



## From subtle patterns to big and bold, wallpaper makes a huge comeback

Kirstin ENDEMANN *Postmedia News*

Summer made an appearance in March, neutrals are a thing of the past and everyone is buying wallpaper. Who'd have thought such things were possible five years ago – besides maybe the environmental scientists and designers such as Stuart Stark?

The owner of wallpaper design company Charles Rupert Designs, which began two decades ago as a source of historically accurate wallpaper for restoration projects in Victoria, Stark knew we'd eventually shake off the yoke of boring interiors.

"Fashion for interior design is cyclical," the architect and design lecturer says from his studio, where he specializes in putting a modern twist on 18th- to 20th-century paper for clients around the world.

"The overstuffed and opulent '80s were a reflection of the 1880s. Even then I was predicting a sea change to stark neutrals by the year 2000 or a more Edwardian approach."

Well, we had years of pale taupe walls, white trim and grey sofas. Now, everyone is predicting a season of orange and an era of big, bold wallpaper. It's a prediction that has been reflected in Stark's sales, which had been dampened by the recent global recession.

"Then six months ago, people started buying paper again," he says. "I think people are just getting tired of neutral, neutral, neutral. And pattern can be very peaceful; people have an emotional reaction to it."

Ottawa interior design consultant Janise Saikaley of Uproar Design is also finding an increase in wallpaper sales at her Hintonburg store.

"Even five years ago, people were still ripping any sign of wallpaper out of their homes." Now, she says, big floral prints, flocked damasks and tone-on-tone Victorian replicas are flying off her shelves.

"Wallpaper is a way of marrying modern design with the traditional and is an easy way to shake up or elevate a room to the next level of elegance instead of replacing all the white and grey furniture everyone in Ottawa seems to have."

This interest in wallpaper is a sign of the times and our need to cocoon, says Alan Elder, curator of the craft, decorative arts and design collection at the Museum of Civilization.

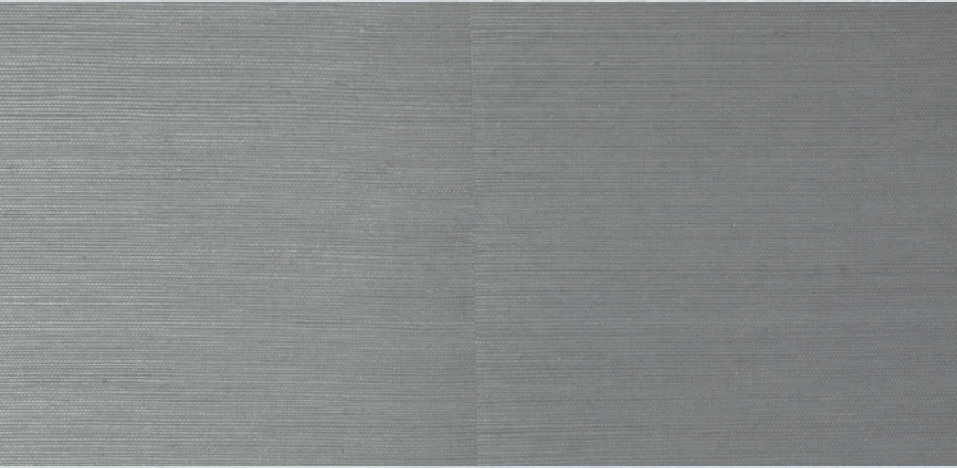
"Because we are living in a period of great change, economic instability and political upheaval, we are looking for some place in our lives where we feel more comfortable: our homes. We are nesting. You only have to notice the proliferation of home design magazines and TV shows."

Humans as a species find patterns soothing, he says, so it follows there'd be an increased interest in wallpaper now,



POSTMEDIA PHOTO

Dylan Connelly, 7, loves the black-and-white cityscape in his room. Top photo: Wallpaper makes homes feel more lived in and has had an increase in popularity as a design element.



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A natural sea-grass cloth covering Joanne Connelly chose for her master bedroom.

much like the Arts & Crafts movement of 150 years ago, when people reacted to increased industrialization.

Now, it's the dominance of technology in our lives that we're reacting to by complementing it with more handicrafts and personalized items.

Stark knows modern sensibilities differ from historical ones, as his collections of paper always include one original colour scheme of two or more colours in a design.

What also makes modern wallpaper more appealing than the mass-produced versions our grandmothers' grandmothers used, is that it can be tailored to fit personal tastes, says Elder.

"It is now possible – due to technology – for designers to work very closely with wallpaper producers to generate

something special for one location or another. So you can make your space entirely your own and comfortable to you."

Rollout, a Canadian company, produces on-demand digital prints on high-end traditional wallpaper, from either their collection of artist-produced patterns or from images, drawings or photos the client provides. The paper is printed only when an order is made, meaning colours can be changed and rolls will be printed to fit the height of the walls, making hanging less challenging.

Rollout's collections are gaining in popularity with homeowners who like to see a twist on traditional patterns, says co-owner and CEO Anita Modha. Black-and-white images, quirky patterns such as their Pigs & Math design and a series of vintage map wall-coverings – to be fully ready by

mid-April – are among their most popular options.

"I think the appeal of wallpaper has much to do with individuality," says Modha. "Design blogs, magazines, shows have made people savvier about what is possible and let them see they can do anything they want; people get the value of having their space precisely personalized."

Ottawa resident Joanne Connelly papered three of the rooms in her custom-built home just weeks ago. It was something she promised herself she'd do when her very sleek, very-white, modern house was being built.

"It has a very old-fashioned look, but very graphic and modern at the same time," she says. "It was nice to put something softer in there."

"Though I like a very clean esthetic, you do not want your house to be very cold. The wallpaper just brings a little warmth into a home."

She chose a light-grey paper with a graphic white floral for a spare bedroom, a natural seagrass cloth covering for the master bedroom – "which my husband and I both love; I'm always touching it" – and a black-and-white cityscape of world monuments for her seven-year-old son, Dylan.

"He wanted black and I wondered how I'd do that," she laughs. "Then I found this graphic print, which is now a big hit with his friends. And the benefit is I won't have to change it as he gets older. It's fine for an adult room."

Rolls of quality wallpaper can cost between \$130 and \$300 a roll (for about 10 metres) or about \$1,200 a wall so it's not a cheap wall treatment. Many of the higher-end brands use traditional printing methods: Charles Rupert Designs, for instance, works with original Morris & Co.-era presses in England and hires skilled labourers to hand mix the dyes.

"It is not inexpensive, but for me it was worth it," Connelly says. "You'd put that same money into art and for me wallpaper is art."

Saikaley suggests being sure about wallpaper choices before purchasing, though some companies such as *tempaperdesigns.com* make versions that can be easily applied and removed. Most stores or designers will provide samples to take home for testing.

She also recommends steering clear of too-hot trends – like flaming pink – that can quickly fizzle or fade. However, she happily sold a client some flocked skull and crossbones paper. But that client came in wearing a subtle skull-and-crossbones bracelet.

"We thought we'd bring out that paper just in case and she loved it. And still does, two years later. Wallpaper today is not the rosebuds of yesteryear."

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