

INTERIORS THAT ARE FELT AS MUCH AS SEEN

With a peerless proclivity to inject spaces with emotion and a company ethos that prioritises delivering joy through human-centred design, Arent&Pyke shines as IDEA 2023 Designer of the Year.

TEXT HELENA MORGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY ANSON SMART AND PRUE RUSCOE

Possessing a name synonymous with emotional interiors excellency, Sarah-Jane Pyke and Juliette Arent are titans in Australian interior design, delivering an aesthetic that bleeds an undeniably joyful feeling and demonstrates a tight grasp on how psychology influences design.

Recently celebrating their sweet 16th as a practice and indulging in a generous amount of reflection and navel-gazing, director, design principal and co-founder at Arent&Pyke, Sarah-Jane Pyke, has never been more ready to outline the ethos that underpins the practice's work.

"Juliette and I have spent the last two years unpacking our ethos from when we wrote our book *Arent&Pyke: Interiors Beyond the Primary Palette* which came out a year ago. We started to determine our aesthetic and ask what is the Arent&Pykeness?" says Pyke.

The pair landed on the five core design principles of joy, colour, spirit, character and

ABOVE Sarah-Jane Pyke, left, and Juliette Arent, right.

BOTTOM RIGHT 1885 House by Arent&Pyke exemplifies the meeting of classic and contemporary via playfulness and grandeur.



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alchemy, and it is evident that each of these principles is harnessed when the team develops a variety of spaces that glow and shimmer.

“I think when you do things for a long time or when you’ve built something gradually – which is what we’ve done with so many people and collaborators – and you then take the time to dissect it and realise, ‘Oh, this is what our aesthetic and ethos is’, it’s incredibly powerful,” says Pyke.

The practice does not just aspire to create spaces grounded in joyful imagery and expression, but also leads projects where joy is met every step of the way – for the designers themselves, the architects, the construction crew and the users of the space, whether they be long-term or just popping in for a visit.

Pyke explains that the immense privilege and honour it is to design spaces for people, who may be undergoing a period of tremendous change and metamorphosis, is never lost on the practice.

These spaces will bear witness to formative moments – periods of pain and suffering, yet also elation and personal development. This honour only propels the practice forward in using design as a powerful vessel with which to make a difference.

“We touch people’s lives in some really key moments, at a time when things are being reborn,” says Pyke.

Arent&Pyke is also gleefully embracing the steadfast engagement with sustainability that is sweeping the current design landscape, as the practice maintains that creating future-proof spaces with embodied and material sustainability in mind, while also prioritising joy and vibrancy, is imperative.

“We think sustainable design can have a lasting impact on users of the space, as well as the obvious takeaways of joy, comfort and functionality. [It] evolves both the usage and the space,” explains Pyke.

Ensuring that spaces cater to both present and future users inevitably unearths a set of challenges, particularly when predicting all the human behaviour that will occur in a space before construction and design. However, this challenge has a redeeming didactic bonus, says Pyke.

“You can’t ever anticipate all the human behaviour before a project is built. Yet, the privilege is when you get to go back and change things, depending on what you learned from one project to the next, and how that consideration of human behaviour changes decisions and ideas throughout the process and even throughout your career,” says Pyke.

Central to the discussion on Arent&Pyke’s colourful and rich practice is its engagement with



PREVIOUS LEFT Hearth House is a Federation-style residence that demonstrates a skillful expansion of space without lapsing into ostentation. PHOTOGRAPHER PRUE RUSCOE

BOTTOM RIGHT Speargrass House is designed to be resistant to the wear and tear of country life while still blurring the indoor and outdoor. PHOTOGRAPHER ANSON SMART

TOP LEFT Speargrass House exemplifies Arent&Pyke's signature emotionally infused interiors. PHOTOGRAPHER ANSON SMART

emotional interiors – the pair argue that what is felt is equally important as what is seen.

Pyke underscores the significant role that memory and history play in the design of a space, and how when she and Arent approach a design emotionally, they work from the future back to the present.

“When we talk to clients in the briefing process, we ask them about the memories they are wanting to make in their home or space. We always strive for people to feel an emotional connection to the spaces they are inhabiting,” says Pyke.

And these envisaged emotions echo the practice's aforementioned design principles – Arent&Pyke hopes users feel comfort, warmth, love and the ability to be themselves because the space allows.

Arent&Pyke is not a novice to IDEA, this year picking up a whopping 10 shortlistings across numerous categories – Colour, Residential, International and Retail – from the modest and wholesome Speargrass House to the eclectic Salsa Verde House and the immersive KODA hair salon, which boasts colour applications capable of rendering clients into a state of meditation.

STANDOUT PROJECTS

Speargrass House exemplifies Arent&Pyke's championing of emotionally infused interiors, particularly as the young family communicated early on that this home needed to assist in the realisation of a certain way of living.

“It was always a dream idea, more than a house – they had an idea of how they wanted to live and we sought to create a home that would make that happen for them,” says Pyke.





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A family with four young boys call Speargrass House, located just outside of Queenstown, New Zealand, their home. Nestled on 85 acres among bucolic surroundings and privy to impressive views of The Remarkables and Coronet Peak, the house is modest yet still drips sophistication.

“According to the clients, after school, the boys don’t want to go anywhere else; they just want to come home, it’s where they want to be,” says Pyke. The parents perhaps risk never becoming empty nesters.

The house is designed to be impervious to the wear and tear of country life, while still blurring the indoor and outdoor. The design hints at an eagerness to avoid the moniker of a ‘precious space’ or ‘museum’.

“It works hard as a house and is incredibly beautiful with such a strong connection to the landscape and environment,” says Pyke.

The practice demonstrated its usual penchant for creating warmth and comfort by softening blackened steel frames with expansive windows and incorporating light blues, saffron and silvery grey colours to echo the sky, autumnal foliage, rocky outcrops and delicate clouds.

Stone was harnessed as a core fixture, alongside hues of oatmeal, nutmeg and cinnamon, and bronze articulating joinery handles and lighting fixtures. Bedrooms function as an oasis with European oak floors and custom maple joinery, whereas the Suzanne Turley-designed garden invites exploration and play.

Also designed for a young family, the interiors of Salsa Verde by Arent&Pyke celebrate a love of travel, art collecting and entertaining.

The design is anchored in Art Deco principles and litters objects and materials, such as a vintage Nepalese rug, a Saarinen hallway armchair, a Verde Guatemala marble worktop and a vintage Murano glass mirror throughout the space. It is a house that truly connects and binds the family and visitors through its vibrancy.

“Our approach was not to add a ‘pop’ of this and a ‘block’ of that; instead, we aimed to provide connective tones with immersive effects so their presence is felt as much as seen,” says Pyke.

Additionally, Hearth House by Arent&Pyke, shortlisted in the IDEA Colour category, is a Federation style residence that demonstrates a skillful expansion of space without lapsing into ostentation, rather maximising flow and functionality for the family’s busy social life.

The practice engaged with sustainable design via staining worn floorboards with



PREVIOUS LEFT
The interiors of Salsa Verde celebrate a love of travel, art collecting and entertaining.
PHOTOGRAPHER
ANSON SMART

ABOVE KODA hair salon was a passion project for Arent&Pyke.
PHOTOGRAPHER
PRUE RUSCOE

BOTTOM The interiors of KODA are drenched in terrazzo, marble and a zesty use of primary shades.
PHOTOGRAPHER
PRUE RUSCOE



a reflective ebony sheen. These are then stunningly juxtaposed against white walls.

A passion project for Arent&Pyke was KODA, a hair salon located on the upper mezzanine of the Heritage Queen Victoria Building in Sydney. It's drenched in coloured terrazzo, marble, zesty primary shades and nuanced tones. The practice relished the opportunity to be bold and ensure that clients feel comfortable and cared for while being under the spotlight.

"It was an interesting exercise for us, as we are very used to private spaces and KODA is a public space, but everyone is having a private moment through this elevated and special experience," says Pyke.

To say it is an exhilarating and exciting time in the Australian design landscape is an understatement. There is a zealous embrace of sustainable design, a major willingness to co-design with Country and engage with First Nations custodians, multidisciplinary collaboration and a prioritising of designing for neurodiversity and trauma, to name just a few innovative measures that are in place.

Pyke emphasises that the strength of Australia's design landscape is indebted to the creativity and ingenuity of all those involved.

"I think there's an incredibly dynamic group of both old and new designers. It's not about a young force – I think there's a real sense of spirit in what Australian designers do, and nobody hangs back and sits on their laurels," she says.

Pyke is delighted by the abundance of inspiration across industrial design, architecture and interiors, and graphic design. There is a palpable cross-pollination of disciplines in the air that galvanises people into action.

While designing for maximum inclusivity and accessibility has well and truly occupied a place in the zeitgeist, Pyke believes the industry has not yet perfected equal and human-centered design.

"We need to consider how we can create something that gives equal comfort and importance to all the users. And we can achieve equality through design – we have an incredible capacity for impact when we design for inclusion, sustainability and mental health," she says.

And, for Arent&Pyke, the purpose is to bring human emotions to the centre of a space in a dynamic, delightful and surprising way.

"The basis of our design is still always joy, love, happiness and that what you take away is positive. It can be from a serene and still space, or somewhere loud and spirited – it doesn't always have to be quiet," says Pyke.

WINNER DESIGNER OF THE YEAR

PRACTICE **ARENT&PYKE**

📷 Anson Smart & Prue Ruscoe

Arent&Pyke is a Sydney-based interior architecture and design practice with a distinct focus on the decorative arts. Founders Juliette Arent and Sarah-Jane Pyke are masters of emotional interiors, imbuing spaces with character through colour, texture and a touch of the unusual since the formation of their practice in 2007.

Arent&Pyke combine decades of technical expertise to pull off comfortable and luxurious interiors. While they have created an internationally recognised practice, the value they bring remains in the emotional connections they create and how those, in turn, drive aesthetic and practical decisions.

IDEA regulars, the studio was recognised across several categories in both the shortlist and final winners' list this year. From the unpretentious Speargrass house, which is a canvas for its breathtaking Queenstown surroundings, to KODA's new hair salon with colour applications so immersive they settle clients into a state of revered relaxation, Arent&Pyke's projects demonstrate a deep understanding of the psychology of design.





The highly acclaimed Arent&Pyke have been instrumental in elevating the decorative within the interior design fold and paving the way for others to follow. The studio has not only developed a distinctive flair for beauty and grace in design, yet demonstrated a willingness to intimately collaborate with clients to deliver unique projects grounded in highly crafted design principles."

SUE FENTON



WINNER INTERNATIONAL

PROJECT **SPEARGRASS HOUSE**
PRACTICE **ARENT&PYKE WITH
SUMICH CHAPLIN ARCHITECTS**

📷 Anson Smart

Settled upon a raised plateau outside Queenstown, New Zealand, Speargrass House blends robust elegance with refined practicality. The project was a collaboration between Arent&Pyke and local New Zealand practice Sumich Chaplin.

Arent&Pyke's challenge was to create a forever home within the new steel, local Schist stone and timber weatherboard structure that wrapped around a sheltered courtyard, avoiding the clichéd trappings of a country escape.

Stone, including native limestone Oamaru, became the expressive canvas and further anchored the home to its setting. Avoiding the customary prized artwork or television above the main fireplace, Arent&Pyke's custom layered fixture—crafted from hand-slumped glass, an amoebic bronze plate and a river pebble sourced from the site—became an ambient meditation on embracing the slow life.

Beneath pitched ceilings and within expanses of glass, Speargrass House is a sanctuary that enhances interaction with family, friends and nature, rather than fussy ornamentation.



“Designing in another cultural context always poses challenges, particularly when that culture bears similarities to our own, yet also subtle differences. Arent and Pyke navigated this difference skillfully by acknowledging the unique connection to the natural environment New Zealanders pride themselves in having.”

BYRON GEORGE



LAUFEN





HIGHLY COMMENDED RETAIL

PROJECT **KODA**
PRACTICE **ARENT&PYKE**

📷 *Prue Ruscoe*

Both nostalgic and futuristic, this bold hair salon is perched on the mezzanine level of Sydney's Queen Victoria Building. The salon design is a fusion of the client's Italian heritage with their progressive approach to styling. Balance is created through layered volume, mixing natural timbers with contemporary materials, including terrazzo, Marblo and high-gloss Polyurethane.

HIGHLY COMMENDED COLOUR

PROJECT **HEARTH HOUSE**
PRACTICE **ARENT&PYKE WITH
LUIGI ROSSELLI ARCHITECTS**

📷 *Prue Ruscoe*

Named after what was traditionally the main source of warmth and light within this Federation-style residence, Hearth House nurtures reconnections both structurally and physically to the original architecture of the home, with immersion through colour becoming the focus for this two-storey home's transformation. Myriad granite, marble, travertine and terrazzo selections dominate.

