



Star power

A decade after her television debut, Carlene Duffy has proven herself a designer with distinction.

While the path Carlene Duffy took to become a designer may be an unconventional one, she wouldn't have it any other way. For the past ten years, she has been busily building a business and brand in the public eye through television and social media while consulting for clients in her Gold Coast-based design studio, Cedar + Suede.

Even in her early years, Carlene was no stranger to the spotlight – it's where she thrived. "I grew up in Brisbane and was immersed in performing arts as a kid," she says. "I was singing and dancing professionally before going to university to study Media and Communication. I worked part-time in the comms industry while my kids were young, but my passion for interiors developed when I was on maternity leave with baby number two. We'd bought our second and current home by that point; it provided a bit of a creative lab and my appetite for design became insatiable. Competing on *The Block* gave me an outlet for that and turned everything on its head."



That first television appearance, where she partnered with her tool-savvy husband Michael, has undoubtedly had a significant impact on her design career – but in different ways than one might assume. While recognition from the programme has its perks, Carlene says it's really the show's immersive hands-on experience that brought the most benefits. "*The Block* was a baptism of fire where we had to learn a lot fast," she recalls. "It gave me a platform and exposed me to plenty of suppliers. It also provided a few lessons on 'what not to do', but overall, I was quite proud of what we accomplished. The first bedroom we delivered back in 2014 included sage green wardrobes, which I still love. It taught me to have a go and commit."

In the ten years since their season aired, Carlene's time has been split between media work and client work in her design studio. Since 2017, Carlene and Michael have hosted the properties located in Queensland on *Open Homes Australia* as well as the full two-season run of *Ready Set Reno*. "*Open Homes Australia* usually isn't very demanding of me. It's on an as-needed basis and doesn't really require any prep – maybe because I've

above and left: Home to a vibrant family of five, it was important to Carlene that the colours used for her Berry House project were reflective of the people who live there. "The interiors are deliberately playful," she says. "The home tells a delicate and considered colour story, with careful consideration to the quality of natural light each space receives. It aims to be a warm and engaging family home rather than a precious object." Kitchen cabinets painted in Resene Quarter Biscotti, island in Resene Toast, pendant lampshades (bottom section) in Resene Moleskin and bulkhead and ceiling in Resene SpaceCote tinted to Resene Half Wan White. Interior design and colour selection by Cedar + Suede. Architectural specification by Shaun Lockyer Architects, www.lockyerarchitects.com.au. Build by JH Dixon, www.jhdixon.com.au. Painting by Chroma Painting Services, www.chromapainting.com.au. Images by Mindi Cooke, www.mindicooke.com.



- Resene Half Wan White
- Resene Quarter Biscotti
- Resene Moleskin
- Resene Toast



been doing it for so long,” she says. “Sometimes filming falls in clusters and I feel the impacts of not being in the studio, but I have a good team so for the most part it’s all very doable.”

Last year, the couple also released a book titled *This Old Van* – which Carlene says was particularly demanding. “I enjoyed the process of doing the book, but because we were renovating a van alongside it (on top of our normal jobs), it was a lot!”

Despite the book’s challenges, Carlene is interested in doing another in the future but wants to wait for the right time and angle. “I look forward to doing an interiors book one day, but I don’t want to simply put another interiors book out there just because I can. I will only put something out that fills a hole in the market, and when I have something unique to say. I know my ‘lightbulb moment’ will come, so I look forward to that. But I also want to have more projects under my belt first.”

Today, the design studio is Carlene’s primary focus while Michael provides building support where he can. “Michael has always loved design but in a much different way,” she says. “He appreciates a home’s architecture whereas I notice colours and

materials. He’s a commercial pilot now but his time as a carpenter and builder comes in handy. He still has to get on the tools at our own house and I still refer to him for certain aspects in my work.”

Of the client work she’s completed to date, her Berry House project – which won a Resene Total Colour Residential Interior Colour Maestro Award – is the job she is most proud of. “Berry House was the first project in which I had full freedom with the colour selection thanks to the faith of our clients,” Carlene explains. “The home was high-end and the outcome demonstrated how colour can be sophisticated. The results resonated with people and it’s a good example of why it pays to trust your designer.”

A pre-war Brisbane property, Berry House underwent a significant renovation led by Shaun Lockyer Architects before Carlene put her interior design and decoration prowess to work. The original cottage was raised and moved closer to the street to allow more space underneath and behind. A new addition at the back of the property spans two storeys, which was made more engaging through the articulation of the floor

- **above:** Carlene’s design for Berry House encapsulates warmth and playfulness, but it also offers a soft and soothing retreat to welcome visitors. Guest bedroom walls painted in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Edward, ensuite walls in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Rainee, ceiling in Resene SpaceCote tinted to Resene Half Wan White and window architraves and door in Resene Lustacryl
- semi-gloss waterborne enamel tinted to Resene Half Wan White.

Carlene’s dream dinner date

Resene
Edward

“Kelly Wearstler, just so I can ask her what she’s charging her clients, and who are these people with these obscene budgets?! It’s difficult to fathom the world in which she operates, so I’d love some insight. I’d also love to hear about her challenges because it looks so rosy over there in her world – and I’m sure it’s not.”



above and right: Different hues create unique identities throughout the various spaces in Berry House. This project was recognised with a Resene Total Colour Residential Interior Colour Maestro Award. Powder room walls painted in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Toast and ceiling in Resene SpaceCote tinted to Resene Half Wan White. Toilet walls painted in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Casper with door in Resene Lustacryl semi-gloss waterborne enamel tinted to Resene Half Wan White.



Resene Casper	Resene Quarter Lemon Grass	Resene Lemon Ginger	Resene Half Wan White	Resene Moleskin
Resene Paris White	Resene Edward		Resene Wan White	Resene Toast
Resene Rainee	Resene Blue Smoke		Resene Quarter Biscotti	Resene Peanut

levels – providing better connection between the house and the garden and introducing more light, air and drama to the interior.

“Transitioning through the home, one experiences the older character of the cottage before encountering the juxtaposed addition that embraces Brisbane’s subtropical climate,” Carlene explains. “The strong use of concrete and timber was intended as both a sympathetic and progressive use of materials that not only references the past but adds ‘new history’ that more appropriately considers climate, durability and personal taste. The lower levels of the home receive a cool natural light and the warmer Resene paint colours – a mix of dusky pinks and umber – blend with the timber to help warm it.”

This idea of warmth resonated and became a key theme throughout the design. “I wanted the interior palette to feel like sun on your face during winter, which we achieved with Resene Quarter Biscotti, Resene Toast and Resene Moleskin to complement the timber veneer, lighting and soft furnishings. As you make your way to the upper level of the home, the natural light warms and is abundant and you notice a delicate transition

into cooler greens and blues throughout the bedrooms, which culminates in the upper lounge with a gentle mix of warm and cool colours. The upper lounge walls are painted in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Quarter Lemon Grass and the bedrooms feature Resene Rainee, Resene Edward, Resene Casper, Resene Paris White and Resene Wan White. Resene Half Wan White, used throughout the home on trims, doors and the ceiling, unifies the colour scheme.”

More recently, Carlene finished the refurbishment of a 100-year-old farmhouse. She says the interior renovation was done on a tight budget, but the results have had a big impact. “It involved lots of vintage sourcing and repurposing. The colours are bolder than I usually work with, but this home absolutely called for it. On the other end of the scale, we’re in the midst of a very high-end renovation in New Farm – a 1880s Heritage Queenslander. We’re going to make sure there is nothing else like it in Brisbane.”

One of the most valuable insights Carlene has learnt through Cedar + Suede so far is to choose her projects carefully. “Not all projects are right for you, and that doesn’t necessarily refer to the client’s budget. If your client’s brief and your own design ethos are not on par, the collaboration is probably doomed. You’re better off just not going there at all.”

Resene has become a trusted supplier in Carlene’s work. “I love the range and nuance in Resene colours and the quality of the paint. I also really respect how Resene appreciates their trade customers,” she says.

Her Berry House project led Carlene to discover Resene colours that have since become favourite hues. “I love Resene Peanut, Resene Moleskin and Resene Toast because they’re strong but sophisticated. I used the latter two in Berry House. I also love those in-between colours like Resene Blue Smoke, a mix of blue and green which we used on our own bedroom doors. I’m keen to use Resene Lemon Ginger in a project if I can get it over the line with a client. I’d love to see it on the wall or even on some joinery.” **BW**

To learn more about Carlene and her projects, visit www.cedarandsuede.com.au.