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Alicia's Wonderland

From Valencia to Perth with Paris, London and Sydney in between, Alicia Ferrer is entering the WA landscape design world with the world at her feet. **TEXT:** Lisa O'Neill

While her name has been on the hot list of the design world for some time, Alicia Ferrer is the fresh new face on the landscaping circuit and quickly building a name for herself.

Previously known for her interior design expertise, Alicia realised a two and a half years ago that she was knocking on the glass ceiling and wanted more balance in her life.

"I loved my job but I was so busy working

60-hour weeks and I was very close to the maximum in terms of salary," Alicia says. "I couldn't imagine working for another 10-years at that pace especially if I ever want a family, so I decided to replan my life."

Her interior design career is extensive and saw her working with some of the biggest names in architecture when she arrived in Perth in 2002.

"I worked for six different interior and architecture design companies in Perth,

including Woodhead International, Roxbury Architects, Marshall Kusinski and my last job was with Oldfield Knott Architects," says Alicia. "I was a senior interior designer working on \$6 million projects, a lot of commercial and some residential."

Her appeal to some of the biggest names in Perth design circles is easy to understand.

Alicia began her career with studies in her hometown of Valencia in Spain while



HEAD TURNER: Alicia's winning design set up at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show 2009.

working at an exhibition design operation that allowed her to travel.

"We had exhibitions in Frankfurt and Hanover, and a lot of local ones in Valencia," she says. "We had some amazing furniture exhibitions, quite a lot like the Milan ones but not quite at that level."

After a push from her boss to "look around Europe and see what else is happening", Alicia managed to score a berth at illustrious design school the Parisienne Ecole Boulle to further her studies.

"I studied in Paris for two more years in interior design specialising in public spaces," says Alicia. "It was perfect to help my understanding of landscape design too as we did parks and public art."

According to Alicia, the combination of Spanish and French design school background has made her a very balanced

designer due to the countries' differing design processes.

"In Spain, it's very spontaneous, daring and almost guttural – you feel it, you do it!" Alicia says. "It's a bit crazy."

"In France, it was the opposite as you really had to think it through and it has to make sense – it can be painful but it's great to have both skills and think of projects in both ways to make you a more balanced designer."

After living the dream as a student in Paris (think free museum entry, architectural inspiration on every corner and le croissant aplenty), Alicia found herself eager to try somewhere new, being nowhere near ready to return home.

Learning English was the next goal, so Alicia moved to London and attempted to score a job in the industry she had so much

knowledge and a reasonable amount of experience in.

"I had so much energy and applied for many jobs but without English, it was really bad," says Alicia. "The message was 'learn English and then come back to us.'"

So ensued two years working as a waitress and in customer service for an airline group, which allowed Alicia to establish a good understanding of the English language. During that time, she also found someone to practice on.

"I met Raj, my husband, who is Australian and that's how I ended up here," says Alicia. "I'd had enough of London and when Raj suggested I go back with him to Australia I thought 'wow' as I'd seen the pictures in the travel agents and wanted to go there so much."

After a year in Sydney and nine months

INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

With a dream to one day have her own holiday home in Bali, Alicia travels there regularly for inspiration.

"When I'm in Bali, I feel so inspired with all the nice plants and really cool bars," says Alicia. "It was there that made me realise it was landscape design that I wanted to do because I kept thinking 'oh my god, I'd love to have that at my place.'"

Hotels, resorts and bars provide Alicia with much inspiration – so much so that even her family are on the lookout when holidaying.

"My sister went to Ibiza and she rings me and says 'I see so many things that you would love' and she sends me loads of pictures," says Alicia. "Ibiza makes a really big effort with chillout spaces and they love white furniture, although every year there's a different theme of what is cool."



MORE ACCOLADES: Alicia's resort-style display at Garden Week Perth gave her further exposure after her win in Melbourne.

in Newcastle, Raj was keen to move to Perth, where his children from a previous relationship live.

"Paris, London, Sydney, Perth," Alicia says with a laugh. "It was a good move to come from Newcastle to Perth as Newcastle is also really quiet. If I had come straight from Sydney I would have died as Perth really is the most isolated city in the world!"

However, Alicia is quickly bridging the gap between Perth and the rest of the country by being the first entrant, and winner at that, of the Melbourne International Garden and Flower Show's Don Fleming Landscape Design Award earlier this year.

After studying horticulture and landscape design at TAFE last year, Alicia entered the nationwide competition aiming to promote up-and-coming landscape designers.

"Somebody told me this was a really good competition because you not only

submit your designs, someone builds it in the biggest show of its kind," says Alicia.

"Because I have done some exhibition designs before, I think I managed the space we were given better than others as we only had a 5m x 5m garden to work with."

The winning design was a simple one that Alicia felt worked within the small space and maximised the height allowance.

"Most people created bi-dimensional gardens but mine was three-dimensional," Alicia explains. "My message was that if you don't have a lot space, like a Sydney terrace, you can still try to own the volume."

"I also wanted to tell people to create a multi-functional space, not just a place to look at because we have so much great weather we have to make the most of it. In this garden, you can entertain, read the newspaper or just chill out in the hammock. It's low maintenance with effective planting."

The simple colour theme of white and deep

lime green is something Alicia would like to develop as a signature trait.

"I like using plants with the same colour but different textures which relaxes the eye," says Alicia. "Another of my signature design elements will be to use a lot of white, although I'll have to modify that in Perth with the glare of the sun."

With a promotional schedule that would exhaust Angelina Jolie, Alicia has returned to Perth with a following already.

"I'm working with a couple now who are really daring, they trusted me and said to do what I think," says Alicia. "I have no deadline, a really good budget and daring clients, I hope it happens more often but I've heard it's not a normal thing."

Whatever design Alicia comes up with next, we're sure people will be talking about it. ❶

Alicia Ferrer, Kokatu Design, 0415 544 903, alicia@kokatudesign.com.au.