



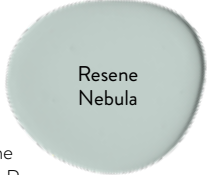
# Hues from the heart

**Designer Marylou Sobel shares how colour and passion have guided her long and successful career.**

There are few design professionals working today who have cultivated a deeper connection to both the spaces they create and the colours that define them than Marylou Sobel. During her nearly four decades of experience, Marylou’s career has spanned continents and blossomed into a flourishing practice in Sydney. The impressive array of thoughtfully executed projects under her belt speaks to the evolution of her colour and design philosophy – one that is deeply intertwined with both her personal journey and the changes she has witnessed in the industry over the years.

Born and raised in Johannesburg, Marylou had a crystal-clear vision for what she was meant to do with her life. “I wanted to be an interior decorator from the age of eight,” she recalls. Back then, the concept of interior design as a formal profession was unfamiliar to her, but she followed her instincts and pursued a formal education in the field, studying Interior Design at TAFE. After working for several years at Head Interiors in South Africa, she emigrated to Sydney in the late 1980s to begin a new chapter in her career. In 1997, Marylou took the plunge into

**left:** Marylou applied the same advice she offers to budding designers on her Ferris House project. “We wanted to keep the overall colours quite consistent, so what we did was use strength variations and different finishes of the same colour for different applications such as the walls, timber, ceiling and wet areas,” she explains. This translated to using Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Merino for the general walls, Resene Lustacryl semi-gloss enamel tinted to Resene Double Merino for the doors and skirting boards, Resene SpaceCote Flat in Resene Half Merino on the ceiling, Resene Lustacryl semi-gloss tinted to Resene Half Merino on the sunroom side table and Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen, Resene SpaceCote Flat and Resene Lustacryl tinted to Resene Double Merino for the walls, ceiling and joinery in the primary bedroom, guest bedroom and linen closet. Freestanding kitchen cabinetry in Resene Lustacryl tinted to Resene Nebula, walls in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Sisal and ceiling in Resene SpaceCote Flat tinted to Resene Half Merino.



-  Resene Half Merino
-  Resene Merino
-  Resene Double Merino
-  Resene Sisal



entrepreneurship, founding her own design practice while also raising her three daughters.

Over the span of her career, Marylou has seen significant shifts in the interior design landscape. "Having the internet and search engines and being connected via social media has changed everything," she says.

Despite the conveniences of the digital age, Marylou emphasises the importance of travel. "We are not isolated in Australia, but I feel

before these technological changes we were far more isolated. You would have to travel to seek and find and contact the greater world. I still travel every year for inspiration and learning and connection to others."

Her recent trip to Paris is a testament to her commitment to keeping her finger on the pulse of global design movements and Marylou sees the tactile experience of visiting international fairs and viewing design products as irreplaceable.

"These days, our business can be streamlined and paperless and we can draw and present all our work digitally, but we will always have physical samples of paint, fabrics, tiles, stone and hardware to present to clients," she adds.

Throughout her career, Marylou has worked on countless projects, but she doesn't view any one as being her most successful. Her approach is rooted in building personal connections and ensuring that every design project aligns with

her values and vision. "I embrace every project with the same enthusiasm and passion as I only take on projects that really resonate with me, and with clients who come to me for me!"

Her passion for her work has guided her every step of the way, from managing the challenges of a family-oriented lifestyle while building a business to the rewarding moments of seeing a project come to fruition. In her view, the most successful projects are the ones that feel like

**opposite:** Marylou's Ferris House project is a prime example of her colour prowess at play. "At the start of the project, we discussed with our client what her colour preferences were. She mentioned liking calming blues and citrusy hues and she also had a colourful rug she liked, which we took colour inspiration from. Although that rug ultimately didn't make it to the final design, we extracted those tones and brought them out on to different areas in her home. Taking the vibrancy from one horizontal plane onto larger volumes breathes life into the spaces as a whole using colour. The main colour feature is the full height joinery in the sunroom, painted in Resene Artemis. It's a beautiful, muted blue with a hint of green so it worked well with the other citrusy colours we brought in through fabrics. The colour is striking enough to command attention, but at the same time, it has a calming feel that accommodated the different activities that would take place in the sunroom. The general wall paint colour we selected, Resene Merino, also complemented it beautifully." Design by Marylou Sobel Interior Design, [www.marylousobel.com.au](http://www.marylousobel.com.au). Build by Capstone Projects, [www.capstoneprojects.com.au](http://www.capstoneprojects.com.au). Painting by The Artful Decorator, [www.instagram.com/the.artful.decorator](http://www.instagram.com/the.artful.decorator). Images by Anson Smart, [www.ansonsmart.com](http://www.ansonsmart.com).

Resene Artemis

Resene Merino

a natural extension of her design philosophy – where the connection between the space, the client and the designer is seamless.

As a highly visual person, Marylou's inspiration comes from a wide range of sources, including books, magazines, movies, travel, nature, beaches, forests, shells, fashion, fabric and food. When asked about designers she admires, she felt there were too many to note, but singled out a few that she wishes she could have met. "I admire and love the work and architecture of Georges-Eugène Haussmann; Michelangelo, because he was talented and a genius across multiple disciplines; Christian Liaigre, furniture designer par excellence; and Coco Chanel and Christian Dior for their passion and precision for fashion, their use of fabrics, detailing and great style."

Colour has always been at the heart of Marylou's creative process and she considers it to be one of her superpowers. For her, the significance of colour extends beyond mere aesthetics – it is a tool for emotional and psychological impact. "I have a natural, inherent ability to record colour and understand its properties. Colour is a major part of design but it's very personal how one perceives it, interprets it and uses it."

Marylou's use of colour tends to lean towards subdued tones, earthy hues and textured layers. "I very rarely use primary colours," she notes. "I prefer subdued palettes, lots of texture and earth tones, as well as blacks and whites. I never use grey in my interiors."

This refined preference for subtlety contrasts with the boldness often seen in the work of other designers. She embraces warmth, gravitating toward colours like warm whites, olive greens and soft neutrals. "I like Resene whites, especially the warm whites – but at times, we need a cooler white like Resene Black White or Resene White Pointer. I like to use the same colour on the walls, woodwork and ceiling in a room with different finishes to give the impression of tonal change. I also mostly keep to the same colour for the interior of a project, sometimes with slight variations, but I don't like big changes of colour. I do like using strong colours for impact in powder rooms, on joinery or a feature wall. I often use Resene Rice Cake, Resene Merino, Resene Blanc, Resene Sisal and Resene Linen. When we want a strong colour, we go for something like Resene Paddock, Resene Olive Green or Resene Colins Wicket," she says.

Marylou also deeply understands the importance of considering the environment in which her design will live. "Because we have so much sunlight in Australia, sometimes people want quieter interiors to balance the colour that comes from outside in – like the greenery, sky blue or ocean colours," she explains. "I think the different architecture and lifestyles

offered in the cities of Australia and New Zealand all dictate the way colour is used, and designers are influenced by this. For example, Melbourne has a lot of traditional heritage homes which often call for colour and pattern and Sydney has a lot of contemporary homes, while Queensland has Hamptons-style homes. There are clients and designers who embrace colour wholeheartedly, but I think it's both personal in terms of what the architecture calls for and what the client needs."

Marylou's appreciation for colour extends to the products she uses, and she holds Resene in high regard. "I love that it's a family-owned business, the intensity of the pigment, the colours of the paint and visiting my local Resene ColorShop," she says.

For others working within the industry, Marylou offers practical tips on specifying paint and colour. She encourages designers to let the paint and finishes pick up on the warmth or coolness of elements within the space – whether it be fabric, tiles, stone or hardware. But there has been one piece of industry advice that was shared with her which has really resonated: "Employ someone to work in your business with you in the most needed role when you can least afford to and it will propel your business to new heights."

Though she was the first in her family to enter the world of design, the creative thread that runs through her has been passed on to her children. Her second daughter, Stephanie Nadel, followed in her footsteps and studied Interior Architecture at the University of New South Wales. Stephanie now works alongside Marylou as an associate designer. This familial bond strengthens not just Marylou's personal life but also her practice, creating a sense of continuity and shared vision – and we can't wait to see more of the thoughtfully-coloured projects she and Stephanie create together. *BW*

To see more of Marylou's stunning portfolio, visit [www.marylousobel.com.au](http://www.marylousobel.com.au).

# Marylou's top tips

- "When specifying paint, I like the tone and colour of it to pick up something in the interior space, like the colour of a fabric, tile or stone I am using. It makes for a very subtle backdrop. I place all the finishes out and sit with my Resene fandeck until something catches my eye, and then I work out how strong I want the tone to be, and whether I want any detailed features like a specific wall, the joinery, etc."
- "I like to use the same colour and strength in an interior and change up the finish. I like using a semi-gloss formula like Resene Lustacryl for timber, a flat finish like Resene SpaceCote Flat for walls and to introduce a paint effect."
- "If the finishes in a design have warm tones, I keep the paint colours warm. The same goes for colder interiors – which is very rare for me, as I love warmth – but sometimes the tiles or hardware may be chrome or blue toned and need something cooler."

