

A
HOME
TO
FEED
THE
SOUL

Since they started out, interior design duo Sarah-Jane Pyke and Juliette Arent have had a particular following. Now their distinctive ethos is coming into its own and they're celebrating with a new book

STORY **MILANDA ROUT**





g

Greater than the sum of its parts. A house that elicits visceral joy from its owners, creating delight in the everyday: drinking a coffee in the morning sunlight; glimpsing the garden as you sink into the lounge to read a book; hanging up your coat and putting down your bags when you finally arrive home.

These are the guiding principles for Sydney interior design duo Sarah-Jane Pyke and Juliette Arent, who are celebrating 15 years in business together by writing their first book. It showcases key projects and shares details about how they go about creating joyful homes that “nourish the soul” for their clients.

“A beautifully designed space has the power to generate a sense of belonging, comfort and freedom that uplifts your spirit,” the pair write in the introduction to their eponymous tome. “We believe that power extends even further, a space that fills you with joy can transform how you live. While it may sound very ‘big picture’, for us this belief is grounded in rigorous attention to the smallest details. The objects that tell us our stories, the colours that call to our senses, the materials that evoke certain moods – all these play a vital part.”

They are leafing through the pages of the first copy of the book on the table in their meeting room in their Surry Hills office while chatting to WISH over lunch (and later, over a very delicious carrot cake from Flour and Stone up the road). The date, September 19, is also the date they first set up their business together in 2007.

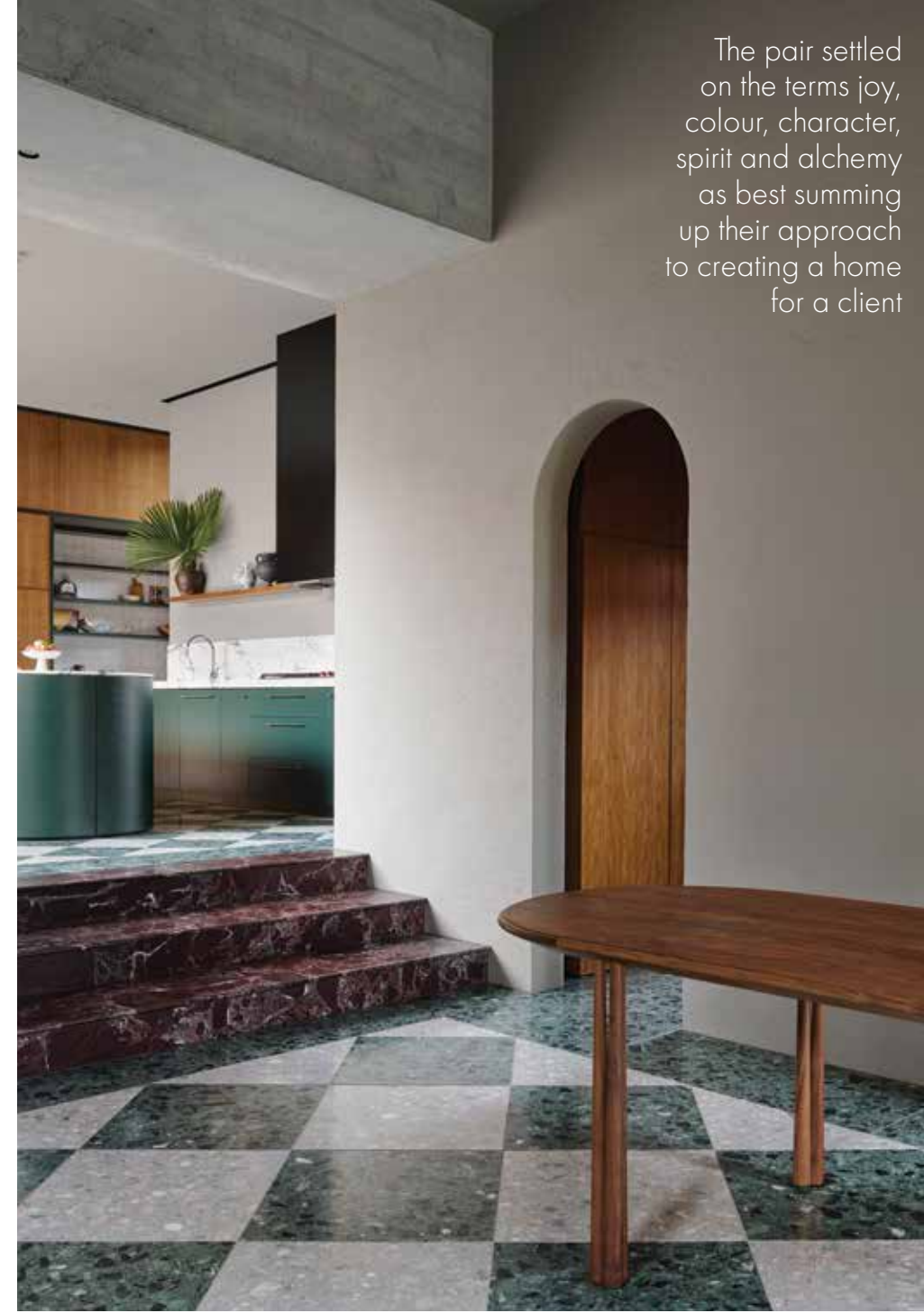
“It is today and it feels really good,” says Pyke of the 15th anniversary of Arent & Pyke. “We have been doing a bit of reflecting this morning about what has changed from 10 years to 15. Ten felt like a really big milestone, but I think the thing that has happened to us over the past five years, and particularly in the experience of writing the book, is that it has allowed us to really look at our ethos and what really underpins our work. We have always known but it really distilled it for us.”

Pyke is talking in particular about the past five years in business because WISH last spoke to the duo five years ago. The friends and colleagues had been winning awards and acclaim for their distinctive approach to interior design – using colour, decorative arts and materials in a



Arent & Pyke's Sarah-Jane Pyke, left, and Juliette Arent, above, are all about creating joyful homes that ‘nourish the soul’. Their interiors are replete with colour and materials that feed the senses and play with mood





The pair settled on the terms joy, colour, character, spirit and alchemy as best summing up their approach to creating a home for a client



very layered, joyous approach – when I sat with them at this same table in 2017 to talk about why they had departed from the then very popular minimalist and monochromatic approach to interiors. Their generous use of colour, and even their insistence upon looking at design from an emotional point of view – Arent & Pyke believe it should be all about how a room feels, not just about its function, and homes should make people happy – did face some resistance from clients back in the early days.

“I would say that is the one big thing that has really changed over the past five years,” says Pyke. “The people who come to us, they understand what we do. They want us to make their whole interiors world come to life. We have clients now who talk in the way we talk and use expressions like ‘I want the magic’, and don’t just come in asking for a white kitchen or a green kitchen.”

“We have had a couple of repeat clients who have said ‘did we hold you back last time?’ and ‘I don’t want to hold you back’,” adds Arent. “They have realised they were hesitant about things previously but now they want us to go for it. That is a nice place to be in, where people have a real trust in us and are also really interested to see what we will do with their homes.”

The other significant change in the past five years is in the relationship we have with our homes. The pandemic and its lockdowns meant we all spent more time inside our own four walls than we ever could have envisaged not that long ago. The way we work has also changed forever, with most people still working from home in some capacity nearly three years on from Covid’s arrival.

“I would say the only good thing that has come out of the pandemic is that people have realised they really want to appreciate and enjoy their homes,” says Arent. “Emotional responses to homes have become more commonplace. Clients have been able to express more clearly that they want somewhere to be quiet on their own, they need somewhere where they can really connect with

the kids. They have become more aware of this way of thinking and we have not had to lead it as much.”

Pyke explains that their design process often starts with a spark of an idea that either of them have during the consultations with the clients, a site visit, or even through their consumption of art and design through their daily life, whether that be through art galleries, travel or people-watching on the street.

“We are romantics, S.J and I,” she says, “so the idea will usually come from something that does feel experiential or artistic. We very much start with a twinkle of an idea, and working with a client, we bring out what they have to offer as well. The process is a very two-way street. We are presenting to the client but we are also learning things that are personal and important to them.”

When writing their book, they had to look through their entire body of work and try to explain the thinking behind their design process. They settled on the terms joy, colour, character, spirit and alchemy as best summarizing up their approach to creating a home for a client.

“We definitely started with a much bigger pool of things and it was through the writing process that we got back to those key terms,” explains Arent. “We have texture and materiality and light, and they fit with spirit and character. Then alchemy came about because we realised it was actually a combination of all those things, it was never just one thing. When all these things come together they form something greater than you imagine. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

What was possibly more difficult than the writing was deciding which projects of the past five years to include. There was only space for 18 homes they had completed in Sydney and surrounds, from the Northern Beaches to the Southern Highlands.

“I do love a Federation house we did on the North Shore – we call it Greener Pastures in the book – because the garden is just immense,” says Arent.

“The clients purchased the house because of the garden. When we met it was kind of a drizzly day, but we didn’t really spend any time inside. We all went out to the garden and talked about their plans and how to incorporate the garden, and how we wanted to create a garden room right where we were standing.” They achieved this by installing enormous timber and glass retractable doors and screens so any barrier between the house and the garden can be removed. The doors retract and are concealed in the brickwork.

Another house the designers loved was in Sydney’s inner west, and photo of it was chosen for the front cover of their debut book. “It’s another really good integration of architecture, interiors, and a brief that was looking for a synergy between the renovation [the new part of the house] and the really beautiful elements of the old part, which was quiet decorative,” says Pyke. “The addition was done by Carter Williamson Architects and those are the projects we enjoy the most, when we get to collaborate with a really wonderful team of people.”

So now that they have reflected on their first 15 years of Arent & Pyke what is the plan for the next 15?

“We really want to start guiding people on what it means to live in a healthy way in their homes,” Arent says. “So bringing in the ideas of good natural light and ventilation, certain building materials, and incorporating those things into our practice. We are in a powerful position to help people understand it as it can be overwhelming.”

Arent & Pyke by Juliette Arent and Sarah-Jane Pyke, Thames & Hudson Australia, \$80

ANSON SMART, PRUE ROSCOE