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paint work

Living with strong colour is easy – especially when
you've made it your business like Rikki Stubbs

WORDS/STYLING **MEGAN MORTON** PHOTOGRAPHS **KIRSTEN STRECKER**



Dealing in what must be the most subjective decorative issue of all – colour – Rikki Stubbs firmly believes in practising what she preaches. Unlike the plumber with leaky pipes or the hairdresser with split ends, this interior colour design consultant's home in Sydney's Petersham offers enough evidence to convince the most cynical that colour can transform.

Each room has been coloured with eagle-eye precision and decorated with distinctive flair. Rikki identifies with New Zealand artist Liz Coats' thoughts on the subject: that colour has similar qualities to a personal signature or scent, which the people around us are tuned to recognise and respond to.

"I feel a certain colour in a certain room," explains Rikki. Take, for example, her glacial green study (Porter's Avocado). The comforting powder blue master bedroom (a four-coat finish she mixed herself). Or the burnt aubergine dining room (Aalto Vatican Violet) that makes even the simplest food something to remember.

There's a golden butter sitting room (Dulux Sinking Sand) and a milky white antique bathroom, which puts the idea of a modern shower into redundancy. Its billowing curtains – even if some are painted on for effect – suggest this room is primed for long soaks. In the laundry, neutral tones make the dazzling white goods seem embarrassed to be white.

Rikki's precocious tabby cats, Colin and Geoffrey, also seem to have a sense of colour and favour rooms that harmonise with their ginger and grey coats. But despite all this, don't assume

for a minute that Rikki lives in a colour bubble and would never admit to having a favourite hue. Most of the rooms in her house have seen at least four colour changes in the 13 years she has been in residence.

"These days, renovators consider colour a relatively inexpensive and very effective design tool," Rikki says. "Why not do the most dynamic thing you can to enhance the architecture and ambience of your home?"

Rikki's clients include renovators, architects and developers. Her favourite projects are family homes that require bold colours, large spaces in need of "cosying up" or bolt holes after a small dose of big impact. Rikki also selects art and furniture, ensuring her work isn't ruined by insensitive accessories.

Yet it's the clever painted finishes and seriously impressive trompe l'oeil

('trick of the eye') that enables Rikki to transform everyday paint into works of art. Paying tribute to her favourite artistic collaborators, ceramic artist Pamela Scott and trompe l'oeil artist Sibylla Tydeman, their work features in almost every room of the house. Sibylla's pretend portraits – including a fallen deck of playing cards on the staircase and a tea towel hanging from a faux brass hook – are so realistically portrayed that you find yourself wiping your hands on the kitchen wall.

There's no doubt Rikki has a way of assembling furniture and collectables – complemented, of course, by colour – that borders on breathtaking. In the study a day bed found on the roadside sits comfortably amid original artworks and beautiful hand-thrown ceramics.

In the backyard Rikki picks up bold colour in the form of glossy foliage, ➔





A statue by ceramic artist Pamela Scott takes centre stage in Rikki's burnt aubergine dining room (left). The golden walls of the sitting room (above) are complemented by a kilim in warm reds and oranges. Keeping it in the family, the desk in Rikki's study (above right) was crafted by her Aunt Myrtle. Also in the study, self-portraits painted by Rikki as a child hang above a chaise longue she found in a second-hand store and had reupholstered. *Previous page* Rikki stands under the fragrant, flowering wisteria on the front verandah of her Petersham home.



follow-up info

trompe l'oeil

The home of colour design consultant Rikki Stubbs is a feast of visual delights, particularly the areas of trompe l'oeil.

- Trompe l'oeil, meaning to 'deceive the eye', is the use of perspective, light and colour by a skilled artist to create a two-dimensional illusion on a flat surface.

- Trompe l'oeil, a playful and humorous art form, ranges from small paintings, such as the tea towel 'hanging' in Rikki's kitchen, to complex designs like the set of doors at the foot of the stairs.

- In Rikki's bathroom, a large-scale trompe l'oeil creates a sense of space. "I wanted a tented room to create the illusion that the ceiling was higher than it actually is. It creates a really lovely environment and I have my very own Rubens!" says Rikki.

- To commission a trompe l'oeil, contact Rikki at Purecolour on (02) 9569 1177. Prices are determined by complexity, size and detail.

- To learn more about this art form, you can buy a step-by-step book such as *The Art of Illusion: A Trompe L'Oeil Painting Course* by Janet Shearer (Hardcover), US\$16.09, from www.amazon.com or have a look through the 'Decorative Arts' section of bookstores.



decorating tip "My house is like a still life that is constantly changing. I love to move things around to give the space a new lease of life. If you own lots of beautiful objects, don't have them all out on display at once. I bring some of my precious pieces out and put others away from time to time. This way, the space stays fresh," says Rikki.

primary colourist

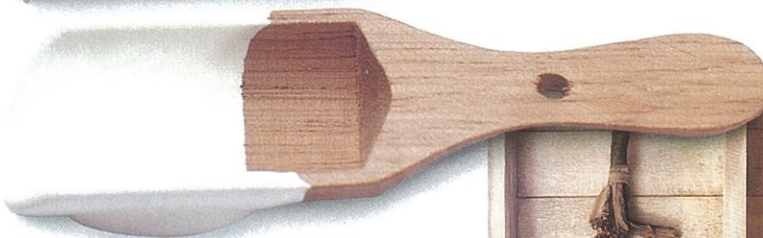
What colours has Rikki chosen for her home?

- For the dining room, Rikki chose a dramatic grape shade, Aalto Colour's Vatican Violet (top left). This room is closest to the entry hall and the colour makes a strong impact when visitors arrive.

- Yellow is "not an easy colour to get right", admits Rikki, who recommends Dulux Sinking Sand (top right), the colour she painted her living room. "It's more golden than anything and just beautiful – I love it," she says.

- Rikki's favourite, Porter's Avocado (bottom right), appears in several rooms. For the full range of paint options, contact Aalto Colour nationally (02) 9953 0933; Dulux nationally 13 25 25; and Porter's Paints nationally 1800 656 664.





paint and wax

A recent extension to Rikki's home is a timber-clad sunroom at the rear. Rikki softened the look of the new timber by giving it a time-worn appearance with a simple paint effect, which she calls her "chicken-shed paint finish".

First, Rikki mixed up an earthy white shade of interior paint and gave the walls a light coat. A similar shade is Porter's Quartz (above), \$30 per 1L, in an ultra-flat finish.

After the paint dried, Rikki applied Porter's Lime Interior Wax (top), \$18 per can, tinted with a pigment called Raw Umber. Then the worn look was achieved by brushing the wax randomly through all the timber's cracks and joins.



rikki's five-part strategy for wonder walls

1 Fill any holes and cracks to create a flat, smooth wall surface.

2 Use an acrylic sealer undercoat (most paint brands have one) to paint over the filled-in patches. The barrier will stop the filler going dark beneath the top coats.

3 After the first top coat, lightly sand the wall to eye level. This will remove any grit that may have adhered to the wall. It will also eradicate drips and blobs.

4 Apply a minimum of two coats as the first coat will only achieve 60% coverage.

5 Always wait until the first coat is completely dry before applying the second coat, otherwise it will simultaneously mix with, and remove, the first layer of paint.

Tip Rikki says that while no wall is perfect to begin with, the secret to making bad walls appear better is to choose a flat interior paint finish. Unlike glossy or low-sheen finishes that reflect light, flat paint absorbs light, making faults less obvious to the eye.

