiable desire for quality and continuous improvement has had a profound impact on Resene throughout his five decade long tenure on the company's technical team. He has played a role in formulating nearly all of Resene's products, including specifier favourites like Resene SpaceCote, Resene Lumbersider and Resene Colorwood. Wall in Resene Zen, tabletop in Resene Flax.

