



Rendering a remedy

Qun Zhang's thesis project reimagines a contaminated site as an oasis of colour.

When architectural graduate Qun Zhang was in the midst of completing his Master of Architecture programme at the University of Melbourne, bushfires were ravaging Australia. But rather than focusing on the horrific environmental destruction, he was inspired by nature's resilience. His aptly named thesis project, *Healing*, responds to the scars on the landscape from land mismanagement leading to sites of contamination too damaged for use and now left neglected.

"The site is a former gunpowder store called Jack's Magazine, a remnant from when Melbourne was an early colonial settlement and gold was discovered further afield. It was later incorporated as part of a larger ammunition factory until the end of the war," Qun explains. "Digging through various environmental audits, it became evident that the soil now contains heavy metals at levels deemed detrimental to health. This led to research into alternative practices in soil remediation, and I landed on the

process of phytoremediation – the extraction of pollutants through hyperaccumulating plants. Current remedial processes are cost-prohibitive. However, this project sees the process as a community-led initiative that brings people together, and a site with a colonial past adapted for present day social needs."

Based on his research, Qun says the carefully selected plants would thrive in the contaminated soil over the 12 year remediation

period. At the end of that period, the plants, which would have absorbed the dangerous levels of contamination, would be harvested and destroyed before a new phase of replanting. During the remediation, the former gunpowder storage buildings would be adaptively reused and designed to function as new spaces for the local community to adopt while other buildings would be retrofitted to continually manage groundwater and become research and education centres.

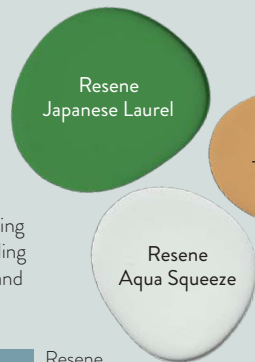
"Colour is intrinsically tied to the project, including the planting. Species of brassica would be alternated with other plants, with their vivid yellow flowers blooming into a sea of gold. By contrast, the powerful red orange catwalk in Resene Daredevil is designed to grant visitors access to this temporary phenomenon and bring awareness to the issue. Strategically lit, the catwalk would become a landmark amid the landscape and signal the site's renewal," says Qun.


"New buildings on the site are drenched in bold Resene colours such as Resene Pioneer Red, Resene Rock Spray, Resene Tussock, Resene Japanese Laurel, Resene Horizon, Resene Half Aubergine, Resene Wild Thing and Resene Feijoa to welcome visitors well after the sun sets. The joyful colours become a reef for community activation where opportunities emerge for performances, markets, events and meetings. Drawing upon the local flora, the buildings borrow colours from the landscape to establish a uniquely local sense of place. While the site is vulnerable to fire and flood, the project builds resilience through the healing of the physical and mental landscape.

Qun's Resene colours were inspired by the hues of the Australian bushfires as well as those that can be found in the following spring contrasted against a burnt landscape, imparting a sense of resilience and rebirth. "When studying Australian plants, it's impossible not to notice the seemingly unconventional colour coordination and juxtapositions: deep greens bleeding into reds, dark velvety purples with bright oranges and golds ablaze. The colours used in this project draw from that energy. Resene Pumice, Resene Aqua Squeeze, Resene Envy and Resene Spanish Green embody the renewal of the contaminated landscape and evoke gum leaves. Resene Daredevil and Resene Wild Thing resemble deep red banksias and yellow myrtle blooms, imparting a vivid vitality that burns with life. These colours were important in establishing a strong identity."

"Remediating the site only accomplishes one part of the design," he continues. "An equally important goal is to heal the wound in the surrounding area which lacks spaces for the

right: A rainbow of nature-inspired Resene hues colour the sunshade that wraps around the multi-storey building that Qun proposes in his thesis project, including Resene Pioneer Red, Resene Rock Spray, Resene Tussock, Resene Japanese Laurel, Resene Horizon and Resene Half Aubergine. The lower adjacent building houses creative spaces with interior walls and ceiling in Resene SpaceCote tinted to Resene Pumice and Resene Aqua Squeeze.



	Resene Timeless		Resene Pioneer Red		Resene Horizon
	Resene Pumice		Resene Rock Spray		Resene Half Aubergine



left Light, shape, colour and a natural vista bring ambiance to the music room in Qun's thesis project. The ceiling and walls are painted in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen tinted to Resene Pumice, Resene Aqua Squeeze, Resene Envy and Resene Spanish Green to create an ombre effect.

right: Not only does Qun's thesis project challenge the idea of repurposing a contaminated space for community benefit, it also beautifully reimagines what the interior spaces could be and examines the effect colour has on their energy. Walls and ceiling in Resene SpaceCote tinted to Resene Half Smalt Blue with columns in Resene Daredevil.

Resene Half Smalt Blue

Resene Daredevil Resene Envy Resene Spanish Green



above: Roof in Resene Wild Thing (top) and Resene Feijoa (underside), pillars in Resene Lustacryl tinted to Resene Pioneer Red and interior wall in Resene SpaceCote tinted to Resene Tango.

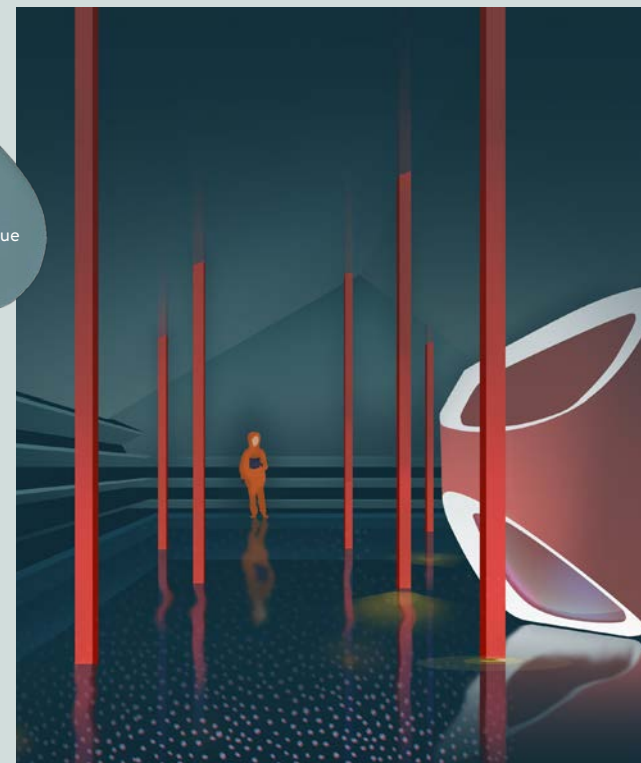
Resene Feijoa Resene Wild Thing Resene Tango

community to come together. The catwalk towering above the site becomes a colourful screen that loudly proclaims its existence. It draws in curious onlookers and teases at the potential renewal. In this project, colour is used unabashedly to generate visual fields that seek to impart a meaningful and transcendent experience for visitors. Subversively tugging on the senses, primary colours used against more complex schemes entice the curiosity of visitors in order to bring awareness.”

Fittingly, the research topic ties into what drew Qun to architecture in the first place: the ability to shape our environment and the places we inhabit. “Growing up, my parents were researchers at an agricultural university. I managed to spend a lot of time roaming – with plenty of unsupervised climbing and exploring of agricultural structures. These were landscapes to me with their own world inside. Woven irrigation in the floor resembled rivers feeding into forests while light, shadow and humidity imbued each space with an elemental rawness. Now, I am drawn to the ability to create structures that stimulate the imagination and extend the everyday experience.”

Going forward, Qun hopes to work on more projects that can be experienced by the wider community – especially those that bring people together in a shared space. “Truly social infrastructure projects, such as libraries, schools, hospitals or social housing are often the interface for a lot of the public and I believe are typologies in which architects can offer the most and highlight alternative ways of living.”

Because a large part of his project was in the rejuvenation of the public space currently hidden away, Qun says it was exciting to see how much energy and vibrancy can be borrowed by the choices in colours. “I am much more attuned now to observing the use versus lack of colour on the street, and the potential that colour offers.”



He says that Resene's extensive range of paint colours allowed him to easily pick tones that worked well with one another across his scheme. “In drawing inspiration from nature, I explored the recommended complementary colours on the Resene website to find soft and subtle tones to balance the stronger hues. I also like the ease in which I can find recommended colours on the website, which are often hues that I didn't even know existed.”

“I find the Karen Walker Paints collection is a great starting point to launch the hunt for a perfect colour, even if you do arrive at a different choice from another range. I just love Resene Half Smalt Blue; it's gorgeously rich in depth and reacts so differently when you play with light and shadow. It's a great colour to use for interiors where the colour melts away at the edges of perception to generate a velvety atmosphere.”

We can't wait to see what other exciting projects Qun's future holds. [BW](#)

To see more of Qun's creative work, check out his portfolio on Instagram [@qunsworld](#).