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Rikki Stubbs selects colours for paint, tiles, kitchen benchtops, flooring and more to bring out personality in homes



DREAMING IN COLOUR

Paint colour specialist Rikki Stubbs puts her stylish handprint on homes from her base near Byron Bay



For designers such as the late Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta, colour is to architecture as flavour is to food.

The South American architect was speaking in Sydney at the beginning of the minimalism trend when white reigned supreme, as it has done for the past 25 years.

For Rikki Stubbs, long a favourite colourist for Sydney homeowners, Legorreta's statement is manna from heaven.

Very few architects understand colour or use it properly, says Stubbs, who until recently was a long-time resident of Sydney's inner west. She now lives in Mullumbimby, near Byron Bay, in northern NSW.

"Colour warms up a home," she says. "It helps bring out the personality and character."

"I first became consciously aware of the power of colour when I decorated my first home in Sydney's Potts Point in the early 1980s. The apartment went from a dreary rent-a-flat yellow to a hue inspired by the view of the Blue Mountains. It took my breath away and lifted my spirits every time I walked in. That was the beginning."

Her training began in London in a course covering traditional and decorative paint finish techniques such as marbling and wood graining. "It involved mixing colour and glazing, that is where it all started," Stubbs says.

On her return to Sydney she set up a specialist painting company adapting the traditional techniques she had learnt to painting walls in contemporary interiors.

"It was pre-Porter's Paints days and my business partner Howard Crump and I scoured second-hand bookshops for books of paint recipes, to make our own. I remember mixing dozens of eggs for egg tempera frescoes for The Royal Hotel Paddington restaurant, and painting Graeme Murphy's [Sydney Dance Company] apartment in distemper made from rabbit skin glue and varnished with formaldehyde. Working onsite, mixing colour, making and handling paint was an invaluable experience.

"Working for the new Museum of Contemporary Art in the 1990s, my passion for art was ignited and I began studying fine art painting with contemporary artist Charlie Sheard. Charlie was an abstract painter, but was passionate about the colour and glazing secrets of the great masters like Diego Velazquez and the Venetian painter Titian.

"This was not taught in any art school and Charlie had taken it upon himself to study their techniques in depth. It was a revelation that deepened my understanding and fascination with colour dynamics."

Working with designers and decorators over the years, Stubbs saw even the professionals struggle with colour.

"Clearly there was a need for advice. After suggesting the idea to Peter Lewis, the founder of Porter's Paints in 1998, the field of colour consultancy was born," she says.

"It was an original idea; there were no colour consultants for any paint companies – they didn't exist."

Stubbs established her company, PureColour, in 1998 and due to Covid-19 is now doing colour consultancy for her many clients online.

"While most colour consultants are linked with a paint company, it was vitally important for me to remain independent to be able to work with as many paint ranges and colour palettes as possible, such as Sydney's Murobond and New Zealand boutique ranges Aalto and Resene," she says. "Before long I expanded the concept of colour consultancy to what I call colour design. Working with all the architectural materials and interior finishes, I choose not just paint colours but tiles, kitchen laminates, veneers, upholstery fabrics, rugs. The floor is the largest area of colour. When all the materials and finishes resonate together, a house really sings," she says.

"In Sydney it is limited; it is mainly renovations. But here [in northern NSW] the new architecture is very exciting. There is so much happening here."