

# FORM

## FORM/DESIGN

Childhood memories, travel, history and culture all shape the way leading interior designers use colour in their work.

## FIVE COLOURS FIVE

Daniella Casamento

**D**uring the recent State of Design Festival the Victorian branch of the Design Institute of Australia presented Top 5x5 Colour, the sixth seminar in the annual Top 10x10 series in which leading designers speak about an aspect of design that inspires and influences their practice.

This year's speakers – Michaela Webb, Beci Orpin, Ian Wong, Debbie Lyn Ryan and Pascale Gomes-McNabb – practice in Graphic Design, Textile Design and Illustration, Industrial Design, Interior Design and Architecture respectively. Colour is an important component of successful design and when advised of the theme for this seminar, their colour choice was immediate. This instinctive response highlights the passion and inspiration drawn from childhood memories, travel, history and culture.

James Harper, the Victorian President and National Vice President of the DIA, introduced the designers in random order. Each designer provided a brief history of their chosen colour and a surprise fact about the colour which proved

both enlightening and entertaining. Landscape, indigenous cultures, natural ochres, fashion and technological advances in colour reproduction were common themes of all speakers.

Michaela Webb, the Creative Director of graphic design studio Round, introduced Yves Klein Blue (also known as International Klein Blue). She explained, "One of the most influential and controversial French artists of the 1950s, Yves Klein devoted his whole career to this particular rich shade of ultramarine and to creating paintings and sculptures that referenced the idea of space, freedom and void."

Yves Klein patented the manufacturing process of his particular shade of blue and so, as Webb explained, "designers and manufacturers today have used their own version of Yves Klein Blue. They can never match it directly and therefore there are different iterations of the blue." It is a colour that cannot be replicated online although there is a website dedicated to International Klein Blue. The single page website is simply a solid block of colour.

The idea of this colour referencing an infinite expanse of water and sky and a surreal reality inspired the concept for the Bleu marquee, designed in collaboration with architecture practice Herbert & Mason, for the 2010 Spring Racing Carnival at Flemington Racecourse. "We wanted to alter reality through colour and form, so we used Yves Klein Blue across everything: the handrails, the walls and the ceilings, to alter perceptions and to unify the space."

Webb and the team at Herbert & Mason undertook thirty colour trials when selecting the colour and in March this year, the Bleu marquee won the Commercial Interior category of the Dulux Colour Awards. The judges awarded the project for the exemplary "use of a single colour to give impact and serenity to a temporary entertainment space."

This intense shade of electric blue has also inspired the fashion industry. "It was big in the 1980s. There were strong electric blues, yellow and orange. It was an era of resurgence and of mad colour combinations," Webb said. More

recently, the colour has re-appeared in the ready-to-wear collection by Prada at New York Fashion Week in April of this year.

Beci Orpin's presentation on the colour Yellow, "the first colour in the Pantone book," she said, referenced the more vivid shades of colour that emerged during the fashion of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, Orpin highlighted the bold yellows in the work of fashion designers Mary Quant and Zandra Rhodes and Rhodes textile designs.

Webb and Orpin use the Pantone Matching System in their work. The Pantone Matching System (PMS) is a system of standardised ink colours assigned a number or name and initially developed for the printing industry.

Trained as a textile designer, Orpin has developed a successful illustration-based practice and design blog. Her illustrations regularly appear in a variety of publications and her commissions include illustrations for advertising campaigns and fashion labels.

"When I began thinking about this talk I didn't think I used much yellow but when I went through the archives of my clothing label, Princess Tina, I found yellow pieces in every single collection," she said. "Overall I decided that what I like about yellow is that it stimulates a sense of positivity, warmth and playfulness combined with a touch of nostalgia."

Orpin is influenced by folk and domestic arts and uses a base colour palette of yellow, red, blue, black and white in her illustration and graphic work. Her favourite illustrators of the late 1960s and early 1970s are Milton Glaser, Peter Mac and Enzo Mari, "whose styles are quite graphic and would not be the same without yellow. These illustrators cross over into both design and art and I love that you can't quite define them. Their illustrations are symbolic of naivety and simplicity."

Industrial designer Ian Wong continued the discussion of the dominant colours of the 1970s with his presentation of orange. A lecturer in industrial design at RMIT and also a PhD candidate, Ian's research focuses on the history of industrial design in Victoria. "I'm very interested in the work of Victorian industrial designers and the whole notion of the 70s, so every time I go into an op-shop now, the object that I take out is the orange version of whatever is on the shelf."

As one of the dominant colours of that era, Wong's collection includes the iconic orange and brown biscuit barrels with faux timber lid made by B.X. Plastics, the plastic kettle designed for General Electric and the Wiltshire Staysharp knife with orange plastic scabbard. The 2011 version of the Wiltshire Staysharp knife features an orange trim on a black scabbard.

Orange is also a reminder of his childhood. The audience was treated to a photograph of Wong's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday contrasted with an image of a cover of Home Beautiful magazine from April 1973. The magazine image showed orange laminate kitchen cupboards, orange kitchen accessories, white Featherston Stem chairs around a white table and orange and pink striped curtains. "That

was the ideal and this is the reality," Wong joked of his family's orange vinyl chairs and orange patterned curtains.

The technological advancement in the Masterbatch system of colour processing enabled the use of vibrant colours in plastics in industrial design during that era and "was just beginning to become a profound influence in the crafting of what we found in our homes," he said.

Debbie Lyn Ryan is a principal of the architectural practice McBride Charles Ryan and is "personally passionate about all the colours connected to red including purple, orange and pink". MCR's projects "are always loaded with ideas and associations and I think that one reason why I like red is because it is also loaded with meanings such as passion, speed and ritual and it's the colour of blood, which gives us life."

Red appears in many of MCR's projects, notably the Klein Bottle House on the Mornington Peninsula and the Letterbox House. The Klein Bottle House was awarded World's Best House at the World Architecture Festival in 2009 and the Residential Exterior category of the Dulux Colour Awards 2008. Red is used internally as a feature colour to dramatic effect.

Of the use of red internally along the facade wall in the Letterbox House Ryan said, "It is the heart of the house." The association is with Australia's red centre, Uluru and red ochre used in cave paintings. "Red is such a powerful force. And all the fast food companies certainly know how important it is in their branding."

Pascale Gomes-McNabb is an architect who has been fascinated with black since childhood because "it was considered a non colour as was white." As designer and co-owner of Melbourne restaurants Cumulus Inc and Cutler & Co, and designer of Bentley Restaurant and Bar in Sydney, Pascale has used black finishes to varying degrees.

"I have that black and white dichotomy in Cumulus where I put the black bar at the window and the white bar opposite and the kitchens are generally white. There are different layers and textures of black in the materiality," she said. "A lot of Cutler is black as well. We've used black steel which I love. The black steel is actually called blue gun steel. I also used black mesh and a black steel bar and I think it's creating a mood."

Gomes-McNabb's fascination with black clothing originated in the mid 1980s and the emergence of Japanese fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto, coinciding with the electric colours of more mainstream fashion. She noticed that "black clothing started to invade society. I think it is part of tribalism to a certain extent. Black through different societies and different cultures has always been a signifier in clothing in particular, a signifier of a certain authority or age or wisdom. I think it's a really fascinating cultural phenomenon and now it has become mainstream. Black is everywhere."

The DIA seminar, held at the Zenith showroom on Flinders Lane, was a sell-out event and there was indeed a lot of black in the room.



Debbie Lyn Ryan



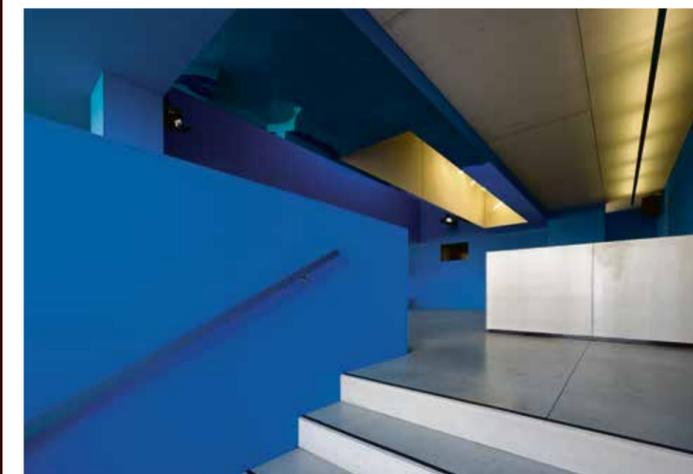
Pascale Gomes-McNabb



Ian Wong



Beci Orpin



Michaela Webb

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