

THE ROLE AUSTRALIAN HOME MAGAZINES HAVE PLAYED IN COLOUR AND DESIGN EDUCATION

Babette Hayes DIA, member of the Colour Society of Australia
Interior designer, stylist, colour consultant, writer

This presentation gives a kaleidoscopic overview of some of the many influences that have impacted the development of Australia's contemporary residential architecture and interiors with a particular emphasis on the role that home-focused magazines have played over the past 50 years in influencing, educating and inspiring the home owner. This will be illustrated by an extensive collection of colour images. The featured colour images are from Australian Home Journal; Belle magazine; House and Garden; Vogue Living; InsideOut and one book, "Australian Style" published in 1970.



THE ROLE OF AUSTRALIAN HOME MAGAZINES

From the earliest days of settlement Australian home makers had relied on a handful of women's magazines and their local newspapers, overseas visitors and family letters to provide them with the latest ideas from England in home making, design and house building ideas. Houseproud, the women in this country depended on English traditions when it came to furnishing and colouring their homes. Isolated at the other end of the world, it was all they knew, and, for many Australians, England was considered "Home" well into the mid 20th century, hence the reliance and preference for all that was traditionally English from furnishings to cooking

THE 1960s AND THE 1970s



My initial response when I arrived in Australia from London in 1965 was one of surprise. Coming from England where I had freelanced, styling for home design magazines including House and Garden and Ideal Home, I discovered styling for magazines was unknown and home magazine decorating and architectural features were well behind in contemporary design content. However I was fortunate – as my arrival coincided with the relaunching of Australian Home Journal, turning it into a modern home magazine headed by a visionary young English Editor, Diana Wynne, who contracted me as their photographic design stylist.

The mid 1960s saw major changes taking place in home decorating as new, radically modern furniture, furnishing products and brightly coloured fabric designs started to arrive in Australia, due to an inspired group of designers, architects and prospective importers who while travelling overseas,

ordered and brought back what they had found. The exposure of these in their showrooms, magazines and new speciality shops led to a growing acceptance of new design ideas and the increased use of a new, vibrant colour/design language in the home. Adventurous home makers, hungry for the new, were inspired by what was appearing in their magazines – bold fabrics, modern furniture, radical designs in kitchen and home accessories from Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, France and America.

Colour visionary and interior designer Marion Best filled her Woollahra shop with: Eero Saarinen tables, Knoll chairs, Mies van der Rohe, Pierre Paulin, Eero Arnio and Joe Colombo furniture, brightly coloured Marimekko fabrics and gorgeous jewel coloured hand woven upholstery silks from Thailand, with colourful Flokati rugs from Greece and tufted wool rugs from Portugal, Artemide light fittings from Italy, and fine woven grass wallpapers from India. It was an Aladdin's cave for those seeking to furnish their home with the best of the new, including Australian furniture designers Grant Featherston and Clem Meadmore furniture, and Australian designers and artists. Then there were suppliers such as importer Russell Whitechurch who fell in love with Finland, Marimekko and Alvar Aalto's furniture and always had stunning, colourful room displays with imported light fittings and locally designed light fittings by John Anderson, becoming an architect/designer's Mecca.

Clean, clear colour was everywhere, fabrics, furniture, and products. Discerning home owners equipped their kitchens and dining rooms with overseas wares imported from Scandinavia, Italy, Germany, Japan, and France. Dick Van Leer, owner of Artes Studio in Sydney, who had launched the first ultra modern furniture showroom in the 50s, continued to provide and educate Australians in the finer points of contemporary quality design, featuring dark rosewood cabinets, leather and bright coloured wool upholstered furniture from Europe and America (Knoll). Local furniture maker, Parker Furniture, made Hans Wegner carved teak dining chairs under license and pine, popular in Northern Europe, found its way into Australian homes, providing a new design edge with its warmth and golden hues on walls and ceilings as well as joinery and furniture.

When it came to using colour no one was in the same league as Marion Best who had developed jewel like multi layered glazed finishes of stippled colour on colour on walls and ceilings for her devoted following – clients loved her emerald green and orange, turquoise and glowing yellow, white on white, Tibetan inspired reds and ochres. Her work was frequently featured in magazines causing shock waves with her innovative use of colour and adventurously furnished interiors.

Readership numbers increased and magazines improved in quality of design content, styling, photography and the availability of better quality paper and improved colour printing which led to more colour pages being included in the magazine. Black and white editorial was the norm in the mid 1960s - House and Garden had five colour pages for their editorial including cooking and home design.

Colour played an important role in the features we put together and readers were inspired to recreate what they saw. While designers and design stores comfortably worked with colour, finishes and furnishings, architects generally stayed with a more austere range of whites on walls, using timbers and natural stone on floors and walls, or carpet or rugs on floors with the occasional splash of colour. Others, like Neville Gruzman, favoured red for one of his clients, highlighting architectural detail and carpeting vast sweeps of flooring and floating staircase in red shag while Merlin Cunliffe, who ran design store Thesaurus in Melbourne, used vivid primaries on walls and upholstery. Joyce Tebbutt's Cabana, catering mainly for Sydney's conservative North shore, favoured heavy Spanish furniture, elegant painted Louis chairs and modern American imports with a colour palette of mid hues - greens, apricot and mandarin, yellows, aquas. Asia came into the picture with designers such as Neville Marsh and Barry Little introducing Asian lacquered furniture and grass wall papers in their subtly coloured interiors. Flamboyant designer Ray Siede and the more discreet American born architect George Freeman wowed us with exquisitely coloured interiors while at the top of the more traditional social echelons, clients sought out Leslie Walford in Sydney and Reg Riddell in Melbourne to create lavish, traditional and very aristocratic Franco-English interiors.

Architects and Project Homes

In launching their project homes, builders Pettit and Sevitt, had a significant impact on the way future home makers would live in their houses. Their well built, open plan houses designed by leading architects such as Ken Woolley and Neil Clerehan were usually set amongst the grey green tones of eucalypts and moss covered rocks on steep, difficult-to-build-on bush covered blocks of land - often the only land sites left (but also ideally suited to the architecture) - around Sydney's Northern Suburbs and Melbourne. It was a brave new concept and led to the development of a more appropriate informal Australian lifestyle, with their open plan kitchen/living spaces, the use of big natural timber beams, split floor levels, high wall areas, large sliding doors and windows and plain painted fuss free walls which lent themselves to softer colours such as gum leaf green combined with white walls and the natural unstained timbers. Melbourne had its groundbreaking counterpart: open plan, flat roofed project homes built by Merchant Builders, designed by Cocks and Carmichael and Graham Gunn, using Janne Faulkner of Nexus for the interiors with her unique colour mix of soft off beat colours.

The book "Australian Style" published in 1970

1970 saw the publication of the first design book in full colour on Australian design and architecture – Australian Style - which I collated and styled, working on the text with April Hersey. It featured the leading names of the time such as Harry Seidler, Ken Woolley, Neville Marsh, Albert Read, Graham Gunn, Tom Gillies, Bruce Douglas, Dennis Bellotte, Tom Gillies, Ray Siede, Marion Hall Best, Reg Riddell, Robin Boyd, Merlin Cunliffe, Barry Little, Joyce Tebbutt of Cabana, Leslie Walford, wall paper queen Florence Broadhurst, industrial designers John Anderson and Gordon Andrews, importer Russell Whitechurch and many more and is now a must-have reference book for the 1960s.

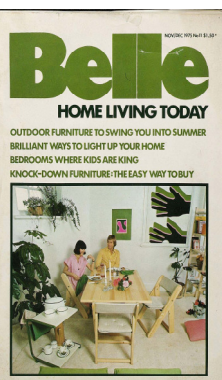
New home design magazine "Belle" launched in 1974

Belle was launched in 1974, as a top end home maker's magazine in competition with Vogue Living. It soon turned itself into a leading design magazine referred to by designers and architects as well as design-discerning home makers. We featured new local and overseas talent as well as established architect's and designer's interesting homes, travelling interstate and overseas to gather our material. The quality of the paper and printing was superb and working with top photographers we would end up with beautifully designed, modern layouts.

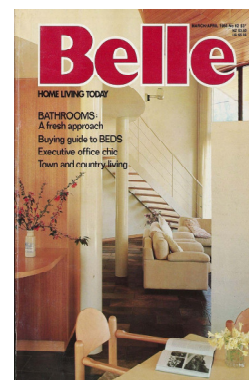
Variety was the key. Queenslanders Gabriel Poole and Geoffrey Pie were featured with their splashes of strong colour on walls combined with open spaces and timber clad honey toned feature walls while in Victoria Alistair Knox's mud brick houses gave us an earth toned palette. Sydney's Marsh and Freeman provided elegantly eclectic modern interiors, and Glen Murcutt continued to spread his message interstate with his dedication to simplicity.



70s



80s



THE 1980s

The bright primaries disappeared as softer mid-hued Memphis colours came in followed by teal green combined with peach-pink and grey with blue-pinks becoming the 80s favourite used in contemporary architecture and interiors. Warm whites such as Dulux's White Birch and Chalk USA became the darling of architects, textures and patterns became more subtle, wall papers disappeared and carpets were ripped up to be replaced with timber floors as minimalism started to creep in.

It wasn't always sleek and modern though. French provincial became the most popular country style as English Victorian and Georgian rosewood and mahogany family pieces were replaced by fashionably pale French, Welsh, Irish and Swedish antiques. Grand old homes were coated in Porters paints in weathered Tuscan ochres, off whites and grey blues, a contrast to the grey concrete or white on white house or apartments designed by the likes of iconic architect, Harry Seidler, in pursuit of simplicity and strength.

THE 1990s AND 21st CENTURY

The 1990s was the decade that saw large numbers of newly qualified architects and interior designers joining existing architectural and design practises or established their own studios and offices. A wealth of Australian talent had blossomed and launched itself into the 1990s. In a short decade the Australian design scene had totally changed.



Vogue Living increasingly looked to a younger professional readership and House and Garden continued to provide quality design ideas. Homes tended to feature white walls inside with the occasional burst of colour and subtle mid tones such as caramels and warm taupes outside. Architects on the other hand were increasingly using colour in strong doses, Virginia Kerridge and Caroline Pidcock in Sydney, Michael Rigg and Centrum Architects in Melbourne, were frequently featured in Vogue Living's pages displaying refreshingly individual colour palettes.

With the end of the 1990s and birth of the 21st century we see the arrival of a new era in the designer/architect professional field reflected in the magazines. Clients required top quality luxury products, larger homes, more space, beautifully detailed and furnished interiors and exteriors with monochromatic resort style colour palettes rich in textures and finishes.

CONCLUSION: RETRACING OUR STEPS

Retracing our steps: we started off with the shock and exuberance of new, vibrant colour palettes and patterned wall papers and bold, graphic fabrics that dominated the design scene of the 60s. We travelled through time zones when we favoured blues, turquoise and purple which were replaced with orange, yellows and brown. Then delved into options of bold primaries and mid-range hues in the 70s moving into the quieter pastels of the 80s, with architects still favouring whites as a new palette of warm greys crept in. Feeling starved of colour in the 90s, designers, home owners and some architects increasingly welcomed the return of colour, which varied from strong to subtle hues and updated Florence Broadhurst wallpapers started to reappear on feature walls. Taupes and greys started to take over in the late 90s - inside and outside - leaving Sydney awash in a sophisticated palette of greys and taupes of every hue in 2009. There is no denying that being exposed to more top end design concepts in our home-making magazines has given home owners and readers an edge and competency that was lacking 45 years ago.

2009 – Where to now?

So where do we go from here? What does to-day's reader expect from their magazines? I asked the editors of Belle, Vogue Living, House and Garden and Inside Out to describe how they see their roles and responsibilities as educators and sources of inspiration.

Neale Whittaker's role is a complex one - as publisher and editor of 'belle' he also has financial responsibilities. "I feel very passionately about Belle, it is Australian born. I see my role as a decimator of information bringing a portfolio together of great Australian and overseas design for each issue. The content is always mixed and it's about spreading the knowledge. I am informing quite a small niche of readers – readers, decorators, designers, industry people - we have an affluent readership. Australian designers have a great design aesthetic and a sense of humour, not bound by tradition. When I came on board three years ago I realised I had to create a point of difference with other magazines and took 'belle' into a luxury element; less architectural (not viable). To allow it to survive we had to make it very desirable with a broad spread of ideas, sexy, with a sense of luxury, elegance and a certain amount of glamour".

David Clarke, Editor of Vogue Living, "makes sure Vogue Living has an Australian identity, looks Australian and feels Australian. I think it's important that it is accessible and presents a new way of looking at things. Our approach to colour? I felt we'd gone through a long period of 'greige', the colour palette was very pared back and there was exuberance lacking so I intentionally put it in, hoping people would think it was OK to use colour in decorating. There is still the divide between architects and designers though. When we produced our 40th anniversary issue we made a point about the science of colour. The elegance of the magazine's content is important. Due to the more extravagant approach to design last year, there is new kind of modernism coming in – a form of minimalism returning with feeling. There is a simplicity we need to reactivate in our lives without compromising our sense and human emotional needs. Decoration can be excessive but there can be too much emphasis on minimalism".

House and Garden's Editor, Lisa Green, takes her role "of the highest selling home making magazine extremely seriously. It's a huge responsibility. Each story is specifically crafted to address the needs of the broad readership. Most of the houses featured are high-end homes, but the ideas gleaned from the images, the home owners and designers interviewed in the stories offer plenty of ideas for people on all budgets and we always include the colour palette. Our homes and gardens are aspirational but the ideas and advice underpinning each feature makes them relevant to a broadband of home owners".

A decade old, InsideOut has been under the Editorship of Karen McCartney. "I am self conscious as an educator. Inside Out is designed for hardworking and aspiring homemakers; it is a coffee table magazine that comes with the information. The delivery of these two things has evolved over the years and is embedded in everything we do – it underpins each house feature which has two pages showing the 'how to' - how to treat the walls, how a coloured chair adds dynamism – its not about 'get the look' and not about mimicking. We provide interactivity. It's a magazine that is art direction led, the art department works on styling: 'How can we keep it relevant? How will it be laid out?' If you can embed yourself in readers' lives then as a magazine you are doing your job!"



2000s