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# You won't believe it's wallpaper

By **Diane Cowen** | January 16, 2017 | Updated: January 16, 2017 9:44pm

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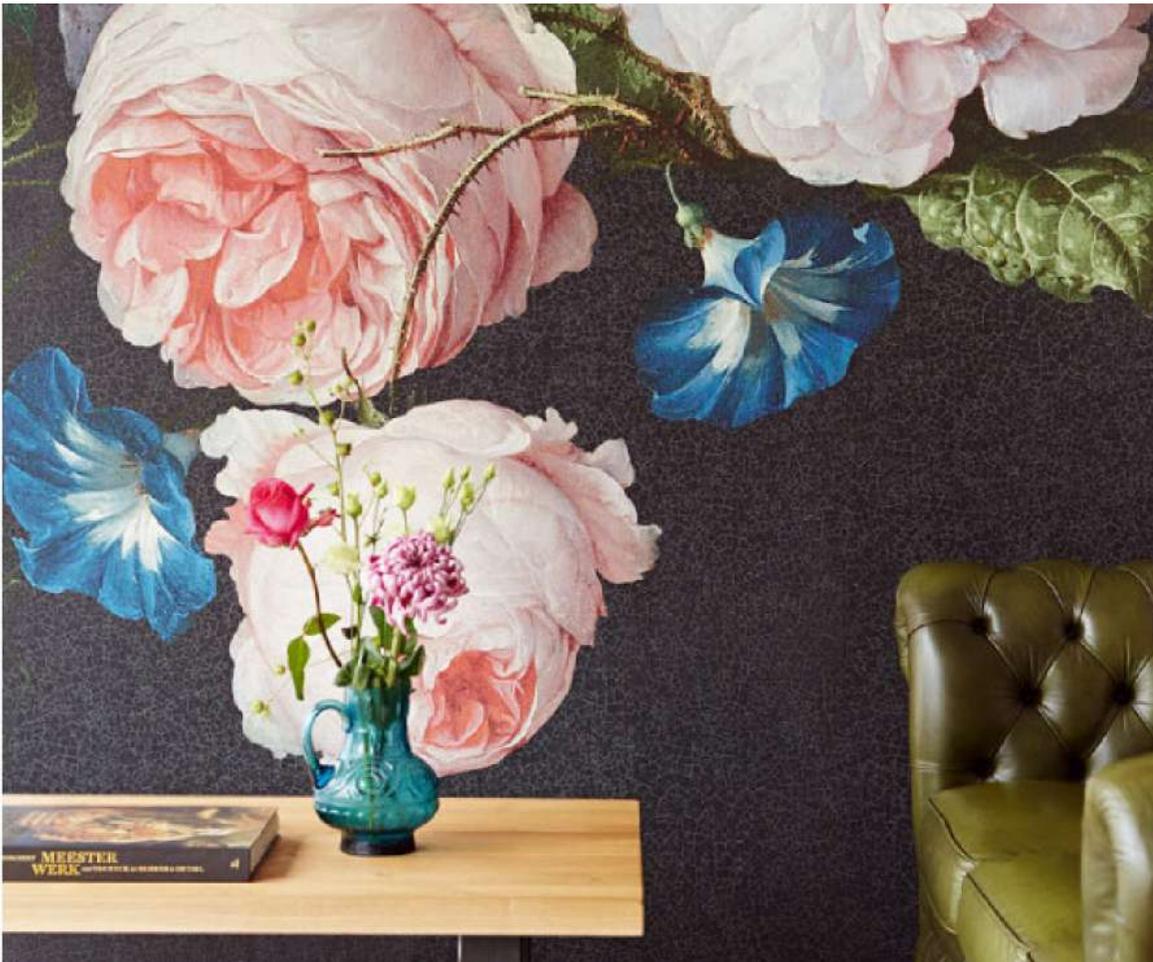


Photo: JFÂ Fabrics

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## IMAGE 1 OF 12

JF Fabrics' Antiquity vinyl wallcovering boasts a larger-than-life bouquet of colorful blooms.

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Misty Madden's sons have definite views about how they want their rooms decorated.

Eldest son, Ty, a junior at Cy-Ranch High School, wanted a grown-up look for his room when the family moved into their Bridgeland home in Cypress. Middle son, Kannon, wanted something sophisticated, and the youngest, 10-year-old Easton, wanted something to match his big, bold personality.

The family's interior designer, Pamela O'Brien of Pamela Hope Designs, was at a design seminar at the High Point Market when a photo of a room with a brick wall caught her eye. The brick was wallpaper.

That might just be the thing for Ty, she thought.

When she showed him options, his younger brothers wanted some, too.

This is not their grandmother's wallpaper, mind you. Ty Madden opted for a tan-brown brick pattern, eighth-grader Kannon chose a Thibaut pattern, with rows of rivets forming diamond shapes. Ten-year-old Easton opted for a York stacked-tile look. Visitors feel compelled to touch it to see if it's real, or just very realistic.

"What has really been fun is that the whole family has gotten excited about it," she said. "I had a lot of fun when the boys all wanted wallpaper. That was new."

The Maddens' experience in choosing wallpaper is part of a booming trend: a return to wallpaper in homes across the country.

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## TRANSLATOR

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## STYLE

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There are the peel-and-stick kind for people living in dorms or apartments. They go up easily and come down in minutes, without destroying the wall surface.

But most interior designers and homeowners are going beyond that.

Connie LeFevre, owner of Design House and Fabric House at the Houston Design Center, waved her arm past rows of hefty wallcovering portfolios in one room of her Fabric House store.

Back in the 1980s and '90s, people used paper-backed vinyl in stripes, florals and other patterns. Today's wallcoverings - they're so elaborate you can hardly call them "paper" - have LED lights and Swarovski crystals embedded in them. Or they're made of beads, crushed glass or sand. Some are made of natural elements, including real peacock feathers, leather and wood.

You'll also find custom-made, hand-painted wallpaper, for people who don't want anyone else in the world to have a single wall that looks like theirs.

If it all sounds expensive, keep in mind that these wallcoverings are high-end options. You can still find nice wallpaper for \$75 a roll, O'Brien said, but when using these new options, a fancy powder room could cost as much as \$4,000 or more plus labor.

"Wallpaper is a bit of a luxury selection. The most cost effective way to finish a wall is plain paint, but it's not nearly as much fun," O'Brien said. "I like to save a spot or two where you can go big and go glamorous and go exciting, just not in every room."

LeFevre stood in front of one wallpaper mural in her store: a beautiful floral garden blown up larger than life and applied to a single wall. It even has a few ants and ladybugs perched on flowers and leaves.



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There's another mural-like wallcovering by MeStyle that could be used on a single wall, perhaps at the end of a long, wide hallway. The scene shows a huge chandelier and where the light bulbs would be, LED lights have been embedded. It looks like an actual chandelier hanging in the space.

"There's a little bit of shock, like 'What am I seeing?' if you saw this down the hallway," LeFevre said.

There are artistic wallcoverings, too. One is a thick, structural design that looks like a combination of papier-mâché and woven fabric. It comes in a variety of colors and would be applied on top of a painted wall for a dramatic effect.

Technology is another factor. Computers allow manufacturers to create wallcoverings out of anything that can be scanned in. Have a favorite landscape photo? It can be blown up to wall size and turned into wallpaper.

O'Brien said that powder rooms are the most common places to see a room all covered in colorful or interesting wallpaper. Some clients go for texture while others want a pop of color or bold geometric design.

She said she often does an accent wall in bedrooms or even a dining room, and a home's small niches can be great spots for a different wall treatment. It's not unusual to see bright, fresh wallpaper in a laundry room or even a pantry.

Peter Reisinger of D&P Wallcoverings, has been hanging wallpaper professionally for 33 years and said 2016 was his most demanding year ever.

He worked all over the Houston area and traveled to jobs in Tennessee, Colorado, Utah and the Cayman Islands. And 2017 looks to be just as busy, filled with six- to seven-day work weeks.

Reisinger does have a few private clients but primarily works with builders and interior designers. O'Brien said her paper-hangers are booked three months out.

"Back in the '80s, everybody was hanging paperback vinyl," Reisinger said. "That is the thing about wallcoverings, it's a constantly changing and evolving medium."

Many homeowners were soured on wallpaper from messy experiences trying to remove it, but likely they were taking down paper that wasn't properly installed.

"For the average homeowner, their paper was hung right on the sheetrock. That's why they hate it when they remove it. It tears the wall up," he said.

Proper preparation includes sanding sheetrock smooth and then using an oil-based primer before installing the wallpaper. Hand-painted wallcoverings also require a paper liner that gets another layer of primer. Grasscloth requires pre-trimming to get the final look just right.

In O'Brien's new home, she chose a bright, bold pattern that's very on-trend, with greens, geometrics and tropicals.

"I went very, very bold, and I absolutely love it," she said. "I went big at home, and now I'm itching to do the next room. I'm deciding what it's going to be."



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