

COLOUR KIND

etc...



maggie blake

ARRANGING to meet Melanie Yonge, colour consultant extraordinaire, at a city cafe, I ask how I will recognise her. She says she has "lots of colour and light" mixed in her hair and that she'll be wearing a blue and green striped jumper.

As it turns out, plans change and we meet at my place, just as dusk is draining the colour from everything. She is wearing black, but her hair is, indeed, a mixture of colour and light.

When she studied architecture at the University of Auckland, colour was not on the curriculum. The subject came up only twice with a lecturer — and that was on a balcony, rather than in the lecture theatre.

Colour theory is something that architects have largely missed out on. Architects are very good at understanding space, according to Yonge, but very few know how strongly colour and light can manipulate the spaces they create.

"Each time you choose a colour, a fabric, carpet or tile it's going to manipulate or distort that volume in some way," she explains.

This year Yonge has a chance to show us what colour and light can do to a space. While working as a colour consultant for Aalto Country Colours she has been teaching the basics of colour to a group of architectural students.

Now Yonge and her students are introducing Aucklanders to colour in a dramatic way with an interactive installation at Pakuranga's Fisher Gallery.

This collaborative project, *Light Labyrinth*, is a network of nine interconnecting 2m x 2m cubes. Visitors can move within the structure, manipulating the walls of the cubes, thus changing the colours and lighting all around them. While doing so, they are surrounded by sounds that reflect the different moods and perceptions they are creating.

Cameras looking down on the cubes from above project the installation and its ever-changing colours on to a screen in another gallery.

The project began in Vienna last year,



COLOUR, LIGHT, SOUND: Melanie Yonge understands how they all come together to create a desired atmosphere.

HERALD PICTURE / MARK SMITH

when Yonge joined a workshop of architectural students working with Dr Leonard Oberascher, an Austrian colour consultant, designer and psychologist. They produced their own labyrinth and began exploring the way space can be manipulated using simply constructed colours and theatrical lighting. Later, a group of professionals moved in and explored their own ideas, making the labyrinth into something completely different.

The exercise was intriguing, and Yonge expects the Pakuranga labyrinth to have a similar effect on all who visit it. "It is quite intense. Some people get in and want to leave immediately. And other people will go in and play for hours."

Professionals here, too, will get the chance to make changes to this labyrinth, which incorporates multi-pigmented

colours and different sorts of fluorescent and halogen lights. Oberascher is coming to Auckland to conduct two colour workshops that make use of the labyrinth. As a result, visitors can go to the exhibition three times and find a labyrinth with a different colour palette each time.

Specially composed music will reflect the different colours and an interactive Website has been established: www.light-labyrinth.co.nz

Yonge's role in the whole complex exercise is almost like the conductor of a strange orchestra made up of colour, light and music. As she says: "I'm the only one that understands the whole score."

• *Light Labyrinth* is on show at the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga from September 17 to October 20.