

lessons from a master

Debbie Abercrombie, one of New Zealand's foremost colour expert educators and interior designers, shares her advice for readers facing a colour conundrum.

In 2019 you received the Resene Total Colour Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of your long and successful career as a colour expert. Tell us about the journey that led you to get into colour and interior design.

A journey should start with the feeling that you are doing something you love. As a young couple, my husband and I bought and sold several houses in as many years. We then decided to do our own build, at which time I knew I needed more formal training. My mentor and colourful colleague was Sylvia Sandford. I was recommended by Sylvia to do colour consulting and also trained with her to be a tutor for the Interior Design course at Wellington Polytechnic. From there, I took several stepping stones: I staged displays for a large textile company, managed a team of five for a home staging company and then worked for a small interior company in Ponsonby, Auckland before I went out on my own.

How would you describe your design aesthetic and where do you think it stems from?

I started out in fashion, originally, which is an exciting way to explore colour. It still plays a part in my appreciation of colour combinations and current patterns or textures. My aesthetic is currently drawn from many sources and is driven by each individual project, to be able to give it its own beauty and personality as well as suit those who will live in the space. Our architecture, our light and beautiful environment in New Zealand play an equally big part in my aesthetic choices.

What inspires you and your colour palettes?

I am always looking for inspiration during my travels and of course in magazines. My travel highlights have been Milan's EuroCucina furniture fair and a fabulous trip to New York. We also have fantastic suppliers here who bring everything from the latest accessories to furniture products to the most exotic fabrics.

You've spent a good part of your career teaching about colour, both at Wellington Polytechnic and in private courses.

What's your favourite tried-and-true colour tip – let's call it 'evergreen', if you can forgive the pun – that you give to students who are just starting to learn about colour?

Always use colour in varying amounts, never equal amounts.



Resene
Love Me Do

Resene
Influential

Resene
Porter

You want each colour to complement the other rather than compete. This is achieved by changing out the balance of each.

What would you recommend readers do if they feel stuck picking a colour for their design project?

Firstly, collect a whole lot of visuals. The ones you keep coming back to that stick with you are the ones you should embrace. You will most likely find a pattern that includes or repeats the colours you relate to. Secondly, be true to yourself and choose colours you love and you can live with. Trends are exactly that – if you follow a trend, make sure it is something that is easy to change out when you tire of it.

What do you love about Resene?

I love that Resene's fashion colours are always energising but calming, inspiring, steady and timeless all at the same time. The Resene The Range Whites & Neutrals collection is hard to go past for its flexibility and ability to graduate from a light version of a colour to its double and triple version. We are using this fandeck more and more to give variety without having to introduce saturated colours, naturally for objects or areas that need to stay with us a little longer.

What are your favourite Resene colours and what draws you to them?

Resene Love Me Do is my go to lipstick colour, and I can't wait to see it come through more in interiors! We just need a little more saturation time to embrace it. Resene Influential is another. It is warm, inspirational and adds energy to any interior. I also love Resene Porter. It is a deep, grounding, stunning background colour and allows the flexibility to add in many other colour options. H

For more information on Debbie and her colour courses, visit www.debbieabercrombie.co.nz.

image Kyrissa Kolisnyk