



# Colour in context

Anna Frame explores the connection between art and architecture through paint colours.

There are some designers whose work is synonymous with bold, explosive colour. On the opposite side of the spectrum are those who prefer to push the boundaries of what can be done with neutral tones alone. Before she got stuck into her thesis at Victoria University of Wellington, Graduate Architect Anna Frame had a strong preference for achromatic colour

schemes, but her research led to a far greater appreciation of the positive impacts that colour can have on our urban communities.

Anna approached her project, *Colour and the City*, as a series of thought experiments which allowed her to explore the physiological effects of colour when applied to built forms. She honed in on how different hues could be

applied to a mixed-density development in the Newtown area of Wellington. Presently, the suburb is primarily populated with single-family homes that were built in the first half of the 20th century and bears plenty of similarities to many neighbourhoods across New Zealand.

“Currently, Aotearoa is experiencing a shift in new residential builds and more and more

medium-density developments are popping up in our cities. The suburban context of Newtown was fitting for a discussion around how we might integrate the future character of medium-density housing with the existing character of pre-1930s homes. Often, new buildings are designed one metre off the boundary of their cadastral sites and extruded to their maximum heights according to council regulations. These designs frequently entail extensive glazing and grey tones. Though colour is sometimes used to accent forms, it is often treated as an afterthought to the formal qualities of our urban environments. Instead of simply using colour as mere decoration, *Colour and the City* explores how we might leverage the physiological qualities of colour through form to contribute to the future character of the city,” explains Anna.

As an artistic painter, Anna relied on her background knowledge of colour theory to guide her experimentation, allowing her to explore the relationships between different Resene paint colours and how each hue changes when



exposed to different lighting conditions. Playing with the idea of reducing the visual impact of increased density, Anna's colour studies ultimately led her to a scheme comprised of Resene Chetwode Blue, Resene Carousel Pink, Resene Drover, Resene Geraldine and Resene Bauhaus based on their relative saturations and value. In the proposed design outcome, larger forms would be of lower value darker colours to suppress their sense of mass on the surrounding context while smaller forms would be painted with higher value hues. Through this alternation between low and high values, the visual impact of the overall scheme is reduced.

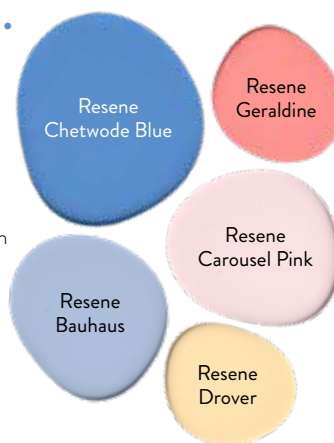
During her experiments, Anna discovered that cooler colours often took on an illuminating quality when viewed under natural lighting circumstances and she sought to make the most of this visual phenomenon. "Together as a colour palette, Resene Chetwode Blue, Resene Carousel Pink, Resene Drover, Resene Geraldine and Resene Bauhaus offer huge contrast to their surroundings being that they are highly saturated. But I saw that, when used as an external finish for the building forms, these colours would frequently desaturate under natural lighting conditions – especially when viewed against the typical backdrops of grey and white walls that often make up our built environments. Our cities also often sit in close proximity to the blues and greens of the sea and bush. For this reason, I chose cooler tones

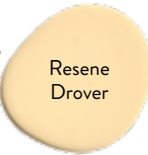
of typically warm hues to explore the impacts colour relationships can have on our perception of form and provoke an opportunity for a greater use of colour in our surrounding context."

Because of her personal preference for neutral hues, Anna says the biggest challenge was allowing the expression of colour to be central to the project itself. "Anyone who knows me would agree I tend to be an achromatic person. For this reason, my research challenged me to step outside of my typical creative practice. In turn, this allowed me to start to challenge my preconceptions around the complexities that lie between architecture and art. Doing this through the use of colour in my paintings opened up my understanding of how the two disciplines can be expressed in my creative practice; inherently, in this project, it is the visual operation of colour that brings the two practices together."



One of her most valuable discoveries was the effect that New Zealand's inherent natural light had on her Resene colour palette. "Over the course of the project, I started to understand how the ambient lighting conditions of the site influences the colours we see in our cities. The ever-changing conditions of this context were not something I fully understood to be as truly expansive as they are across seasons, weather conditions and ranging proximity to the bush and sea. This is still a challenge I think about often. We don't just want a blue city, despite

**opposite and right:** Graduate Architect Anna Frame's thesis project, *Colour in the City*, explores issues of urban circulation and housing density. Anna leveraged her experience with artistic painting and colour theory to guide her thesis research, which aimed to provoke discussion surrounding the use of colour within medium-density urban contexts. Her design concept features Resene Chetwode Blue, Resene Carousel Pink, Resene Drover, Resene Geraldine and Resene Bauhaus applied to a mixed-use urban development in Newtown, Wellington, shown here under two different lighting conditions to demonstrate how the paint colours would be affected. "This is just one proposition for what the future character of Wellington could be, explored through colour – a proposition that aims to stray from the conformity that has the potential to strip character from our cities," explains Anna.





**left:** Anna selected Resene Chetwode Blue, Resene Carousel Pink, Resene Drover, Resene Geraldine and Resene Bauhaus to show how even saturated colours can sit well with one another and within the grey and white façades that are common throughout many of our cities. She also paid close attention to how our inherent lighting circumstances, natural surroundings and changes in weather affected her Resene colour choices. Anna's primary design outcome consisted of an elevated walkway, laneway, café, gallery, community garden and medium-density housing, which she has mocked up to mimic different lighting conditions.

- |   |                         |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|
|  | Resene<br>Carousel Pink |  | Resene<br>Bauhaus       |
|  | Resene<br>Geraldine     |  | Resene<br>Chetwode Blue |

“Since completing my thesis, I now see colour use to be very contextual. You also need to have a client willing to partake in the colour, as it doesn't seem to be the norm in New Zealand or Australia. Some firms in Europe, such as Fala Atelier and Studio Ossidiana, have really interesting approaches in their use of colour that adds something rich to the urban fabric. There is something in the way that colour could be used to define a layer of time and characterisation, to provide something other than conformity and offer something new that could define the future character of our cities,” she says.

“As more time passes, I often consider how my thesis has shaped the way I see colour and architecture, and I am excited to continue this thinking in my future creative practice. It is safe to say my paintings will likely always draw heavily on colour. It is also safe to say that, while I have a long way to go in the industry until I will have an opportunity to specify colours, I am excited for doing so in the future – and the chance to provoke more discussion around how we use colour as an external finish in Aotearoa. I am hopeful for the future of housing in our cities.” [BW](#)

To see more of Anna's portfolio, check out her Instagram feed at [www.instagram.com/annaframee](http://www.instagram.com/annaframee).

the illuminance that blue paint might provide on a particularly sunny day. But that being said, I don't think we want a grey one either!”

While the subject of her thesis project was conceptual, it calls attention to the reality of our urban and suburban environments. “This project would be interesting to be realised as it would provide a huge contrast in its proposed context of Newtown. The use of highly-saturated hues provokes a discussion about opportunities for applying colour within our existing city fabric. The more colour, texture and materiality that we use, the richer the city becomes – and we start to experience it as a composition of layers of form and space.”

For Anna, the connection between art and architecture is deeply rooted. “I think my interest in architecture came mostly from my love of art. I had two really great teachers in high school – in Art History and Visual Arts – who both exposed me to so much of the world outside of Dunedin, where I grew up. My grandmother is also a librarian and so many school holidays

were spent with her at the library and the art gallery. Although I loved painting at high school, I was also drawn to the technocratic nature of physics and maths, so studying architecture was a natural path to choose. I was also fortunate enough to visit some parts of Europe when I was quite young, which was my first insight into all that architecture overseas has to offer.”

Anna says the project has had an enduring effect on how she approaches colour in both her architectural and artistic work. “My post-graduate study really allowed me to delve further into my creative practice and to really understand how my years of painting have shaped my eye across disciplines. The complexities and contradictions that lie at the boundary of art and architecture are navigated through the realm of colour. The project was not intended to provide some sort of solution to the visual impact of medium-density housing; rather, it is understood as a series of thought experiments that develop an understanding and knowledge of how colours operate in the

complex built environments of our cities. I guess that's why my thesis was a huge experiment for me. It was interesting to compare the way I see my painting in relation to my architecture, as well as in relation to myself as a creative. It challenged me to reflect deeply on how I view and understand my painting practice, and how this contributes to my architectural practice.”

Today, Anna lives in Sydney and works at Candalepas Associates. Looking ahead, she hopes to gain experience with a variety of project types. “As a young graduate, I think it is really important to gain as much knowledge as possible. At the moment, I have been finding myself really interested in working on buildings that will have an impact on more than a few people,” she says. “I would love to work on a small art gallery one day – mostly for the approach in scale and also the potential for designing something that will have a greater impact on a larger population.”

Anna is also interested in continuing her colour explorations through more real-world projects when the right opportunities arise.