

South Pacific design & colour



Thousands of islands lie scattered across the wide expanse of the South Pacific - the groups of islands are known as Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. They range in size from small coral atolls to lush tropical islands, providing a habitat for the most vibrantly coloured flowers and fruit, birds and butterflies, and in the surrounding ocean there are multi-coloured fish, coral and shellfish.



Colours for South Pacific design are drawn from the natural environment and cultures of the native people who settled in these islands. The people in the three regions were originally agriculturists, growing breadfruit, bananas, coconuts, yams and taros - many villages were self sufficient and the family was considered their basic political and social unit.

Their cultural art has a close association with the spiritual realm, the veneration of ancestors and gods. Their original crafts were fashioned from wood, stone, shell, bone, coral, flax and feathers. Sculpture was the major art form with human figures, and tapa cloth is the textile made from the pulped bark of trees.



South Pacific architecture

A vision of tropical vegetation, turquoise lagoons and white coral sand, inspires architects, designers and artists to capture a South Pacific design style. Whether it is an old church, colourful flowers or lush palm trees, there is an abundance of vibrancy for colour stimulus. The traditional building materials basically came from the vegetation – timber poles lashed together as the building framework with a thatched roof from dried palm leaves. The early homes in the villages were known as fares, fales or bures.

Many of the architectural features are captured today and translated into modern buildings, while others are designed to remove boundaries between the interior and exterior so that the ocean and tropical gardens are visible from every room. The cultural style of bures and fales is transferred into tourist resorts and restaurants to give the ‘island feel’ to the architecture and design.

Thatched roofs and lashed balustrades have been implemented into the design of these buildings.



modern architecture

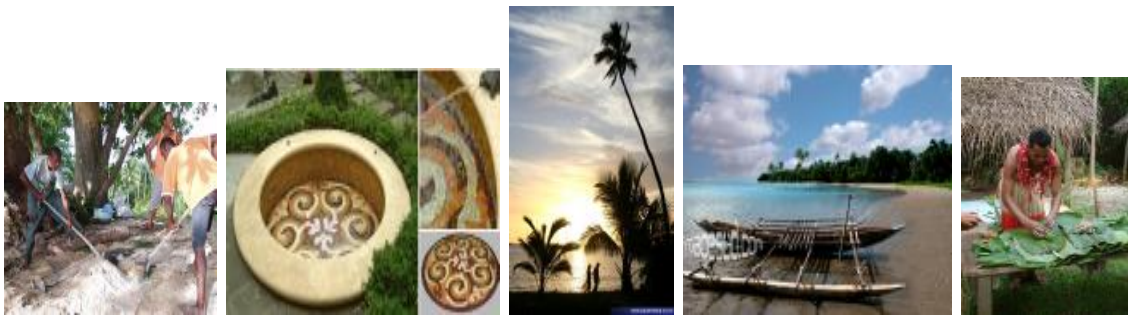
Examples of building styles below have drawn inspiration from the cultural building styles of the Pacific.

1. The traditional thatched construction given support by intricately laced timber beams allows heat to rise and dissipate through the loose thatch, keeping the interior cool.
2. The outdoor seating of long timber beams is typical of that seen in communal areas in the shopping centres and village markets.
3. The Opera House in Sydney alludes to sails on the harbour, while the Telstra Centre in Manukau City has a defined connection to Pacific Island design.



indoor/outdoor transition

There are many examples of homes and buildings that have blurred boundaries between the indoors and outdoors. Outdoor living is a big part of the Pacific lifestyle - with food preparation, cooking and eating outdoors.



outdoor living

There has been an increase in the number of tropical palms and plants growing here as the climate has warmed. Many homeowners strive to create their little piece of Pacific Paradise in their own back garden or at their beach house, with lush vegetation or sea views. While we may not cook in the ground as was traditional, we have developed sophisticated barbecues and outdoor kitchens for outdoor entertaining.

The Pacific style is often referenced in motifs from island culture on outdoor furniture, in sculpture and paving design. Also shell decorations, wooden food platters, woven table mats, tropical styled fabrics as table cloths, and light up the luau lamps to set the scene.



tropical colours

The colours from nature have a huge impact on the colours we like to have in our homes, or the clothes we wear. Tropical flowers are transferred into paint colours and fabric design for upholstery and bed-linen.

Sunset colours of yellow, orange and pink, the reds and purples of hibiscus with the fresh greens of palms and leaves. Also the food of the region, such as succulent fruits - think mangoes, pawpaw and pineapple. Sometimes the colours are pared back to coral whites, sandy beiges, bleached timber, coconut wood and cane.

Fragrances are also a reminder of island life - frangipani, gardenia and the oil of coconut, to name a few.



design inspirations

The patterns and designs on tapa cloth or a body tattoo may be the design inspiration for a product with connections to the South Pacific. We see these design motifs transferred onto crockery, textiles, clothing, furniture and jewellery.

Local designers who have captured the Pacific spirit into furniture and fittings include David Truebridge who designed the beach lounge, Stephanie Rondel's kettle and Humphrey Ikin's bench seat. Even the floral bouquet wrapped in woven flax has an island feel to it.



furniture and fittings

These modern pieces have a reference back to traditional cultures of the Pacific.

The cane chair on the left is thatched together and the calico seats relate to nautical sails. David Truebridge's pendant lights are made from timber, the organic shapes possibly inspired from old fish or bird traps that were used by islanders to trap their food.

The design speakers in the middle are shaped like a canoe, and the seat beside it intricately carved with island style designs. The design of modern black and white fabric to the right comes from palm fronds and could be used as drapes, upholstery or cushion covers.



bamboo + coconut wood

Bamboo flooring has become popular, partly because it is a renewable source and partly because it provides a casual feel to a room. There is also an increase in the use of coconut wood in furniture and wall panels as well as lamps and furnishing accessories.

The blue light shade ties in the colour of the ocean, and the starfish shaped handle also references the sea.



Pacific Island design store

This store in Auckland stocks bed-linen, cushions, lights, textiles and body care products that have Pacific origins. Textiles are available in hand-blocked Samoan prints, there are hand-stitched Tivaevae quilts from Cook Islands and floral designs of hibiscus and frangipani in a range of tropical colours. Body care products include soaps and lotions that contain coconut oil to nourish the skin.



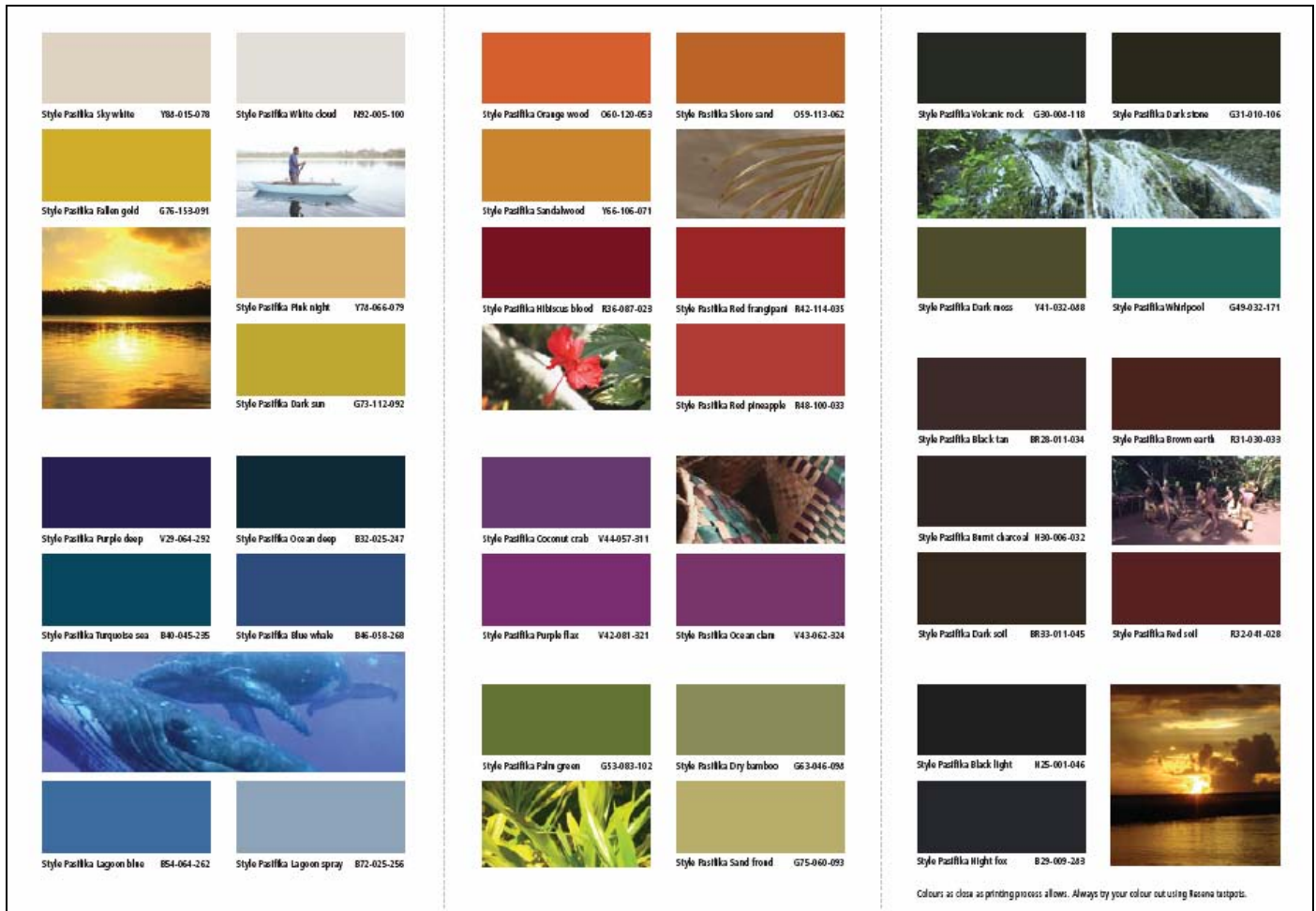
fashion

Auckland being the largest Polynesian city in the world, attracts attention to the fashion and music through various festivals and fashion shows such as Style Pasifika.

From the influences of Fijian police uniform to the traditional grass skirts and floral leis, new styles of fashion are hitting the catwalks and receiving international acclaim. Shell

and black pearl jewellery or a hibiscus flower on a tee shirt are all references back to the islands.

Style Pasifika in conjunction with Resene has developed a unique palette of paint colours to reflect the colours of the Pacific Islands.



island food

The traditional foods and produce of any region have an impact on colour and design. In the islands a great place to visit is their produce markets where there is a large array of fruits and vegetables in vibrant colours.

A popular drink in the Pacific is kava which is made from grinding the leaves of the kava plant into a fine powder and mixing it with water. It is generally consumed by the men

in a village during ceremonies, and is quite intoxicating. It is served from a wooden bowl, the kava bowl, which are popular souvenirs for visitors to take home.

The other important part of the diet in the Pacific is fish and shellfish, both being abundantly available. As a result the fish and shells are often printed onto fabrics and furnishings as a design motif.



diy craft ideas

Try stencilling colourful shell motifs onto deck chair fabrics, or make a shell and timber frame for a mirror. Or perhaps try mosaics with broken tiles or crockery in ocean colours such as these hearts above.



hotel lobby

Guests gather here for drinks, or to sit and relax amongst the oceanic colours of green and blue, and decorative sea shells set into the bleached concrete floor. The design of the space relies on references to the Tahitian culture. To the right there are examples of carving and weaving from Vanuatu. The baskets are decorated with brightly colour feathers.

compiled by

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