



From mermaid prints to textured effects, wallpaper is on a roll. **Clare Vooght** explains how it has always reflected more than just pretty patterns

Rose gold velvet crush, semi-gloss concrete effect, ebony grain texture, silver glitter-crackle – a quick online search will bring up wallpaper choices in pretty much any colour or texture you can think of.

And it seems style-conscious Britons can't get enough, with wallpaper experiencing a boom in sales in the UK. Leading online seller iwantwallpaper.co.uk reported a 24 per cent increase in sales for 2018, with similar growth predicted for this year.

Paula Taylor, stylist and trend specialist at Blackburn-based wallpaper manufacturer Graham & Brown, puts it down to our obsession with interiors on social media.

"A lot of people are very proud of their interiors, and they want to show that off on Pinterest or Instagram," she says.

"Rather than having to be invited to somebody's house for a dinner party to see somebody's interiors, you can see them more readily now. That sharing culture has really boosted not just wallpaper but anything, really."

Our walls are also becoming more showy – homeowners are moving away from muted grey and neutral walls, instead choosing personality in their designs, with everything from bright florals to leafy tropical prints. Alex Whitecroft, head of design at I Want Wallpaper, adds: "Technology has played a part in this, with online design tools allowing homeowners to experiment and view how their rooms will look before they take the plunge."

So what are the trends in wallpaper for 2019?

Many of I Want Wallpaper's current top 10 lines are textured – with vinyls and shimmering, smooth metallics featuring heavily alongside faux wooden beams and velvet foil designs. Texture and tactility are predicted to remain strong looks for this year – but far from the puffy wallpapers of the 80s, they come in the form of string-effect detail to create stripes and geometric patterns. Kintsugi-effect wallpapers – made to look like it has cracks which are filled with metallic paints – are also popular, says Taylor. Oriental styles – including cherry blossom, delicate orchids, birds, porcelain prints and silk textures – are also big for 2019, as are maximalism and calming, slow-living looks.

And when it comes to children's bedrooms, animals – especially lemurs in rainforest scenes – are popular, while Wayfair.co.uk has noticed a surge in searches for whimsical mermaid prints.

But we don't necessarily like to commit. Searches on Wayfair for "temporary wallpaper" increased by 760 per cent in the past year, as removable peel-and-stick options make it easier to enhance a rental space or bring a temporary addition of colour.

We are also picking up on easier paste-the-wall papers, that make the process far easier than traditional methods, and require far less prep than painting. Taylor adds: "These days you can paste

the wall with paper far quicker than you can paint it. You literally just paste the wall, slide the wallpaper up and cut it on the wall, using a Stanley knife to trim it on the wall."

And while it used to just be one statement wall in the house, people are going for entire rooms – and no room is off-limits, with wallpaper-makers seeing a rise in interest in waterproof options for the bathroom, including *Blue Planet II*-inspired fish designs.

Wallpaper hasn't just served as a pretty thing to brighten up homes, either – through the years it's reflected social trends and outlooks. Taylor notes the fluidity of masculine and feminine designs over the past couple of

years: "It started with *The Danish Girl* film [in 2015], and we're seeing it with female empowerment and the HeForShe [gender equality] campaign too, there is more design work where something that would be a typically masculine design, say geometric or hard-marble designs, is in feminine colours, juxtaposing the two looks."

Wallpaper through the years

Being reflective of the times isn't a new thing for wallpaper: during 19th-century colonial exploration and expansion, many European wallpapers depicted faraway lands, with romanticised visions of China, India and Senegal printed on to huge panoramas.

Florals, however, have endured

through the centuries. The earliest surviving wallpaper found in Europe, at Christ College Cambridge, was woodblock-printed and dates to 1509, featuring a pomegranate design made up of floral motifs and *fleur-de-lis*-style hooks.

For centuries wallpaper was a preserve of the middle and later the upper classes. Andrew Bush, paper conservator and chair of the Wallpaper History Society, says: "It wasn't until 1850s to 1860s that wallpaper became cheap enough to be found in the poorest of labourers' cottages. This was soon after machine printing took off and mass production began, with designs at the time ranging from marble and wood grain-effect to imitation stucco and textile patterns."

"The variety of design is endless and I think people tend to concentrate on a few designs for each period. You think of William Morris for the late part of the 19th century, but in fact that was a small part of the market and unaffordable for the vast majority of wallpapers users at that time."

"The most common long-lasting wallpaper has been the floral paper. Then there were also commemorative wallpapers for events; there were some with soldiers and battle themes."

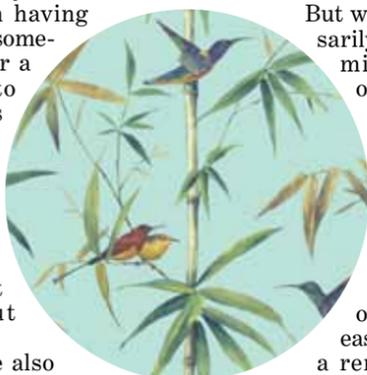
How it's made

Earlier wallpapers were printed by woodblock and often nailed on to the wall in sheets. Other traditional methods still used to produce today's wallpaper rolls include gravure, using engraved copper cylinders, and screen-printing, which allows designers to create texture through a heating process.

But, while still small scale, the advent of digital printing has meant more bespoke designs with smaller print runs and bigger personality. "It's thrown out the rule book," says Taylor.

"You're not limited to so many colours on the machine – you can print an infinite number, and the repeat size doesn't have to be to the repeat size of the rollers in the machine. You can do smaller print runs that are more bespoke, so you can have more out-there designs."

So it looks like wallpaper designs are about to get a whole lot more experimental. Bring on the rose gold velvet crush.



Wallpaper has become more accessible for most decorating budgets and is available in a variety of designs and textures, such as these by Wayfair, which reflect both classic images and striking modern designs FOLIO IMAGES