



To wallpaper, or not to wallpaper?

Is it background or foreground, art or decoration, vulgar or respectable, a substitute, or the real thing, questions Donna White.

Everyone has an opinion. It is like politics in our country, half on one side, and half on the other. The use of printed papers as wall or ceiling decorations is thought to have started at the end of the 15th century. Ever since, its status has been widely questioned. Our parents had it, so does it mean we have grown into them?

Whatever you're feeling, wallpaper can go way beyond what can be done with paint. Both wallpaper and paint can add colour and interest to a room, but wallpaper with texture and pattern will provide a level of interest that is difficult to attain with mere wall paint. Textured and patterned wallpaper can manipulate spaces and add or eliminate architectural detail. An added advantage is it can cover up any imperfections or oddities in your walls.

Patterns fall into one of four basic styles:

1. Geometric patterns: include plaids, stripes and grids.
2. Large prints: add visual interest to a room.
3. Overall print: repeated tight patterns. The eye blends the design together, which minimises the pattern and emphasizes the colour.
4. Small prints: add a touch of pattern on top of a background colour, and are best at forming a subtle backdrop.

Anaglypta (Greek term for 'raised ornament') and Lincrusta wallpapers have an embossed or textured design that resembles fine plasterwork, designed to be painted.

Like paint, wallpaper comes in countless grades, with options to fit every budget and creative mind. To help you choose, I suggest you keep

in mind two simple points: Scale and Proportion. In a small room, for example, a large-scale pattern may not repeat more than once before it meets the skirting board. This would be rather like seeing only half of a painting. Instead, try a smaller pattern with a shorter repeat.

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Typically a larger room can handle bolder colours and larger patterns. If you have a small room, but prefer a large print, make sure it has lots of white space to balance the effect. White space is the area around and above furniture. A room rarely looks good with every centimetre of it filled with colours, and patterns. Eyes need 'resting places' within a room, so 'white space' is essential.

Wallpaper can manipulate our illusion of a space. For example, wallpaper with a vertical stripe can give the impression of greater height to a room with a low ceiling. To make a small room seem bigger, use small and open patterns in light colours. Rich, dark, large patterns will make a large room feel more intimate. All-over patterns, extroverted textures and matte wallpaper camouflage bumpy walls and architectural oddities. Wallpapers that look like wood, leather or fabric can add architectural interest to a room. Metallic wallpapers add glamour. New wallpapers are being embellished with glitter, jewels, and iridescent or metallic inks. These effects cannot be replicated with paint.

A small area can 'pop' with correctly chosen wallpaper. For example, you can define the eating area of a kitchen. It is important, though, to use wallpaper that complements the adjacent paint.

In an open-plan home, think about a combination of wallpapers that easily carries the eye from room to room. The wallpapers could share a colour palette, or a design element. Alternatively, choose another print from the same collection - they are grouped to coordinate, so the hard work has been done for you. This establishes a visual harmony and a spatial flow.

Wall preparation is equally as important whether you are wallpapering, or painting. Wall surfaces must be prepared properly for optimum results, so do follow the wallpaper manufacturer's instructions. If you are unsure about your DIY abilities, it is best to hire a decorator. If the wallpaper is extremely heavy, expensive, or being hung in a tricky space, I suggest you hire a professional.

One of the latest wallpaper trends is wallpaper chosen from the archives. These are far from old-fashioned. You can team archive wallpaper with modern furniture for an eclectic look. If you want a paint that matches the ones used in archive wallpaper, look at heritage and period paint collections.

Ultimately, at the end of a wallpapering job there should be leftover rolls. What can you do with them? Use them for lampshades, and to line drawers, to draw attention to the back of shelves, or add an unexpected wow factor to the inside of a wardrobe. Wallpaper also makes excellent, and very special, gift-wrapping paper! ■