



# The only constant is change

Kate St James and  
Catherine Whitting find  
each other, and their  
true calling.

**T**he world has changed dramatically since our parents or grandparents were forced to face the choice of what they wanted to do – or had to do – with their lives. Today, it's becoming increasingly rare to be pigeonholed into a single industry, never mind one job description. Instead, most of us are accustomed to wearing many hats. And the more we evolve, the more we realise how much our old hats come in handy – especially when it comes to the ways in which we are able to serve our clients.

Kate St James, for instance, started off as a journalist in London in the early 70s before transitioning into a successful career in high-end residential, commercial, hospitality, health and aged-care interior design in Australia through her own company, The Design Works. But then in the late 90s, she shifted into the design publishing world where she became founding editor of Universal Media's *Home Design and Living* series of magazines, including *Grand Designs Australia* and *Home Design*.

"I went into design publishing because I was keen to showcase the benefits of good design to a wider community of consumers while promoting the benefits of employing professionals in design





projects,” explains Kate. “I was able to continue running my design business but in a reduced capacity. But after 18 years in the publishing world, I planned to semi-retire and move to New South Wales where I would buy, renovate and sell properties with a focus on sustainable design.”

To some, switching careers from journalism to interior design may seem like a major shift. But given how important it is to be able to communicate ideas to clients, it’s easy to see how having a solid base in writing can go a long way in the design world.

Catherine Whitting’s path has also been a winding one. She started as an artist and HSC Visual Arts and Design teacher – though the latter was for much shorter than she anticipated. Three years later, she became pregnant with her oldest son, and though she continued with her art, interior design and decorating, colour consulting and property styling became her primary focus. But in 2003, she retrained and moved to a career in tertiary interior design education with TAFE NSW (Technical and Further Education New South Wales) – which proved to be rather serendipitous.

Catherine first met Kate when she invited her to speak at an industry forum held for TAFE NSW’s students to discuss the importance of media and marketing within the industry. Then, in 2016, Kate was invited to exhibit at the Sustainable Rooms by Design at the Sydney Home Show. When she was asked if she knew of someone else who would be interested in exhibiting, she immediately thought of Catherine.

“During the three days that we exhibited at the show, we realised we had so much in common – not just as passionate designers, but also as design educators,” says Kate. “The ideas were flowing and for several months we met after work in the cocktail bar of a hotel next to my office to discuss our ideas and interests. These meetings culminated in the formation of St James Whitting, with our first project being a full house renovation for clients we met at the Sydney Home Show, and we’ve never looked back.”

But Kate and Catherine’s evolution didn’t stop when the duo joined forces. Through St James Whitting, they’ve continued to evolve the way they work and what they are able to offer their clients. Their interior consultations for individuals and companies that want to include eco-friendly, sustainable design practices and products into their projects are now complemented by additional specialised services like business branding – which is only possible because of the unique journeys that brought them to where they are today.

Change has been a resonating theme in their work, too. “Interior design for me is all about change,” says Catherine. “We are change agents, and designers create positive and healthy changes in people’s lives. Physiological and environmental change is the most important part of interior design, whether it be in a residential, commercial or institutional interior. When a design provides an environmentally healthy and physiologically uplifting transformation on people and communities, that is great design.”

**opposite and above left:** Kate and Catherine say that kitchen and bathroom design has evolved as core projects of St James Whitting due to their relationships with their residential clients. “Kitchens are the heart of a home and usually the starting reason for a renovation. Catherine also worked alongside her father for many years as Century 21 Australia’s preferred home styling and renovation team and has developed many relationships in construction and renovation. These trade teams continue to implement St James Whitting kitchen and bathroom designs in their Sydney based projects,” explains Kate. Walls in SJW Blot, ceiling in Resene Alabaster and kitchen joinery in Resene Peace. Build and painting by G&C Builders. Images by Liz Kalaf, [www.lizkalafphotography.com.au](http://www.lizkalafphotography.com.au).

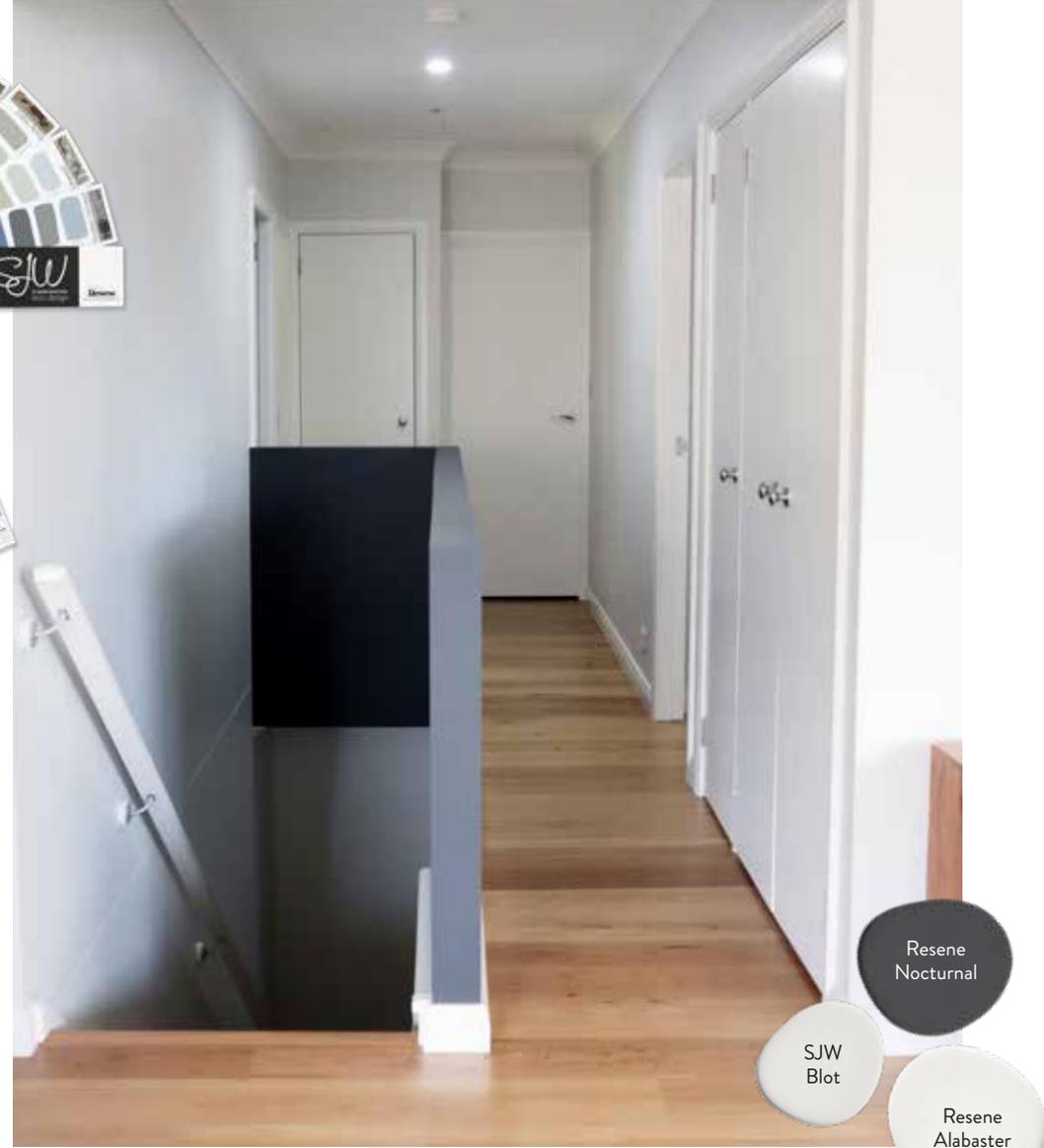
**above right:** The subtle differences between the two white paint colours used in the living room provide depth while allowing the eyes visual space to rest. Walls in SJW Blot and ceiling and crown moulding in Resene Alabaster. Image by Liz Kalaf.

In 2018, Kate and Catherine were inspired to add another feather to their caps: curating their own colour collection. The pair wanted to create a palette that was born of their passion for art, nature and the environment, full of bold and brave hues; and given that each of them had been using Resene for more than 20 years, the company was a natural fit to collaborate with on their new project.

“We started St James Whitting based on our enjoyment of working together and our love of colour, art and designing for

**right:** Interior designers Kate St James and Catherine Whitting created the Elementals Collection in 2018, which features 147 stunning hues that capture elements from the environment, favourite destinations and original artworks and translates them into curated palettes of colour. Each palette includes notes on the designers' inspiration, ideas and tips to create interior or exterior solutions with ease and confidence. All of the artworks featured are available as limited edition prints in your choice of size and framing options from The Curious Art Bar, [www.curiousartbar.com](http://www.curiousartbar.com).

**far right:** Walls in SJW Blot, ceiling, trims, door and railing in Resene Alabaster and balustrade in Resene Nocturnal. Image by Liz Kalaf.



psychological and physical wellbeing. This ethos seemed to perfectly resonate with Resene, a family-owned business that focuses on education and exceptional service with a commitment to sustainability and innovation,” says Catherine. “And the language used in the Resene palettes has always inspired us, with sentences that educate and enable designers to talk about colour effortlessly, and names that enchant and enthrall.”

“No matter what type of project we’re working on – be it commercial, hospitality or residential – we focus on concept and curation. The integration of art and colour into commercial branding, or residential styling is a signature of the St James Whitting design process. Our first commercial project on York Street in Sydney featured eight original artworks that were commissioned specifically for the space and curated with coordinating Resene paints. This has been our process ever since. Concept and art/ rug curation, space plan and colour curation, then design documentation and coordination,” explains Kate. “That curation of art and colour has always enthralled our clients, and we wanted to create a fandek for designers, stylists and home renovators that would provide easy, effortless and user-friendly inspiration to be bold, brave and brilliant with.”

And so the SJW Elementals Collection coloured by Resene was born, where hand-picked hues and art meet with meaningful written stories and signature artwork accompanying each palette. “Our designer tips on how to implement the palettes with ease and confidence were core inspiration,” explains Kate. “The colours for each fandek are derived directly from the colours used in the artwork. It invites you to pick a card and play with it, not only in terms of paint, but also for coordinating materiality to create your own signature interior with a coordinating art scheme.”

Travel has also inspired many of their colour selections, such as Kate’s trips to Spain and Catherine’s to Alcatraz Island. Then, there are the colours plucked from their local environments, with hues that resonate with both Kate’s life on the northern rivers of NSW and Catherine’s in inner-city Sydney. “We are both inspired and moved by the colours of water, sunshine, the desert, the bush and lush countryside,” says Kate.

“The idea of the fandek is to not only to use them for paint but for art and furnishings as well,” adds Catherine. “The Spanish Street palette will take a daughter’s room from two to forty-two with Valencia Rosada being a perfect, timeless architectural pink. Imagine a girl’s room in Valencia

Rosada with an ochre toned sisal round rug, Terra inspired bed, Arcilla mohair blankets and Nube soft concrete grey linen with Apagon toned monochromatic photos of her travels and Tostada toned timber flooring.”

“We are already dreaming of a second collection accompanied with a book on how to use the SJW Elementals Collection coloured by Resene to create emotionally and physically sustainable

homes, and team with our coordinating rug collection, wallpaper and textiles.

Watch for SJW Elementals Natureture, which is derived from our art and photography of the natural and architectural world – particularly our love of bold painted doors from around the world.” **BW**

See more of St James Whitting’s work on their website, [www.stjameswhitting.com](http://www.stjameswhitting.com).