

A Choose a palette and keep it in mind when shopping B Group together prints and paintings that take your interest C A neutral setting can be personalised with patterned cushions and hangings D This chair was the starting point in Greg Natale's interior design for his home



Making indoor spaces your own

Inject personality into your surroundings by stretching your imagination and embracing a style that reflects who you are and the things that interest you

Decorating your home can be a daunting experience. There are just so many decisions to be made. In recent years, however, interior decorating has been seized by an inclination towards showroom looks, devoid of personal style.

White walls with white surfaces in kitchens and bathrooms might make a house appealing for real estate agents, but the result can be a characterless environment.

Stylist and interiors photographer Sue Stubbs says it is becoming more apparent in her line of work.

"I photograph a lot of homes and so many look like display houses, but your home needs to reflect your personality," she says.

Industrial designer and retailer of all things quirky, David Page,

from davidmetnicole, says many homeowners appear to lack confidence in making choices.

"A lot of people who come to us are nervous, mostly about what their friends will think," he says.

Showroom syndrome

His business and life partner Nicole Page agrees.

"I am amazed our business is successful, because so many people are buying from the same places and their homes look like showrooms," she says.

With a business built on one-off pieces, David and Nicole have helped countless homeowners embrace the unique and unusual.

While they can be a great source of inspiration, Nicole says magazines should not be followed

slavishly, while David advocates a you-only-live-once approach.

"Just be confident in what you put together," he says.

"You only get one life so don't be worried now what you will sell it for or what your friends will think."

For the professional stylist, pulling together a cohesive look is almost instinctual. For the rest of us, it can present a challenge.

Sue Stubbs says start by giving your home a good clean-up and then consider what colours really make your heart sing.

"It has to be a palette you love, then inject amounts of colour depending on the life of the room. Children's rooms, for example, can take a lot of colour," she says.

If the thought of mixing colours makes you nervous, look for



Photos: John Fotiadis, Chris Groenhou, Mark Taylor



GO YOUR OWN WAY

Pulling together your own look is rewarding and fun if you keep just a few ideas in mind

- * Look to magazines, especially international titles, and websites for inspiration.
- * If colour worries you, go with a white tone and add feature wall colours that can be easily repainted as the mood takes you. Alternatively, go with the same colour in different tones and add texture for depth.
- * Choose a theme and a palette and keep them in mind whenever making purchases.
- * Don't be afraid of mixing the old with the new. Often old furniture is extremely well made and can be refinished or upholstered to fit your theme.
- * Search your home to find special objects that have meaning. Old photos can be linked by using similar frames.
- * Display one large item, such as a tapestry or painting, and pick up colours from this.



A Using just three colours can make an impact when patterns are included in the design **B** Kelly Doust's "gelato-inspired" kitchen features on the cover of her new book **C** Choose a specific theme, such as birdcages, and group these items together **D** The hallway of David and Nicole Page's home presents a passion for all things quirky



different hues of the same colour and add some texture to make it more inviting.

But even the most thoughtful colour scheme can lack heart.

"Display things that have meaning for you like gorgeous old books or something you treasure from your nana," Sue says.

"You don't need a lot of it, but you should have something special."

Homeowner, blogger and author of *The Crafty Mixx*, Kelly Doust is building a career on her own distinct decorating style in her Dulwich Hill home.

Based loosely on a 1950s palette of gelato colours, she finds working with a theme will help pull a specific look together.

"In the hallway, I set this price limit of no more than \$10 or \$15 to buy prints. All the pictures are on a theme. They look great together, even though they are actually different," she says.

A subscriber to local and international decorating magazines, as well as a frequent visitor to flea markets and auction houses, Kelly says creating an individual home requires patience, if not a large wallet. "I love Ikea for storage solutions, but

I would never go to one place and buy everything," she says.

And despite her love for all things pretty, she has also made practical choices for her home based on her personal circumstances.

"We don't want to buy a \$10,000 sofa at this stage because our daughter is only a year old, but we still want to have lovely things," says Kelly.

"In the hallway, I set this price limit of no more than \$10 or \$15 to buy prints"

Instead, she bought a three-piece 1920s club lounge at auction for \$100. New upholstery and french polishing cost a further \$3000, but the end result is still a well-priced, solidly built lounge suite.

Interior designer Greg Natale says you need look no further than your own home for inspiration.

For his inner-city apartment, he took a large armchair in orange brocade from his parents' house in the western suburbs and made it the designer

starting point for the rest of the interior.

"No one will have that chair or the stories behind it," he says.

While he has begun importing vintage furniture from the US to service his clients' desire for original interiors, Greg says a good secondhand dealer or auction house can turn up some gems.

If you are concerned about how they will link visually, he suggests looking for a common colour or feature such as scrolled arms to hold it all together.

He says the generic look has had its day.

"To find inspiration, look within," he says.

"No one else has your experiences and they don't have your style." ■

Robyn Willis

MORE INFORMATION

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The Crafty Mixx by Kelly Doust, \$39.95, Murdoch Books released in November, thecraftymixx.com.au



Photos: John Földiads, Chris Groenhout, Mark Taylor