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Three wallpaper designers tell Rachel Calton that walls are becoming more interesting with texture and patterns, while plains are yesterday's story

Roll models

Pattern comeback

Jocelyn Warner works at the cutting edge of wallpaper design, harnessing new developments in inks and computer generated designs. She has been in the business for nine years but is currently enjoying the growing popularity of pattern, catering to the ever more design-educated consumer, and observing the resurgence of the big UK design houses.

The complex designs for her new Kaleido collection are created on a computer, but are screen printed in new iridescent inks.

'Metallics have been around for a while, giving glitz and sheen to wallpaper, but the tonal effect of iridescent ink is much more inspiring; it acts in certain ways under the light that can't properly be captured on camera.

'Like when gloss ink came out in 2000, having never been used before in interiors, it is an important turning point,' she explains.

Liberty and Heal's have always sold wallpaper and fabric as part of their interiors portfolio, though many retailers don't as yet. With feature walls becoming a strong interior trend, it is becoming a more sought-after 'decor' purchase.

'It is possible to just buy one wallpaper roll and make a feature piece from one wall—a chimney breast for example,' says Warner. 'In this case the wallpaper acts more like art, a canvas almost for the graphics. You are concentrating more on the image, what it's giving out and the mood it creates.'

'However, wallpaper needs to be a more educated buy these days. It's not like buying plain colours that you can easily envisage, or patterns of 25cm. Our repeats are 70cm to over a metre in height, so it can take some advice to think through how it will look.'

Although media coverage is billing the renaissance of wallpaper as a trend, Warner thinks of it as more of a change in psychology.

'People's interest in design has changed, the understanding of the product has changed. These days people are talking about repeat patterns, colours and inks. They are interested in the product, whether it is manufactured digitally, by machine, screen printed, or printed by hand, you never used



to buy a product with this kind of information.

'As people are more confident with printed design, they are not necessarily just looking for something that will fade into the background, but a way of bringing contemporary art into a room. As people are more confident in their tastes this is more important.'

Interest in wide wallpapers in particular is higher in the UK than other countries, Warner reckons.

'In London, certainly, a lot of people are living in flats or Victorian houses that have been broken up. A younger person, interested in design, can make something look contemporary without changing the structure, but by wallpapering certain walls.

You can change space quite drastically without having the fireplace out or knocking walls through.

'In other countries, where properties are newer, they are designed to look more aged than they are. I think it is a greater trait with the British as well,



wanting to be different and stand out from their neighbours,' she says.

Warner is also enthusiastic about the move back towards the UK as a design led centre for prints on wallpaper and fabrics. Wallpaper has been instrumental in making people look at pattern and colour, she claims; 'it has led the way in fact.'

'The revival in pattern happened in wallpaper before it did in textiles. We have witnessed a huge turnaround within the British industry; the big companies where the sales suffered the most, have experienced the most drastic change.'

'Harlequin has seen a phenomenal turnaround. Osborne & Little which 10 years ago was very traditional, is now upbeat, with highly stylised designs. A decade ago its bestseller was a little star repeat; today it has a full range of large, sophisticated patterns.

'The size of the repeat has changed dramatically.

Even with antiques designs, a contemporary take is evident in the structure of the design. Florals are still popular but are hugely stylised.

'We are never going to be like the Italians, with a lot of their manufacturing industry for wovens, knits and prints still family run. A lot of our businesses have been lost, but there is a movement back towards the UK as a centre for design, especially with the growth of digital.'

Digital design is helping Warner to branch into other areas of accessories, such as throws, wall hangings, lights, and ceramics; applying variations of designs to cushions and throws can be done with minimal wastage.

'Now with a strong identity and branding it is easy to break into these markets. Increased exposure, consumer interest and the popularity of pattern in the past few years have all helped to consolidate that.'



Far left: Tracy Kendall's In The White Room

Centre: Jocelyn Warner's Kaleido silver and Kew Turquoise (top left)

Bottom left: Loophole's Kura

they are by no means prescriptive. I enjoy changing and customising prints to be cohesive with a room. It all depends at what point you decide to bring in the wallpaper,' she explains.

Kendall started out as a designer with a fine art degree, but after turning to textiles for her MA she found that the two made a good marriage. Her wallpaper designs have used everything from flock to glitter and buttons to jigsaw pieces; 'anything is up for grabs'. And the same ethos is slipping into other areas of interior decoration.

'Habitat bought the rights to use my designs and have created a lamp from it; it is an oval black lamp with buttons.'

References crop up in Kendall's designs that she might have come across anything up to three years previously. Sometimes it is a case of distilling them into designs that are pure and simple, or it may just be a case that they become technically possible.

'Young people spend a lot of time in front of computer games, graphics, films, and other multilayered visuals. It is more normal to be confronted by this kind of imaging. With the advent of digital designing, it is possible to reflect these influences in interior design.'

'On the flipside, you don't want to go too madly digital. There is the desire to keep handcrafts alive and people like to have a handmade look to things in their homes, which is why products at both ends of the spectrum are enjoying popularity.'

Living with the detail

Tracy Kendall is leading the field in expanding the vocabulary of possibilities for wallcoverings, using new materials and 3D effects. In her opinion, plain interiors are hard, and not altogether natural, to live with. 'We live with so much stuff that minimalism is not the most human thing.'

Her wallpaper designs reflect the things going on around us and all the things we live with.

'Rigid schemes in houses need not apply either; changing pattern from one wall to the next, from a corridor through to a living room actually adds to the depth and quality of the interior. A mish-mash of furniture works in these interiors then too. Once you recognise that the rules are there to be broken, a whole new avenue of aesthetics opens up to you.'

'I try to design things that offer an idea. Sometimes they are a starting point for a room, but

Floor to wall

Until recently Loophole specialised in contemporary rugs, carpets and runners. Recognising the crossover between signature prints on rugs and wallpaper, however, designer Lorraine Statham has recently moved into wallpaper design.

The gold and black roll is the boldest of the new collection of four which was designed with small boutiques and hairdressers in mind. This has become its bestseller in both the contract and domestic market, where it is often used for a feature wall against plainer painted surfaces.

Softer, but just as opulent choices for interiors and homes are Vanilla French and Alabaster Stripe.