



From the ground up

When the perfect job didn't exist, designer Annabel Berry built it for herself.



Prior to starting her award-winning Oamaru based interior design studio, Design Federation, Annabel Berry had been working as a general manager in the education and tourism sectors. But when her first child was born in 2011, family leave gave her the opportunity to consider how she wanted to shape her career going forward. She and her husband, Simon, were building a home at the time – a project she became immersed in, which gave her the idea to begin training with the Interior Design Institute in 2012.

“Building our home sparked my initial desire to be an interior designer. I loved every aspect of the design process and never felt overwhelmed by the number of decisions – instead, I thrived on it.

Taking the Interior Design Institute programme allowed her to solidify the key principles of interior design from the comfort of home while raising her child. It was that work/life balance that sparked the idea for her business.

“Living in a smaller locale comes with plenty of benefits, but with a limited number of practices in the industry, the only option I saw was to start my own business.”

Annabel describes the beginning of Design Federation as ‘the classic Kiwi around the kitchen table model’ – at least for the first year, until the samples started taking over. She began looking around town to find a suitable brick-and-mortar

left: With inspiration found from the incredible gardens surrounding Riverstone Kitchen, the Design Federation team developed a scheme that brought the interior of the barn-like structure back to life. Deep and dramatic Resene Green Meets Blue walls bring a warmth and depth to the main dining area complemented by large-scale floral installations. Ceiling in Resene Black White. Image by Emma Willetts, www.emmawilletts.com.

	Resene Black White		Resene Green Meets Blue
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above left: Annabel and her team completed the interior design for the Observatory Hill Retirement Village. Their colour choices were a direct response to the North Otago landscape, tying together the key areas of coastal North Otago blues, Waitaki Valley greens and high country neutrals. Walls and ceiling in Resene Sea Fog with stripes in Resene Half Robin Egg Blue. Image by Rachel Wybrow, www.rachelwybrowphotography.com.

below left: Annabel used deep and dusty Resene Coast in her own bedroom, which sets the scene for a sleeping sanctuary. Image by Rachel Wybrow.



restricted around budget, as we have developed some of our favourite design solutions under very tight budgets.”

Over the past six years, the business has grown into a hybrid studio/shop and Annabel has made a name for herself far beyond her local region – primarily for her masterful use of rich and thoughtfully selected colours.

“To me, colour is the most important aspect of our projects because it directly sets the tone for the spaces we design,” she explains. “It energises or calms, brings drama or relaxes the mind. Colour psychology is vital to the way we design our spaces. We love giving our clients the confidence to step out of their beige comfort zone and live a life with colour, which they are always grateful for.”

Annabel says that her inspiration for her stunning palettes is almost always drawn from nature and the beauty of her local surroundings. “We are lucky to live where we do and be inspired daily by the Kakanui coastline, Waitaki Valley, lakes, mountains, our Oamaru stone, rich farmland and open skies.” Other times, she looks to industries like fashion or graphic design. “While we love to keep abreast of trends, we are never trendy. We aim to deliver interiors that stand the test of time.”

When the global pandemic hit, many were forced to either make profound changes to the way they operated their business or try to weather the storm and risk shuttering. In what’s typically

a face-to-face industry, Annabel and her team had to come up with some innovative approaches to cope with the challenges of lockdown and keep the success of Design Federation rolling, including offering a range of online consultations and programmes – a move that has changed the way that they continue to work today.

“They say with every crisis comes opportunities, and lockdown provided us with the space to change and adapt to a new world. I was adamant that our business was going to not only survive but thrive – but I was also flexible around what that meant. I am all about change and moving forward in a positive way, and our mantra at work is to continually improve. This doesn’t mean we need to be bigger, but it does mean we need to be better in everything we do from our high-level processes right down to the ribbon we gift wrap with in store.

“I spent the time in lockdown reviewing how we could improve and what was important to the business. We launched our online consultations so we could work with people across New Zealand while they could remain in the safety and comfort of their homes. I also reviewed what was important to me personally as a working mother. I have always wanted to do something that both empowers and strengthens women in our community, so we launched Belamour in the back space of our shop, which provides events and activities for women to develop and grow.

location. “Thanks to a kind offer from a local real estate agent, they partitioned off part of a street-front office, which I was able to rent for only \$50 a week. The benefits of living in a rural town meant that my commute was only four minutes, so I could continue to balance work while raising my children,” she says.

“So many aspects attracted me to this industry, and because I am based in a small rural town, we get to do it all: new builds, renovations, commercial projects, developing large-scale

tourism operations, retirement villages, luxury accommodations, offices, large-scale homes to small renovations and everything in between. I love the variety, the fact that every day we turn up and there is something new and exciting to get our teeth into.

“My favourite projects are any that push the limits of creativity, where we are given the freedom to conceptualise ideas without boundaries and bring all of our knowledge and expertise for a great outcome. This is not

“As Chair of the Oamaru Business Collective, we had a real focus on supporting local business and encouraging the community to stand side by side with all the businesses in town. I believe at this time, it is our sense of community that is the most important aspect of getting through the next couple of years, being supportive and working with other businesses to ensure the greatest success for us all.”

While good ideas never seem to be something that Annabel is short of, every designer has to deal with the challenges of creative block at one time or other. When she feels stuck on a project, Annabel looks to the talent around her.

“Setting aside specific project time with my team to brainstorm and bounce ideas off each other is key when we need to spark creativity. Having that workshop time that is separate from our normal workspace, even if just out the back where we can voice our ideas, is important. No idea is a bad idea as far as I am concerned, some just need a little work; and allowing my team to speak and have their voice heard is key because sometimes even the littlest nugget produces gold.

“Engaging other creatives in the process can also be good. My husband Simon owns and manages Whitestone Cheese and has a marketing background and an incredible eye for good design. If I am struggling, I will brief him and he will come back with some great ideas. Design and creativity can be a lonely space if you let it. But sharing and working with others can validate your ideas and lead to success.”

“With interior design you are always learning – every day there is a new product, or a new way to use a product, and we are constantly being trained by all of our amazing suppliers and trades. I am grateful to all of them for being experts in their field and for all of their sage advice and guidance.

“Resene has been there since day one for my business, whether it is advice on the phone, or in the Oamaru Resene ColorShop through to samples, the online colour palette generator, the

top tip

Upload an inspirational image to the free online Resene Colour Palette Generator and it will suggest a palette of Resene colours to help get you started on picking hues for your project. Try it out at www.resene.com/palettegenerator.

lot! The range of colours provides exactly what we need and the drawdown service is brilliant. We were so proud to win two Resene Total Colour Awards, which gave our business a real boost. I think that Resene is one of the heroes in the design world, and we aim to specify Resene paints every time.”

When asked about her favourite Resene hues, Annabel says there’s too many to choose. “But I’m feeling inspired by the floral dress I am wearing right now, which would make a great palette: Resene Green Meets Blue, Resene Cavern Pink, Resene Rice Cake, Resene Tasman and Resene Thatch.”

For others who have innovative ideas for starting their own business, Annabel encourages them to take risks and not worry so much about the opinions of others.

“The best piece of business advice I have received is ‘you do you’ – focus on what you are doing, run your business how you want to run it and trust your gut.”

While there are plenty of unknowns in the months to come, Annabel says she and the team at Design Federation has a lot to look forward to. “We have some incredible projects on the books, including a couple of hospitality projects, new accommodation, offices and a range of residential new builds and renovations. Expect to see some beautiful colourful projects coming out of Oamaru!” **BW**

To see more of Design Federation’s work and get the lowdown on the new Belamour wellness space, visit www.designfederation.co.nz.



above: Resene Atomic (right) and Resene Loblolly (left) are the hero hues Annabel chose for her own lounge. Trims and ceiling in Resene Milk White. Image by Rachel Wybrow.

	Resene Rice Cake		Resene Cavern Pink		Resene Thatch
	Resene Milk White		Resene Loblolly		Resene Atomic