



Designs that sizzle

Natalie Du Bois shares how she became a kitchen design specialist and the best Resene products for the hardest working room in the house.



When she finished high school, interior designer Natalie Du Bois wasn't entirely sure which career path she wanted to take. "I knew I had talent in the arts and have always been creative. Cooking and food were always important to me; I started cooking from an early age and was intrigued by flavour. When I was a child, there was no such thing as chicken nuggets for us – more like ox tongue, snails and beef bourguignon. My father was French Belgian and his mother was a caterer for embassies, so we had to eat quite rich tasting foods."

The day after she finished high school, Natalie started working as a trainee chef. "It was a great experience, and quite a challenge being the only female amongst experienced chefs – especially after coming straight from a girls' school. It wasn't long before I realised I preferred to be around to see the joy people get from what I create, which didn't happen at all in that job. I felt that being an interior designer definitely would offer this – and, luckily, I was accepted into design school in the nick of time to start with my same school leavers."

Natalie ended up studying spatial interior design in Cape Town. But after completing her studies, she struggled to find a job. "I had written endless letters and rung up so many design firms offering to work for free, but nothing eventuated. I resorted to waitressing for a spell and then worked for three employers at once who shared a cottage and antique furniture shop, a soft furnishings business and an antique lighting supplier.

"My first design job was convincing my boss it was a good idea to redo the signage and colours for the antique shopfront," she says. Her aim was for the shop to be noticed and get more people through the door, so Natalie introduced fuchsia to its boring beige façade. "It may have been for slightly selfish reasons to curb my boredom, but I had a goal and that was to get to London and try to be a 'real' designer."

But it was working there that allowed Natalie to save up enough money to follow her dream.

"This didn't really happen straight away. I managed to find a job in Harrods department store in Knightsbridge, where I sold nursery, children's and bedroom furniture. It was a great stepping stone, as it taught me how competitive I was in sales and wanting to be the best. I tried to move to the interior design department by continually hounding them, but no one wanted me. Eventually, I ended up working across the road at a high-end kitchen design company designing German kitchens, bespoke kitchens and other interior furniture."

The irony, she says, was that Harrods rang to ask if she could come in for an interview for their design department on her first day there – which she kindly declined. Instead, she gained experience moving around between her new employer's three showrooms located in Chelsea, Richmond and Knightsbridge. "This really gave me great insight to the expectations and pressures of being a designer – a few late nights of getting designs done for deadlines would soon be the norm."

"There were certainly trying times," she admits, "and I remember feeling like I was not cut out to be a designer. I thought maybe a change would be good, so I approached a company in the same area I lived in Chiswick and they nabbed me straight away. This job and my boss really gave me the confidence to believe I did have what it takes to be a designer. I was even convinced to enter a design competition and ended up winning, which made me feel like I needed to stick with it."

"That same year, in 2000, I moved to New Zealand with my then Kiwi partner, whose visa had expired. For the next 7 years, I worked for a high-end kitchen design company and then for an interior design company."



Resene
Chilean Fire

Resene
Half Merino

Natalie's top tip

Rely on your supplier and product reps. Ask them lots of questions if you're ever in doubt about anything. They know their stuff, so it's better to not just assume you know the answer. Their knowledge is gold.

With a mother who was an accountant and a father who owned a luggage factory, she says growing up with a family business and learning to be good with cashflow definitely helped when it came to starting her own business, Du Bois Design, in 2007. But it was her days as a trainee chef that gave her some real insight into creating kitchens that work for the people who use them – and it's not only something she specialises in, but it's also something she's gotten very good at. Over the last 20 years, Natalie has taken home over 45 awards, including two Resene Colour Awards at the National Kitchen and Bathroom Awards.

For people who have multiple passions and have learned to wear many hats the way Natalie does, variety is often the spice of life. "I have had new clients say that the reason why they go with me is that they can see I listen to my client's needs as my projects are so varied. There are many different styles and looks which you can see on my website and Instagram. To be honest, I think I would be bored if there was just one type of look that I designed. I try to see the beauty in all style genres and focus on what will work for my clients to make them happy in their environment."

"My favourite projects to work on are timeless, sophisticated, high-quality interiors. I like each project to show some unique aspect to give it a point of difference. And I love incorporating natural materials, stone, timber, natural fabrics like linen and metals."

Through her experiences, she's learned that design work can't be forced. "Sometimes it's good to leave the design for another day and come back to it the next day or night. I like designing at night as I find my inspiration is better when I am not interrupted by phone calls and emails and I can block out a few hours to sink my teeth into it. I pretty much live and breathe work 24/7 – but I am not sure how healthy that is though," she laughs. "My initial meetings with clients are quite in-depth, and I try to get 'inside their heads' to work out what really makes them tick. I find that after talking to my clients and understanding them, that's where the inspiration starts."

When it comes to which products she specifies for her jobs, Natalie usually turns to her favourites. "I tend to like more matte, velvety finishes, so I often specify Resene SpaceCote Flat and Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen for kitchen ceilings and walls," she says.

While Resene Lustacryl and Resene Enamacryl are great choices for ensuring a durable finish on doors and trims, Natalie says that Resene AquaLAQ may be a game changer for getting Resene colours on kitchen and bathroom furniture and joinery.

"I am very interested to use the Resene AquaLAQ system, which was released just recently. Most of my cabinetry is

Natalie's colour crushes



opposite: Natalie's elegant use of colour is ever present in her kitchen designs. Cabinetry in Resene Half Stack, walls in Resene Triple Black White and ceiling, architraves and trims in Resene Black White. Image by Michelle Weir, www.studioweir.com.

above left: Lighting – both in terms of properly illuminating task spaces, but also in the way she plays it off of the different surfaces throughout the space – is something Natalie executes beautifully in her kitchens. Cabinetry, walls and ceiling in Resene Sea Fog and doors in Resene Triple Sea Fog. Image by Kallan MacLeod, www.kallanmacleod.com.

below left: Natalie created plenty of interest through pops of colour and a mix of different materials and textures in this eye-catching kitchen. Cabinetry in Resene Half Merino, walls in Resene Quarter Truffle and statement cabinets in Resene Chilean Fire. Image by Jamie Cobel, www.jamiecobel.com.

specified in a Resene colour and then needs to be matched, and this is quite tricky as the match can never really be perfect since it's not an actual Resene colour or a Resene base. Using Resene AquaLAQ on upcoming projects will be much easier and avoid any irregularities and the need to have samples re-matched, which can be time consuming."

"I love that the Resene website is extremely thorough, with lots of information. They have really made it very user friendly, so I can see that a lot of time has been spent ensuring it works for their clients no matter if it's for the general public, painters, designers or architects. The Resene fandecks are well organised and easy to work with and the new releases on colours always makes it interesting to want to specify different colours.

"I do feel that I like to support businesses that have good people who are supportive, and that is what I feel I get from Resene."

Looking back on her journey now, Natalie is proud to have gotten where she is today. Even when we know what we are capable of, it's common to second guess ourselves when others don't buy into it. "There are a lot of challenges in this industry, but if we are passionate enough, it makes all the difference," she says. **BW**

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