

# RHAPSODY IN BLUE

FROM AQUAMARINE AND TOPAZ TO INDIGO AND COBALT, AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING PALETTE MAKES A MELBOURNE DESIGNER'S HOME A COLOUR STATEMENT

TEXT ANNEMARIE KIELY PHOTOGRAPHS LISA COHEN



A kilim matches the blue theme in the Melbourne home of designer Belinda Hall OPPOSITE PAGE A Matégot cocktail trolley sits in front of a wall covered in Anthropologie's 'Etched Arcadia' wallpaper mural





There's been a lot of media babble lately 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, which revealed blue to be the world's favourite colour. Why? One can only guess, but it certainly seems to be 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 a palette of deepest blues, digests this trivia and says that she met her business partner, Fiona Richardson, on the dark side. Does she mean *Star Wars*? 'No, it was a colour thing,' she says with a laugh. 'Really. We bonded over blue. I was looking to add some atmosphere to this big, blank, white renovation of an old Victorian dairy when I met Fi and told her that I was thinking of going deep.'

Fiona, who'd lived on the dark side in a double-fronted Edwardian house, showed Belinda her idiosyncratic layering of resurrected antiques on ash greys, and soon the dusky mood was repeated in the domesticated dairy. Its success began a conversation about a new styling business.

'I remember saying to Belinda, who was insisting that I get a design company going, "It's not going to happen,"' Fiona recalls, who reminded Belinda of the total of six children and two 'big-job' husbands between them. 'If we did it together, however, and shared the load, well, then...'

Belinda, a former publishing executive, finishes Fiona's sentence 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. ▶



FROM TOP LEFT The formerly all-white kitchen acquired visual appeal with details such as the Azul Zafiro-tiled splashback; touches of green inside and in the garden beyond provide colour contrast OPPOSITE PAGE Vintage Italian Arrben chairs in the dining area





‘At night, this depth of “murky pond” blue is really vibrant and sings’ *Belinda Hall, designer*



The pervasive blue of the living room is relieved by glints of gold in the form of a French sun-ray mirror and a bust of Alexander the Great. The 'Ro' easy chair is by Jaime Hayón



‘For my house, I’d found the perfect colour on an old English paint chart,’ says Belinda. ‘To match it, we custom-mixed paint from the Haymes range. At night, this depth of “murky pond” blue is really vibrant and sings.’

Noting 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, Belinda adds that it serendipitously reiterates the gilt-framed blues in 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.’

This portrait, paired with an auction-bought Thonet ‘No 16’ settee, nicknamed ‘Mick’s chair’ after a friend, brings Fiona 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 but you,’ she says. Their quest for the unique means that they forgo the Sunday sleep-in (Camberwell Market in the eastern suburbs calls) and necessitates the regular trawling of the auction rooms at Leonard Joel in South Yarra.

But these are the small pleasures of their ‘design digressions’, insist the duo, who have curated a highly individual collection in Belinda’s home. A blonde-wood sideboard, created in the 1950s by Albert Guénot, is framed by partial walls papered with Anthropologie’s ‘Etched Arcadia’ wallpaper mural. These panels work with patterned floor rugs to create a graphic dynamic that stops the slip into sedation that 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 shifting their gaze to the Matégot cocktail trolley, bearing liquid remedies for the infamous witching hour. ■

FROM TOP LEFT Belinda with one of her children; the master bedroom is the only room painted in pale pink **OPPOSITE PAGE** From the entrance, the eye is drawn towards the rear living rooms by a vintage runner and lower-wall dado painted in royal blue. The portrait is of Belinda’s mother at age six

