

BLUE, PERIOD

This Melbourne home displays its owner's liking for 'going deep' with a favourite hue.

By Annemarie Kiely Photographed by Lisa Cohen

Designer Belinda Hall's living room is lined in a "murky pond blue" custom-mixed paint from Haymes. It is furnished with Gerrit Reitveld's 'Zig-Zag' chair from Cult and a 1950s blonde-wood sideboard from Geoffrey Hatty Applied Arts. The Modernist monochromes of a 1930s French wall light from Nicolas & Alistair complement Adrian Lockhart's Stretching, from Leonard Joel, and Anna Varendorff's geometric brass sculpture, Medium Free Objects, from Franque. OPPOSITE PAGE: A Gubi 'Mategor' drinks trolley from Cult, stocked with vintage cocktail ware, sits in front of a nib wall papered in a section of Anthropologie's 'Etched Arcadia Mural'. Details, last pages.





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ABOVE, FROM LEFT: *The eye is drawn down the entry hall into the rear living rooms by a lower-wall dado painted in Haymes 'Royal Blue' and bordered in Porter's Paints 'Alchemy Liquid Gold'. The portrait is of Hall's mother at age six; a vintage runner from Loom and a Thonet 'No.16' settee offset the dado's line and colour. The living room features a 'Claude' sofa by Russell Pinch, upholstered in Romo 'Linara' from Marco Fabrics. A coffee table made by Hall's brother-in-law Tim Shovelton sits on a rug from Montreux.*

There's been a lot of media babble about design settling into a blue period. The truth is that our tonal preferences have always sat between violet and green on the spectrum. This bias was recently tested by a series of surveys — the polling of which, covering some 10 countries across four continents and a diversity of cultures, revealed blue to be the world's favourite colour. Why? One can only guess, but from the fluff that collects in our navels to the colour of the cosmos, it is the most constant cast of our existence and perhaps the one we subliminally associate with safety and certainty.

Belinda Hall, one-half of Richard Hall & Son, the Melbourne design duo who have just enveloped her home in the deepest blues, digests this trivia and tells that she met her business partner, Fiona Richardson, on the dark side. Does she mean *Star Wars*? “No, the

kid's kinder,” she says with a laugh. “No really, we bonded over blue. I was searching to add some atmosphere into this big, blank, white renovation of an old Victorian dairy when I met Fi and informed her that I was thinking of going deep.”

Richardson, who had lived on the dark side in a double-fronted Edwardian house (*Vogue Living*, Nov–Dec 2013), showed Hall her idiosyncratic layering of resurrected antiques on ash greys, and the dusky mood soon repeated in the domesticated dairy. Its success began the conversation about a new styling business.

“I remember saying to Belinda, who insisted that I get a design company going, ‘It's just not going to happen.’” Richardson recalls, reminding Hall of the totality of six children and two “big-job” husbands between them who still account for most hours in their days. “However, if we did it together and shared the load, well then...” »

Glints of gold, in the form of a French sun-ray mirror found on eBay, a brass 'Infinity' bowl from Lightly and a bronze bust of Alexander the Great excavated from the garden of Hall's father, twinkle amid the all-encompassing blue in the living room. A vintage lamp from Waverley Antique Bazaar and Jaime Hayón's 'Ro' easy chair for Fritz Hansen from Cult are sensuous insertions into the colour blocking. An oil-on-board painting from 1975 by Gareth James Roberts introduces a hint of green. OPPOSITE PAGE: The dining area is set with a table encircled by vintage Italian Arrben chairs found on eBay. A Gan 'Palermo' kilim rug from Hub shakes up the scene and delineates an adjacent sitting area.





« Hall, a former publishing executive who claims to thrive on collaboration, finishes Richardson's words with, "I was in."

That was three years and multiple projects ago for the two mothers, who now juggle their diaries around decorating jobs for residential clients and styling commissions for commercial interests — which brings us back to blue and the particular shade of paint the pair used to impart Hall's house with indefinable edges. "I had found the perfect colour on an old English paint chart but couldn't convince my husband to bring a sample tin back from a business trip to London," says Hall. "We custom-mixed it to match from the Haymes paint range until we reached this murky depth of 'pond'. At night it's really vibrant and sings."

Qualifying that Haymes 'Royal Blue' has been used to draw the eye down the hallway while a gold-edged dado line defers to the period drama of *Downton Abbey* and the colour schemes of Italian designers Dimore Studio, Hall adds that it serendipitously reiterates the gilt-framed blues of a portrait of her mother. "My great-grandfather, Frank Wells, started painting at the age of 74 — he did really beautiful portraits and landscapes," she explains. "My mother must have been about six years of age when she sat for him. I sort of borrowed that piece from my parents' beach house."

This "subtly appropriated portrait" paired with an auction-bought 'No. 16' settee, nicknamed 'Mick's chair' after a dear friend, brings Richardson to define the pair's point of difference as designers. "We try to impart feeling and emotion while creating a space that could belong to no one else but you," she says. "It's not about money. We seek an articulation of the individual, not a shop." This negates the sleep-in on Sunday morning (Camberwell Sunday Market in the eastern suburbs calls) and necessitates the weekly trawling of the auction rooms at Leonard Joel in South Yarra — "obligingly opened till eight on Wednesday nights".

But these are the small pleasures of their "design digressions", insist the duo, who have made emotion palpable in Hall's home with such resonant pieces as a blonde-wood sideboard, created in the 1950s by Albert Guénot, the former head designer at French department store Le Bon Marché. Its chiselled bulk is framed from kitchen view by nib (or partial) walls papered with the towering trees of Anthropologie's 'Etched Arcadia Mural' wallpaper.

Richardson and Hall used only the end sections of the mural's seven pieces, but these florid panels work with patterned floor rugs to define areas and create a graphic dynamic that stops the steep into sedation the colour blue supposedly induces. But isn't that just the ticket to sanity when sharing a house with young sons? Both women nod in fierce agreement before averting their gaze to the Gubi trolley — the cocktail bar on wheels filled with remedies for the infamous witching hour. *VL*

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Design partners Belinda Hall and Fiona Richardson radically altered the appearance of the white kitchen with colour, replacing the splashback with a band of Azul Zafiro wall tiles from Signorino Tile Gallery. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: A kitchen jug filled with vintage French enamel cutlery repeats the gold accent. The master bedroom has been painted in Haymes 'Blushing Bride', while the 'New York' bedside table is from Grazia & Co. Details, last pages.

