

Leading by example

Resene Quarter
Duck Egg Blue

How Tracie Rodwell-Dunne put her interior design and colour psychology prowess to work for a generation of designers and their clients.

There is a false idiom that exists which you've probably heard before: 'those who can't do, teach.' It's hard to imagine anyone other than a megalomaniac coming up with such a wildly untrue idea. By nature, teachers are very much 'doers' and no one can rise to the extremely difficult task of educating others without having a significant level of skill and knowledge in the subject they're covering. On top of everything they accomplish on a day-to-day basis and have succeeded with in the past, in a way these industry leaders are doing far more than average by upskilling others and sending them out into the world to do better work that better serves our society. The saying also ignores the level of passion people like Tracie Rodwell-Dunne have for sharing with others what they themselves have learned.

Tracie grew up in Brisbane, and her inherent love for design and decorating in all its forms was clear from an early age. "I seemed to just innately know what worked and didn't," she says.

"My grandfather was an apprentice to Daphne Mayo in Brisbane before the Second World War and he worked with her on architectural sculptures that became part of some of Brisbane's most beloved and iconic buildings. He unfortunately passed away before I was born, so I never met him, but I feel his creativity was passed down through my mother – who was a painter herself."

Tracie decided to pursue a career in interior design, and after completing her training in the mid-80s, she became one of Queensland's first qualified interior designers. But she had another important 'first', too. "I was the first woman in my family to get a tertiary education. It was expected that I'd get



married and have a family, which was never on my agenda. My grandmother was probably the most influential person in my young life. She was incredibly intelligent, a mathematical genius and could turn her hand to anything and excel at it. But because of how things were when she was born, she didn't have the same opportunities we do today, and I think that is why she encouraged me to follow my aspirations and dreams."

In 1989, Tracie spent a year abroad living and working in Toronto, Canada – which she says was a remarkable experience for her creativity. Upon her return, up until she started her own interior design business in 1994, Tracie worked in corporate design

where she developed a number of complementary skills that have proven to be useful ever since. "When I first graduated, I worked for an agency that specialised in creating fully-cohesive packages to represent each client's company image, from the brand's logo design to their office fit-out and even the design of their uniforms. I was fortunate to be able to expand my creative vision in such a way. I learnt I was good at holding the vision for a client three-dimensionally and ensuring that all the elements worked together in synergy. I was able to use this skill over the course of my career for major clients like Wesley Hospital, Queensland's largest private hospital. I helped them with the design and evolution of their corporate image for over 20 years and loved it."

Tracie has long been aware of her strong affinity for colour and the energies imbued within each individual hue, but what she didn't realise initially is that her innate level of awareness isn't something everyone carries with them. "I just assumed everyone felt the energies of different colours, and I guess understanding that this was relatively unique became a precursor to my passion for colour psychology."

Ever since she purchased the Beaumont School of Interior Decorating and Design in 1999, increasing comprehension of colour, the meanings we attach to different hues and the effect colour has on project users has been a chief mission in Tracie's career. This part of her journey began when she was approached by Beaumont's original owner, Valma Pugh.

"It had never crossed my mind to own or set up a design school. I did know that I liked to teach, as I'd lectured part-time at Queensland University of Technology several times over the years. I find teaching is a great way to ensure you know your subject as students are very smart and ask insightful questions that can put you on the spot – so you really need to know what you are talking about."

Now, it's been almost 25 years since Tracie took the helm at Beaumont. It's important to remember that, at the time she began, information on many design topics wasn't at our fingertips the way it is today. Luckily, there were a number of important studies done on colour and design during the 20th century that could be referenced to help build and improve the curriculum.

"When I purchased the school, the core information available on the topic was good but it was also quite 'old school', so the first thing I did was modernise and enhance what was there. Then, as students kept asking me to teach them more, I developed more advanced interior design training and added in colour psychology and feng shui – which are quite unique courses that dovetail perfectly with interior design," explains Tracie.



Resene
Headlights

Resene
Allports

Resene
Colour Me Pink

“Designers have been faced with so many changes over the decades, from technology to the availability of products. Some of those changes have been for the better but not all of them have been good. The advent of technology from a design perspective has been great, but I feel sometimes it has reduced creativity. I feel it is important to still be able to manually draft and sketch as I believe maintaining that hand/pencil to brain connection supports imagination and problem solving. Certain advances in products have been amazing, but I feel availability and service have taken a step back – and I think this makes things very hard on the interior design professional who just wants to do their best for their client when they aren’t always supported by the supply companies. I miss the slower, more conscious pace of when I first started working in interior design, when you had time to be creative and do thorough work and quality was valued,” she admits.

Tracie singled out one supplier as an exception, Resene, and she says their extensive colour range isn’t the only reason she’s been a long-time fan. “I think Resene is one of the most ethical and impressive companies I’ve ever dealt with. Their commitment to excellence is amazing and their desire to always improve and do the best is to be admired. Their staff from senior management down are a great reflection on the company,” she says.

While most design professionals study colour to some degree during their schooling, it can be limited. Very few will leave school with a strong understanding of colour psychology and Tracie feels this industry-wide knowledge gap is underserving clients and other building users. “I feel not enough is understood about colour and the psychology of colour by our design professionals,” she says.

“There is a lot of fear around using colour and so a lot play it safe. I also think the universities and colleges are failing our professions by not teaching the topic of colour comprehensively. The problem is that many weren’t taught it properly themselves, so they don’t realise what they don’t know, and the cycle of misinformation and lack of knowledge continues on. In my experience of teaching, it takes at least two years of continual study to fully understand and learn all there is to know about colour, how to see it properly and how to use it correctly. Once this is achieved, you end up with delighted clients and great work.”

Tracie retired from her active role in interior design a couple of years ago and it’s allowed her to focus on teaching and writing. “I think it’s important that we share our knowledge and experiences and give back to our profession. Sometimes we don’t realise how much we know about our profession until we start to write and share,” she says.

“Colour psychology is a very important subject for me as it is the only way to fully understand colour. Otherwise, we can only know it superficially and that is such a shame as it is a very powerful and life-changing tool for humanity and our profession. I truly believe that we all need to keep growing and learning. If we stop, we become stagnant and lose the ability to see things with new eyes and where’s the fun in that?”

The school has taught Tracie plenty about herself, too. “I guess the main thing I’ve gotten out of owning and running the school is that I enjoy sharing my knowledge and giving back to the profession to ensure that it continues on in a sound and ethical manner. I love watching my graduates successfully go onto having their own careers and businesses. I have mentored many former students over the years and always love connecting with them and offering any help or advice they may need. When you have been doing it as long as I have, there isn’t much you haven’t experienced – and it’s rewarding to help the next generation succeed.”

If she could go back in time to the beginning of her career and mentor herself, Tracie says she would encourage a shift in priorities and an increased focus on values that have longer-lasting effects than financial gains. “I think I’d tell myself to value my creativity and not compromise the design process in order to simply ‘push the work out’ to meet deadlines and make money. In my experience, I think this is easier to do when working for small businesses than larger companies. My primary philosophy was always to put the client first, and I think this is still a good one to have. But early on in our careers, we often undervalue our skills and I think it’s important that we not undersell ourselves to clients or employers either.”

For Tracie, who spends so much time working with colour and has a deep understanding of the advantages each one offers, the Resene colours she considers her favourites are always changing and evolving. “I actually love all colours, but there are some I am always drawn to and some I like for a short time. It also depends on whether I am presently being drawn to colours that have been tinted, toned or shaded. Currently, I’m very into very pure colours like Resene Headlights, Resene Allports and Resene Colour Me Pink. Resene Headlights is such a happy pure yellow colour that resonates with fun and learning, which are two of my favourite things to do. Resene Allports is a true blue-green and what I always love about this colour is its association to thinking outside the box and communicating about deep subjects, both of which I enjoy doing. And red-violet Resene Colour Me Pink is always my favourite go-to colour; it’s my happy place and the colour is all about helping others and living your best spiritual life.” **BW**

For more information on the Beaumont School of Interior Decorating and Design, visit www.bsidd.com.au.

Resene Eighth
Pearl Lusta

Colour Psychology 101

For those who might not be as well-versed in colour psychology as she is, Tracie offered up her skills to provide an assessment of four spaces that feature a number of today’s top trending Resene paint and wood stain colours. Here’s what she had to say about the effects Resene Vantage Point, Resene Pioneer Red, Resene Morning Haze, Resene Cinnamon, Resene Egg Sour, Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy and Resene Colorwood Bask have on the spaces they’ve been used in.

opposite, top left: Walls painted in Resene Vantage Point and floor finished in Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy. Pendant lamp from Powersurge, artwork by Alan Pearson from Sanderson Gallery, chairs from Matisse, table, rug, lidded dish, bowl, bottle and glassware from Smith and Caughey’s, flowers from Urban Flowers.

opposite, bottom left: Wall painted in Resene Pioneer Red and floor finished in Resene Colorwood Bask. Table and rug from Ligne Roset, artwork by Katherine Throne from Sanderson Contemporary, bowl, Venus statuette and vase from Smith & Caughey’s, candle, candlestick and glassware from Tessuti.

opposite, top right: Walls painted in Resene Morning Haze and floor finished in Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy. Sofa from Mr. Bigglesworthy, side table and stool from Bauhaus, rug and cushions from Baya, glassware and shoes from Father Rabbit.

opposite, bottom right: Left wall painted in Resene Egg Sour, right wall in Resene Cinnamon and floor finished in Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy. Sofa and rug from Good Form, basket from Father Rabbit, throw and cushions from Baya, side table and mug from Smith and Caughey’s, artwork by Lucy Rice from endemicworld, curtains from Curtain Studio. Projects by Amber Armitage, images by Wendy Fenwick.



Resene Vantage Point + Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy

“The colours used in this dining space create an energy of balanced, clear, open-hearted communication. There is also an abundance of prosperity with grounded protection. This is a safe and happy space to spend time with family and friends.”



Resene Pioneer Red + Resene Colorwood Bask

“The colours used in this room create an energy of supported motivation to move forward and make balanced changes. There is a lot of loving support that creates a peaceful and harmonious energy in this room.”



Resene Morning Haze + Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy

“These colours create an energy of soothing, introspective balance which helps us to connect with ourselves. There is protection around expressing creativity as well as clarity around being visionary and thinking outside the box. There is a lot of support and peace in this space.”



Resene Cinnamon + Resene Egg Sour + Resene Colorwood Breathe Easy

“The Resene palette used in this room creates an energy of support and acceptance of one’s self. There is a deep inner wisdom to be discovered in this space, which can help its users to become more contented and blissful. This room has balanced good fortune and embraces clear spiritual insights which may want to be shared.”