

PEOPLE

Sarah-Jane Pyke & Juliette Arent of Arent & Pyke



Residential interiors by Arent and Pyke employ colour and textiles to create a decorative modernism that feels particularly Australian.

Words by David Clark

Photography by Felix Forest, Anson Smart and Tom Ferguson



One of the more complex questions in design is whether there is a difference between how men and women approach an interior. Juliette Arent and Sarah-Jane Pyke are forthright on the subject. “We talk about emotional design, which I would say is a strongly feminine approach ... that’s what we’re doing when we’re working on someone’s home. We’re taking into consideration all the nuances about their family and we’re responding to that in an emotional way,” Juliette says with a disarming smile. Sarah-Jane adds, “It’s an earthy and grounded response to [the clients] and the way they live.”

The pair first met in their twenties, working as designers in a small Sydney practice. Sarah-Jane had taken a more linear path, studying interior architecture at university and then moving into practice. Juliette had “meandered” – first some time

at design school, then a fine arts degree and eventually back to studying interior design. Their friendship developed as they talked about their plans for life and work, each recognizing in the other a similar attitude to the home, an entrepreneurial spirit and a shared ambition for their careers. Soon enough they had set up their practice – initially just the two of them. Ten years and more than a hundred jobs later, they now run their studio in Sydney’s Surry Hills with a team of ten senior designers and support staff, currently all women. At the time of writing they have more than thirty jobs on their books. That’s a lot of work – testimony to their ever-expanding reputation.

From the beginning, they saw a clear direction for the kind of interior design practice they wanted to run. “We saw a gap in the profession,” says Sarah-Jane. “When we started, we were seeing a lot of minimalist work – it was white and bright

01 Juliette and Sarah-Jane run their studio in Surry Hills with a team of ten senior designers and support staff, currently all women. Photograph: Katherine Lu.



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02 The Alex Hotel is Arent and Pyke’s only project that isn’t residential and the practice was selected to design this hotel for their expertise in domestic interiors. Photograph: Anson Smart.

03 The brief for the Alex Hotel was to give the feeling of “home away from home.” Artwork leased from Artbank. Photograph: Anson Smart.

and amazing, and the guys creating this work were our design heroes.” But while some of these practices were at the time the “gods of the Sydney scene,” Juliette realized one day that she “couldn’t live in a place like that.”

At the same time, they were seeing a lot of high decoration, rich with brocades, tassels and swags and a European sensibility that they felt was too opulent for an Australian way of living. They identified a road between – something with an easier contemporary comfort and more individuality, expression and colour. “We felt that we could offer people something that had energy and spirit to it,” says Juliette.

“Intelligent solutions that are grounded in what people need, and that can elevate the experience of being at home to something joyful and exciting – and spirited. That was a key word for us,” adds Sarah-Jane.



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Design for the home is the duo’s forte. All their work to date has been residential, apart from one project – the Alex Hotel in Perth. Even for that job they were contracted because of their expertise in domestic interiors. Like many contemporary hoteliers, the developers were after that “home away from home” feeling. Designing a more public “domestic” interior gave the designers a freer hand, without the need to design for a specific client. Many of the threads that run through their practice were given a purer and unfettered expression in this project – the finesse with colour and textiles, clarity and thoughtfulness about how a space is used, the compositional eye and the combination of the best contemporary objects from international designers with Australian artisans and makers.

An earlier project, The Avenue, was a turning point for the practice in terms of

industry recognition. The house is a large 1880s terrace in inner Sydney. The owners had been living overseas and returned to Australia wanting to finally make it their home. The fabric on the sofa, featuring a print of large green leaves, has become a visual signature for the interior. It is striking against the moodier hues of the blue walls, old timber joinery and pair of Gerrit Thomas Rietveld Utrecht armchairs. “We presented that fabric and the clients said, ‘You mean, on the whole sofa?’ They were brave [in trusting our decision to use it],” says Sarah-Jane.

The pair often gently nudge their clients – one of their skills is nudging just enough. “People like the idea of being adventurous, with a marble or a stone for instance, but in

the end, they’ll often want to stick with [materials they know],” says Juliette. “They always have a degree of trust in us, but I think a lot of clients don’t have that level of trust in themselves to do daring finishes ... we encourage them beyond their comfort zones.”

Fig Tree House and Bronte Beach House both have a quirky and individual feel, expressive of the personalities of the clients as much as of the designers themselves. These, like many of the firm’s projects, are family homes. Both Sarah-Jane and Juliette have young kids, so designing for a family is close to their hearts.

When they started their careers, they noticed other residential work featured a lot of steel and glass, and hard and sharp edges

04 The Avenue is a large 1880s terrace house in inner Sydney. Photograph: Anson Smart.



05 The moody hues of the blue walls provide a backdrop to a collection of antique furniture. Photograph: Anson Smart.

06 The designers encourage their clients to move beyond their comfort zones, such as with playful patterns as seen in a bathroom at The Avenue. Photograph: Anson Smart.

07 The fabric on the sofa in the Avenue, featuring a print of large green leaves, has become a visual signature for the interior. Photograph: Anson Smart.





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2015
Fig Tree House
• SYDNEY, NSW •



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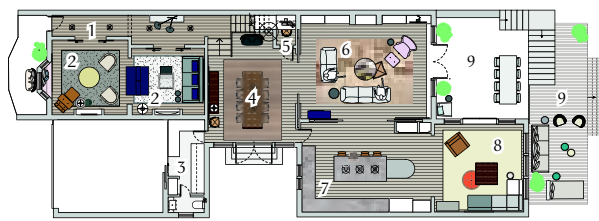
2015
Bronte Beach House
• SYDNEY, NSW •

08 Each of the rooms in the Fig Tree House evokes a different mood, but they all cater to family life. Photograph: Felix Forest.

09 The Bronte Beach House has a quirky and individual feel, expressive of the personalities of both clients and their designers. Artwork by client. Photograph: Felix Forest.

10 The playful edge to the Bronte Beach House is carried through into the bathrooms. Photograph: Felix Forest.

11 Textiles are an important source of texture and colour in the work of Arent and Pyke, as seen here at the Bronte Beach House. Artwork: Noah Taylor. Photograph: Felix Forest.



- 1 Entry
- 2 Parlour
- 3 Laundry
- 4 Dining
- 5 Study
- 6 Living
- 7 Kitchen
- 8 Sunroom
- 9 Deck

Fig Tree House plan 1:400



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that are not ideal for young children. They wanted to create something warmer, more natural and inviting. "We started drawing all these families to us as clients, and developing an expression around what it means to be in a home and to create warmth and memories. Having a child of your own sets off all those light bulbs," says Sarah-Jane.

It's a kind of decorative modernism. All the function is there, but also a curve or two in the form, and a little embellishment in the details. Textiles are critical and an important source of texture and colour. Sarah-Jane says it was textiles that pulled her into interiors in the first place. And perhaps because of Juliette's studies in fine art, art plays a vital role in all their interiors.

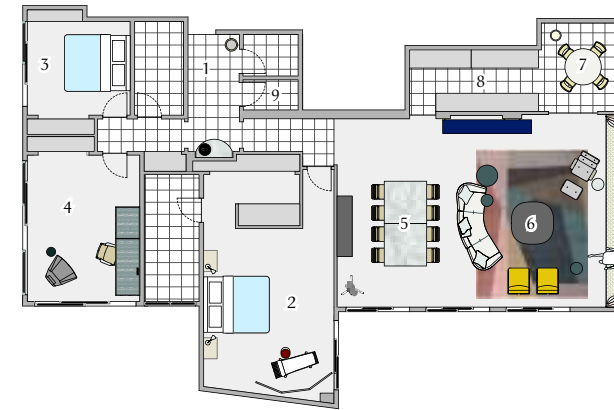
Sarah-Jane and Juliette also have a blog, In/Out. For them, it's a way to explore and reveal their influences, collaborate with other creative people around the world and partner

with design business for one-off projects. And they both oversee the photography after a project is completed – allowing them to take ownership of the way their work is styled and photographed, which has been important in building their practice's reputation. They also use each shoot as a tool to review and critique their work.

There is an elegant familiarity to the work of Arent and Pyke, possibly enhanced by what the designers refer to as an emotional approach that comes from a "feminine source." Their projects are comfortable, sensual, liveable and, above all, well designed. The work of Arent and Pyke offers a clear expression of a modern interior that, as mercurial as it is to define, feels particularly Australian. arentpyke.com

12 The work of the practice could be described as "a kind of decorative modernism," as seen in the Pymont Apartment. Artwork (L-R): Ron Mackinnon; film poster. Photograph: Tom Ferguson.

13 Clarity and thoughtfulness about how space is used are evident in all Arent and Pyke's projects, including the Pymont Apartment. Photograph: Tom Ferguson.



- 1 Entry
- 2 Main bedroom
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Study
- 5 Dining
- 6 Lounge
- 7 Casual dining
- 8 Kitchen
- 9 Laundry

Pymont Apartment plan 1:250



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OUR PALETTE

• MATERIALS & FINISHES •

The warm and inviting interiors by Arent and Pyke result from a clever combination of colours, textures and furniture. Here the team shares a few favourites.



01

01 Akari pendant and floor lamps

Arent and Pyke often chooses Akari light shades as the *shoji* paper adds a handmade quality to its designs and gives an ambient glow to the room, as seen at the Alex Hotel. livingedge.com.au



02

02 Calacatta Viola stone slab

The warmth in the colouring of the Calacatta Viola stone appeals to Arent and Pyke. The practice isn't afraid to mix and match patterns and textures, as seen here in a bathroom at Croydon House. artedomus.com.au

Photography:
Anson Smart 01
Tom Ferguson 02
Felix Forest 03, 04, 05, 06

03 Vola tapware

Vola tapware is classic in design and has historically reliable engineering. Arent and Pyke is drawn to the timeless quality of the Scandinavian design, as seen here at the Harbourside Apartment. en.vola.com/vola-group/vola-australia



03

04 Cassina Maralunga armchair

The Maralunga armchair is an iconic Italian design by architect and industrial designer Vico Magistretti that was first manufactured in 1973, along with Maralunga sofa. According to Arent and Pyke, the moveable headrest and armrests make it very comfortable. Pictured at Bronte Beach House. spacefurniture.com.au



04



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05 Lariat Pull

The Lariat Pull is a solid handle with a unique design, as seen here at Bronte Beach House. It is a durable product and the aesthetic of the handle aligns with Arent and Pyke's design intent. rockymountainhardware.com



06

06 Precision engineered herringbone floors in 'Graupa'

The tongue-and-groove system of this flooring makes for easy installation and suits many applications. Arent and Pyke often chooses 'Graupa,' pictured here in herringbone at Darling Point Penthouse, as it has a knot running through it, giving it an authentic feel. precisionflooring.com.au