



Championing colour

Belinda Burke infuses her Master of Architecture thesis with chromatic inspiration from both near and afar.

When you have gained first-hand experience of the benefits that come from living in an environment brimming with vivid colours, returning home to find streets lined with subdued homes decorated in soulless neutrals can be pretty disenchanting. But instead of letting it hamper her, architectural graduate Belinda Burke was ignited to advocate for confident use of colour in our built environment, fight the prejudice of chromophobia and help move our culture to embrace emotion, wonder, delight, sensitivity and sensuality.

Her design-led research thesis titled *Colour, Hell of a Good Thing!* was fuelled by a passion for colour which was piqued during travels to Morocco, Spain and, particularly, Mexico, where she resided for six months. She was especially taken with Mexican Architect Luis Barragán's way of choreographing magical atmospheres through the use of light and colour, which led her to focus on how his same strategies could influence contemporary architecture back home.

"I remember flicking through books on Barragán in my second or third year of study. I

love his bold use of colour, and that's what lured me in. I've now come to realise the wealth in Barragán's architecture that extends far beyond a glossy page of pretty colours," says Belinda. "When I was in Mexico, I walked through two of his houses – Barragán's own home and studio and Casa Gilardi – and it was these rich experiences that made me eager to learn more about the ways in which he designed with colour, space and light. There's an emotional and spiritual dimension to his manipulation of light and colour that makes it so captivating."

"Barragán was heavily influenced by his exchange of ideas with people from other disciplines, and it was his crossover between art and architecture that interested me the most. He considered colour not just as a mere decorative element, but as a powerful tool for altering the perception of space. It was also his sensitivity to the potential of colour and its inseparable relationship with light, coupled with Mexico and New Zealand's similar light qualities, that made him a desirable subject to draw from."

While the site could have theoretically been anywhere, Belinda chose the Wairarapa region as she thought it provoked a challenging and juxtaposing angle of investigation to the urban contexts of Barragán's projects. "It's a greenfield site that's wide with long shadows stretching

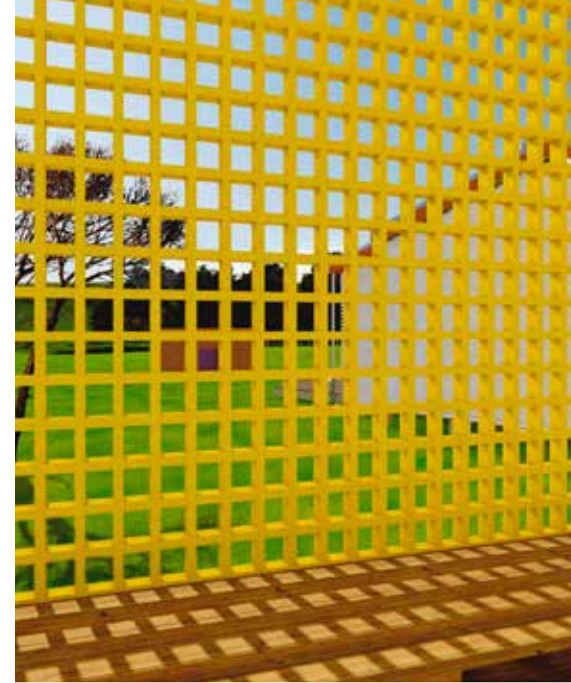


left: Belinda's project won her the Resene Total Colour Rising Star Award in 2021. Resene Aquaclear waterborne urethane varnish in a satin finish was chosen to protect the interior timber walls of Belinda's project while a skylight featuring Resene Happy allows warm, yellow light to radiate down and bathe the interior of the home. Timber trims in Resene Colorwood Natural (interior) and Resene Woodsman Natural (exterior), interior flooring in Resene Colorwood Bark and exterior deck in Resene Woodsman Natural.

	Resene Woodsman Natural		Resene Happy
	Resene Colorwood Natural		Resene Colorwood Bark



-  Resene
Marionette
-  Resene
Outrageous
-  Resene Colorwood
Bark



left top and bottom: Through her research, Belinda learned that Barragán employed coloured latticework in his architecture to create surreal compositions that smooth the transition in light as you move from the outside in. “This latticework is usually used in entrance areas, where this harsh change is most noticeable, as either a window or door element which then becomes a prominent feature of the façade,” she explains. Barragán’s vibrant colour choices reflected those of the flowers in his environment, so Belinda looked to those growing in the Wairarapa region to inform hers. She used Resene Happy to colour the latticework grid on her project, a choice inspired by the golden flowers of wattle trees (*Acacia baileyana*).

above and below: Resene Marionette was used on an internal wall of Belinda’s design – a colour which wraps around to the kitchen splashback – and Resene Outrageous on a portion of the exterior façade which is visible inside the home. These vivid planes of colour have strong ties to Barragán’s work, and the hues themselves reference the lilac *Agapanthus* and orange *Kniphofia nobilis* that can be found in the site’s surroundings. Timber walls and ceiling in Resene Aquaclear, trims in Resene Colorwood Natural and flooring in Resene Colorwood Bark.



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across the field, which seemed fitting as it embodied mysteries like that of de Chirico’s paintings, which influenced Barragán’s work. The rural setting provided an interesting venture into the tension between Barragán’s quest in Mexico; to design homes for privacy and refuge from chaotic surroundings versus the desire in New Zealand to have open living and transparency that allows for strong connections with the land. This led to a design where areas of shadow and intimacy give impact to surprising coloured moments with accents of colour that mediate between inside and outside light.”

Belinda says her major challenge was determining whether to choose hues that appear to disappear into the landscape or ones that would yield an arresting contrast with the surroundings. “It also needed to be a colour scheme that would be compatible with the dramatic seasonal colour changes in the Wairarapa that shift from vibrant fresh greens in winter to warm dry ochres in summer,” she says.



Belinda's current colour picks

"I get pretty overwhelmed when it comes to selecting colours. It can be terribly exciting, yet equally daunting. But some of the juicy colours I've come across are Resene Guggenheim, Resene Hypnotic and Resene Can Can. There are so many factors at play that aid in the selection of colours, including where they'll be used and how they tend to respond to a particular context, so I try to keep open-minded when it comes to colours. There will come a time and place where some colours will work and others won't, and all prior convictions I have about those colours will change."

Resene Hypnotic

Resene Can Can

Resene Guggenheim

below: Belinda says the intention of her thesis is to inspire both architects and broader society to use colour and natural light to create atmospheric, sensory-driven spaces. She used testpots in Resene Happy, Resene Outrageous, Resene Marionette and Resene Alert Tan with Resene Colorwood Natural to colour the physical model of her project that she constructed.

Resene Alert Tan

Resene Colorwood Natural



left: A pop of Resene Marionette also features outside the home on the pool's waterfall feature. From this vantage point, the same hue is visible on the kitchen splashback – as is the latticework in Resene Happy.



She ultimately settled on a neutral exterior cladding that would fit well with nearby farm buildings. "The subdued tone allows the colours of the surroundings to stand out over the building, and as the material weathers, it will continue to recede into the landscape. The orange accents in Resene Outrageous, on the other hand, contrast with the landscape but still feel harmonious. They, along with the Resene Happy and Resene Marionette accents, appear from a distance as hints of bright colours amongst the land the way flowers do amongst trees and shrubbery."

Since April, Belinda has been primarily working on residential alteration projects with James Fenton Architect in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, but with her thesis finished, she is looking forward to focusing more energy on her art. "My

research advocates for cross-disciplining with a specific focus on the importance of fusing art and architecture. So my art practice is both a creative outlet and a means to test colour combinations that will hopefully influence my work in architecture," she says.

When asked about what she'd like to specialise in during her architectural career, Belinda says she's still figuring it out. "In a dream world, I'd be splitting my week between architecture and my art practice. Then again, I've often fantasised about dropping architecture all together in pursuit of other crafts – but haven't we all?"

As fellow chromophiles, we can't wait to see where her journey takes her. [BW](#)

To see more of Belinda's architectural and artistic work, check out her Instagram feed [@belinda_burke](#).