1980s colours and styles

1980s technology and events

- 1981 – The personal computer developed by IBM
- 1982 – War and drought lead to famine in Ethiopia
- 1983 – Aids virus identified by scientists
- 1984 – New Zealand declares itself a nuclear free zone
- 1985 – Hole in ozone layer over Antarctica discovered
- 1985 – First mobile telephones launched in UK
- 1986 – Space shuttle Challenger explodes on take-off
- 1987 – Stock market crash sends shockwaves worldwide
- 1989 – Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing
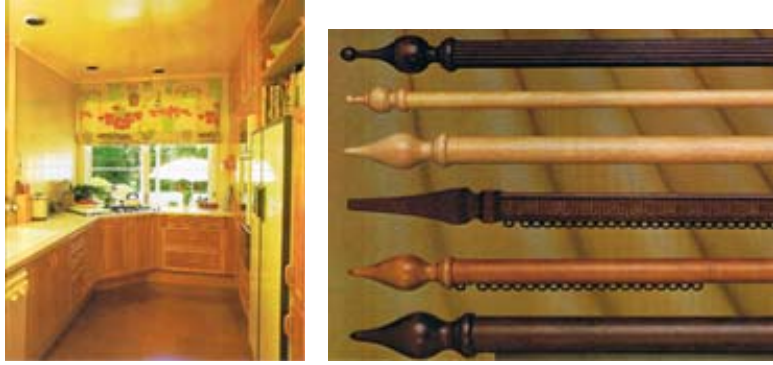- 1989 – The fall of the Berlin Wall

oxidised yellow, orange, green and brown

In the earlier part of the 1980s woody and natural colours were seen in offices and homes. Comforting colours of brown, olive, rust and gold were warm and safe, a contrast with what was happening in the later part of the 1970s when the world was rebelling against law and order.

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timber   cork   curtain rods   warm   sunny   yellow

Nurturing natural colours from autumn leaves and golden sunshine with warm timber and cork were popular. Try **Resene Supernova**, **Resene Hazard**, **Resene Brown Sugar** and **Resene Fahrenheit**.

peach flesh tones nurturing soothing

Pale apricot or peach was an extremely popular colour during the decade. It is believed to nurture and soothe and was selected to combat the stress people felt with the faster pace of life and fear of the new communication and computer technology in the workplace.

Try **Resene Tequila**, **Resene Corvette** and **Resene Sazerac**.

plaster and iron

Peach tones were also translated to architecture and often used in contrast to high tech metal balustrades and canopies as illustrated on this 1988 building. Grey and teal were used as accent colours with these peach shades.
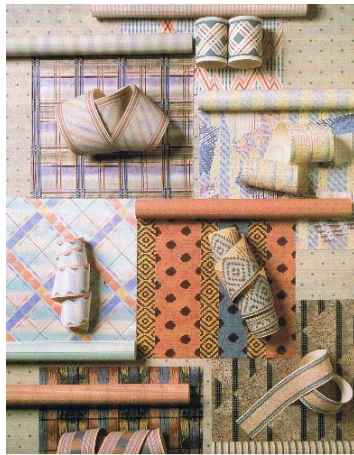
Try Resene **Cavern Pink**, **Resene Astral** and **Resene Delta**.

The pastel apricot outdoor polycane furniture was seen in many gardens in New Zealand during this decade. The foyer of the Sheraton Hotel in Auckland was designed in 1983 - sumptuous peach marble with peach leather seats.
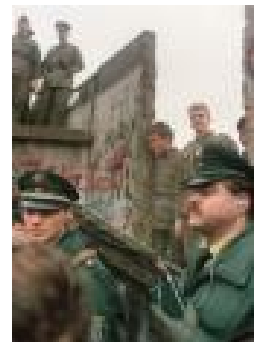
Pastel blues and purples, with a splash of pink or yellow, were used to brighten up neutral interiors in the 1980s as seen in these two spaces. At the same time Lady Di was showing similar shades in her fashion wardrobe, especially her fairytale ball gowns in silks and satins in colours of pale cream, turquoise, primrose and pink.

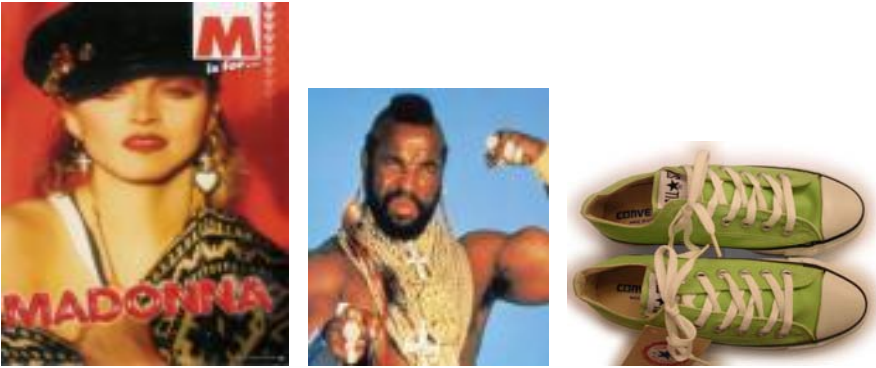paint pots   wallpaper   textiles   trims

values self-improvement ethics neighbours united

Margaret Thatcher promoted a return to family values in Britain, matched by conservatism in the USA under Ronald Reagan's leadership. Then there was a flood of self improvement and self motivation books, tapes and workshops on the market.

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the paint the professionals use

Gorbachev talked of the East and West becoming good neighbours and when the Berlin Wall fell at the end of the decade East met West for the first time since 1961.

Global Village – this term was introduced as new technology made possible instant communication with virtually any part of the world. Fax machines, modems and electronic mail enabled people to communicate instantly. The cellular phone became commonplace during the 1980s.

global communications   instant networking   fashion fusion

The result of the global communications meant that new ideas, technology, fashions and colours were transferred across the world at lightening speed. Children in Europe were wearing US style training shoes and baseball caps with jeans and corporate menswear was available at high-street chain stores.

A series of ecological threats provoked designers into focusing on "green" issues; products that could be recycled and finding solutions to large-scale world problems.

deconstruction   visualisation   expression

At this time of the decade, deconstruction in fashion and architecture emerged as a visualisation of processes, an expression of the turmoil the world was in. Black and white and all the greys in between were popular in fashion, interiors and architecture. The cutting edge of new technologies, affirmation of the irrational.

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slick streamlined modern apartments home-office

Black stretch fabrics, black lacquer furniture, slick glass tables and lights, charcoal office furniture and black leather chairs became popular. The first apartments were built in New Zealand and as a result interiors and fashion became more streamlined than the bright florals and colours of the 70s.

shine colour lighting texture

Moody blues, deep purples and exotic reds were popular, especially in restaurants and nightclubs. Try **Resene Midnight Express**, **Resene Meteorite** and **Resene Sensual Red**.

memphis design   clashing colour   fun + frivolous

Ettore Sottsass showcased this shelving unit in 1981 in Milan, now regarded as an icon of post-modernist design. He visited New Zealand in the 1980s bringing new ideas in colours and patterns for laminates, furniture, fabrics and ceramics.

Colours used in Memphis design were often strong and sometimes considered clashing. The primary colours with black and white and green were combined – similar to the Rubik cube which kept adults and children entertained during the 1980s.

The original bright colours of Memphis design may have been "tongue in cheek" but they became immensely popular with the elitist and had high price tags attached to them. They were designed to be controversial pieces but became a huge commercial success.

zipped jackets   domestic machines   high-tech lighting
There was an element of high tech and industrial design seen in fashion, interior design and architecture, which may have originated from the aggressive street style of punk fashion. A trend to exposed workings instead of hiding components was seen in lighting in particular. Another example was the radical radio – all its workings were contained in a transparent PVC bag to display a quirky decorative quality.
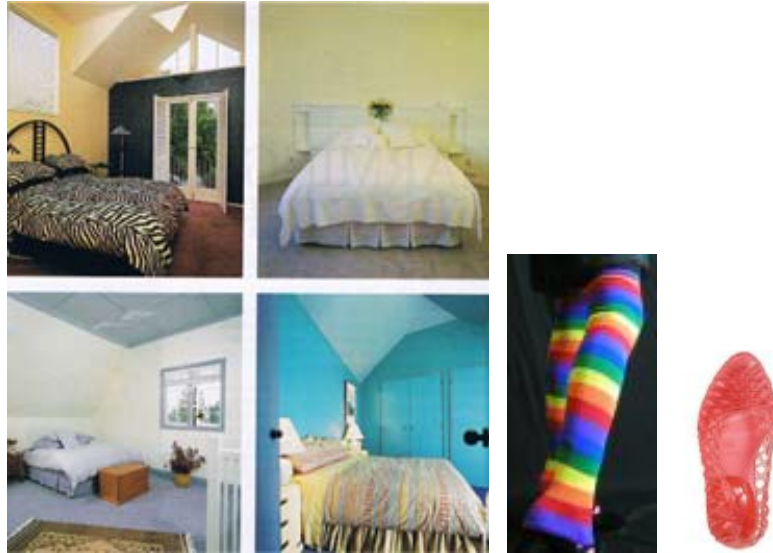
Try **Resene Eskimo** and **Resene Trojan**.

**white on white –
appliances, cabinets,
walls, exteriors**

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warm + cosy   duvets   jelly shoes   leg-warmers

This was the era of the fluorescent socks, leg-warmers and leotards, influenced by the movies "Flashdance" and "Footloose". The fitness fanaticism led to a sudden increase in private clubs and gyms.

In the bedroom the duvet was born and quickly took over blankets and bedspreads. Apart from being fluffy and sumptuous, they made the bed easier to make, especially for the young and older members of the family.   With the duvet came the introduction of valances and fitted bottom sheets and additional pillows to set the scene.

money   power   digital time   computers   cellphones   yuppies
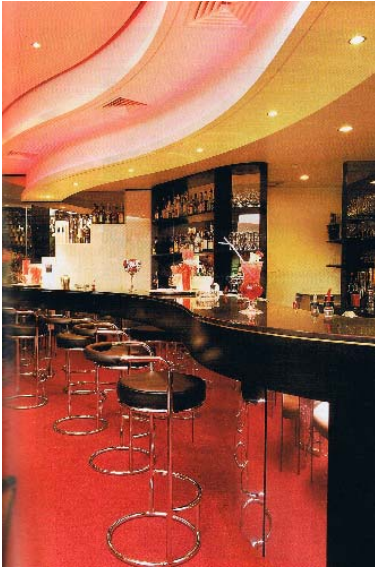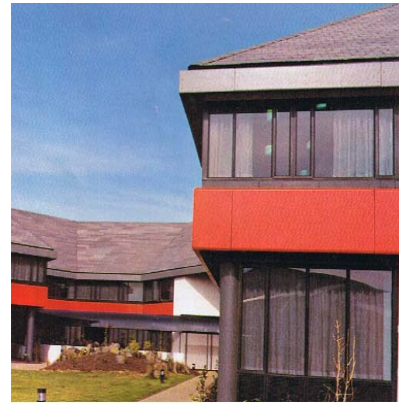
The economic upturn of the 1980s resulted in a return to vibrant colour. Women flooded the workforce in power suits, fashion brands like Adidas and Nike were the rage for street wear, designer jeans cost the earth – an era of ostentatious consumption.

Lifestyles sped up with the introduction of desktop computers and cellphones - video games were the hottest new innovation. Sophisticated equipment for life and leisure included the introduction of the digital watch, music on compact discs, cappuccino machines filofax organisers. In 1984 Yuppies appeared on the scene (young urban professionals) synonymous with upward mobility, greed and selfishness. ATM machines and credit cards made money easily available to consumers of designer clothes and luxury items.

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red black grey white

Red was the power colour in the corporate wardrobe. Red ties for men, red jackets for women. Worn with black or charcoal trousers and skirts and crisp white shirts. This translated into architecture as seen on this 1980s building.

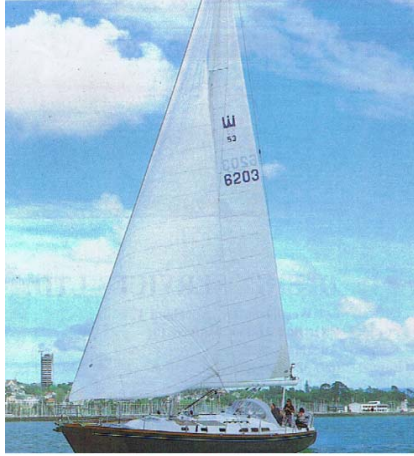Try **Resene Bright Red** and **Resene Bombshell**.

Red was big, signifying power and speed. The bar above has red carpet and the bank is actually an Auckland branch of the National Bank before they were green! In fashion, red was popular in sports and exercise clothing and in womenswear red accessories and plastic jewellery reigned, teamed with black, camel or grey.
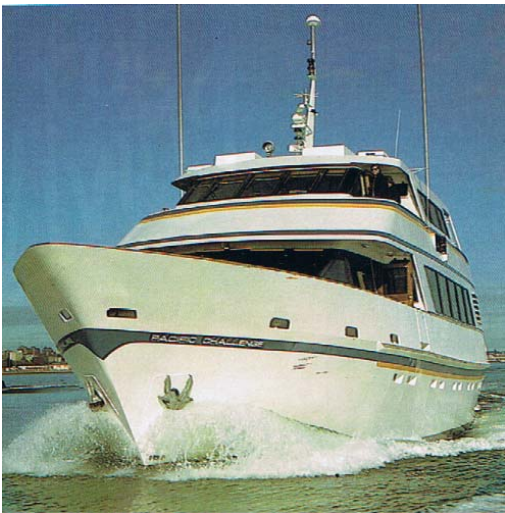

the power of silver glitz and glamour

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marine calm fresh clean quiet

After disease, disaster and death, people yearned for calm and quiet, to breathe clean fresh air. Colours representing these elements are pale turquoise and aquamarine – pure and cleansing. Try **Resene Escape** and **Resene Oxymoron**.

luxury lifestyles executive ostentatious

Leading up to the 1987 sharemarket crash, there was a huge display of new wealth, extravagance and indulgence. Greed and selfishness, glitz and glamour. From luxury boats to ornate furnishings, total consumption!

successful powerful dresscode impressive influential

Dress for success, impress friends and colleagues, power and pleasure...

stock market crash tragedy pollution sombre mood

Later in the decade the 87 stock market crash sent shockwaves across the world, which resulted in a sombre mood and duller colours, with black, white and brown prevailing.

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The following year, just before Christmas, a Pan Am flight departed London for New York but was brought down by a bomb over Lockerbie in Scotland, killing all passengers and crew. Further tragedy echoed when the Chinese army opened fire on protesting students in Beijing, killing or injuring thousands of innocent people in Tiananmen Square. Also in 1989 a massive oil spill from tanker Exxon Valdez killed marine animals along 2080 kilometres of shoreline in Alaska, and many years later the environment of the region is still suffering the effects of this pollution.

minimal restrained anorexia war

Like any decade, war and death take their toll on the community. Israeli troops invaded Lebanon and Palestinians were massacred in Beirut. War and drought led to famine in Ethiopia in 1983. The Falkland Islands were invaded by Argentina, and the USA bombed Libya in 1986. And in 1989 the Tiananmen Square Massacre killed thousands. Indian Prime Minister Gandhi was assassinated in 1984, as was the Egyptian President and John Lennon. Reagan and the Pope survived attempted assassinations on their lives. Aids was introduced to the public as a sexually transmitted disease and anorexia emerged as a new health threat as women attempted to change their body shapes.

key design elements of the 1980s

This home built in Christchurch demonstrates the need to feel secure and grounded after a rather turbulent decade. The buildings below illustrate how structural construction materials were featured to make a statement in architecture.

key colours of the 1980s

Try **Resene Nero**, **Resene Alabaster**, **Resene Trojan**, **Resene Pirate**, **Resene Escape**, **Resene Eskimo**, **Resene Spray**, **Resene Oxymoron**, **Resene Cavern Pink**, **Resene Tequila**, **Resene Corvette**, **Resene Delta**, **Resene Astral**, **Resene Claypot**, **Resene Astronaut** and **Resene Meteorite**.

references
- New Zealand Home & Building 1980 to 1989
- Fashion of the 20th Century
- Events Change the World
- Looks of the Century
- Resene Archives
- Designers Institute Library
- *Our acknowledgement of the designers and photographers who contributed to articles featured in the NZ Home & Building magazines published by AGM during the 1980s.*

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