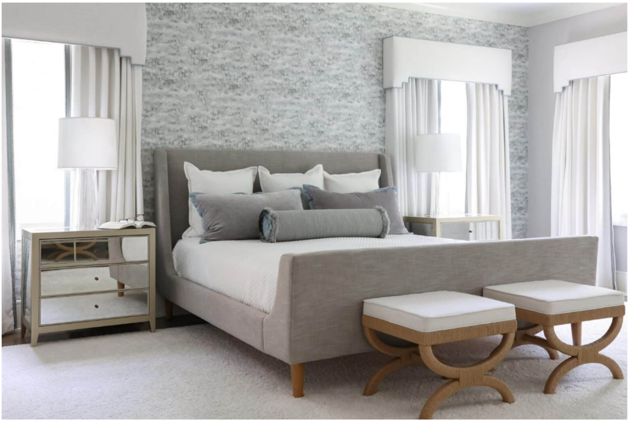
Insider Secrets on How to do Wallpaper Right

By Kristan Zimmer



We've all seen the design reports for 2024 and in no uncertain terms, wallpaper is present in a big way this year, from minimalist textured papers to opulent metallics to foliage-forward prints. But while the application and the prints have evolved and improved over time, wallpaper as a design feature has been around for centuries and is one of the design world's most essential and meaningful ways to make a house a home.

"Paint feels nice and fresh but it's not as much of a design direction or commitment, so I think the permanency of wallpaper makes you feel like you've made a space yours," says Andrea Sinkin, principal and founder of Andrea Sinkin Design in Greenwich, CT. "There's no other way to customize a room the way wallpaper gives you a point of view as the homeowner and the designer."

While we can all appreciate the beauty and artistry of wallpaper, many of us shy away from using it because of that permanence and our fear of "making a mistake," but Sinkin advises if you work with the right professionals to select and apply your wallpaper thoughtfully, it will make every space you design your favorite room in the house.

Create a Moment

When Sinkin begins a project, she often knows where she is going to put wallpaper and what will go there. Pattern for the powder room, dining room and the laundry room, grass cloth for the entryway, "after that it's more texture based," says Sinkin who looks for wallpapering opportunities on every floor. An accent wall like the colorful blue and yellow stripe she chose around the window in one client's open-concept living room helps define the sitting area and adds a fun focal point. She used a similar technique in another open concept space by putting a custom Pierre Frey wallpaper around a window nook. She then designed a custom banquette for the dining table rather than have the table sit in the middle of the room. "When you walk in, you see that from the front door and that's what we used as inspiration throughout

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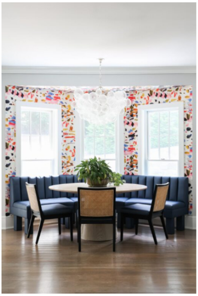
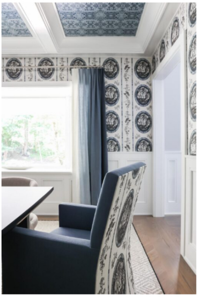
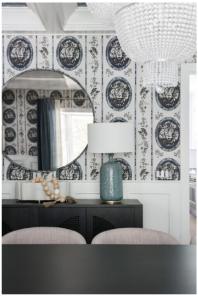
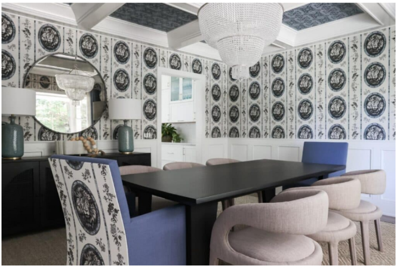
the house" says Sinkin of the colorful paint brush-stroked abstract design. "We pulled those colors through the house to make everything very cohesive and connected."



In another client's home, she chose an irreverent yet traditional lion print for the walls, with matching upholstery on the backs of the chairs and a coordinating deep blue grass cloth on the insets of the coffered ceiling. "I just put a picture of this on my Instagram and everyone went wild for it," says Sinkin. "It has a lot of humor to it, but it still feels classical to me, so I think that's a really neat spin on it. Then in the coffered ceiling we have this beautiful, marbleized water-staying wallpaper to coordinate with it…Adding that really gave it a lot of depth and made the moldings pop."

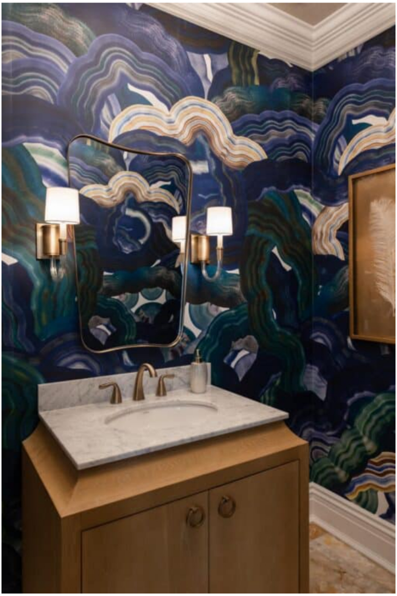




Mix and Match

Sinkin loves to coordinate wallpaper with a wall of built-ins like in the home office she designed with a textured Thibaut wallpaper made out of real wood shavings, or a paneled wall like the living room she designed with a textured blue kid-friendly vinyl wallpaper to contrast creamy white paneling on the accent wall.

She also likes to mix and match two different wallpapers in one space that complement each other like she did in that dining room with the lion print. Often, a textured or grass cloth wallpaper on the ceiling and a print on the walls can dress up or modernize an otherwise dated tile on the floor. It also warms up a space that has a lot of smooth, hard surfaces, like a bathroom.

[Christian LaCroix wallpaper on the walls of a moody powder room pairs beautifully with grass cloth on the ceiling]

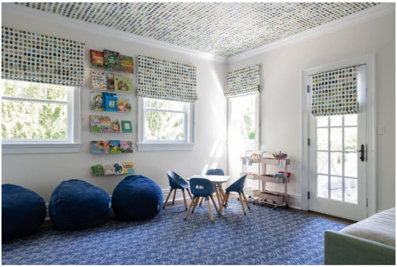


Christian LaCroix wallpaper on the walls of a moody powder room pairs beautifully with grass cloth on the ceiling

Consider the Ceiling

Don't forget that "fifth wall," which is the ceiling, says Sinkin. She loves selecting a wallpaper that has a matching fabric for drapes, Romans or cornices over the windows. "We did a traditional Buffalo plaid on the ceiling with matching drapes in a nursery recently, in a more masculine baby blue and brown that works well with the bleached woods and some warmer tones. Then we did some irreverent art to funk it up a bit. Off that room, we did a wallpaper with dogs on it for the powder room."

In another client's "quiet playroom" she selected a Cravit print made to look like paint dots. "The homeowner fell in love with it," says Sinkin. It had a matching fabric, so she had custom Romans made to match in the same print as the ceiling. "It's such a sophisticated, fun, bespoke, very custom look," says Sinkin. She advises if you do decide to wallpaper the ceiling, don't forget to address the walls with paneling, fabrics or a different wallpaper to make sure the space looks finished.



Thread a Theme

While each room has its own distinct character, your house should have a thread woven through each space, whether it's a repeating image, color or texture. Sinkin says that's why it's important to consider your whole house when selecting wallpaper and not choose something just because you like it. "One of the houses I'm doing now, the homeowner had wallpapered just the powder room before she hired me and now we're looking at possibly redoing it, just because that's not the palette that's appropriate for the house as a whole," says Sinkin. Make sure the aesthetic also "works with the bones of the house," she adds. "If you select something beachy and coastal and you have a house that is more modern or more traditional, those elements don't really connect."

Scale it Right

Just like the design should connect to the style of your home, the scale of the print you choose should make sense for the space where you hang it. Don't choose a small print for a room with a lot of wall. Likewise, if your wall has a lot of windows and moldings, don't select a large-scale pattern. "The pattern needs to be able to repeat so you see it cleanly," says Sinkin.

Don’t Skimp

Most importantly, selecting high quality papers and hiring an experienced and professional paper hanger are worth the cost to have it done right, advises Sinkin. After all, as we mentioned, wallpaper has a level of permanency that paint doesn’t, and you want to have it a long time. A professional will know the best place to begin and end the wallpapering process (hint: the section of the room where there is the least amount of wall —over a door for instance is the best place to “dead” or end your work). A professional will also know the right glue to use so your paper doesn’t begin to yellow after a few months or a year.

Be sure to order extra (at least one full drop or wall-length) from the same “run” (similar to a dye lot), because if you ever have to patch your wall you will want to repair it with paper from the same run of the press. The tone of the colors or the scale can change slightly each time a wallpaper is printed.

Nothing is Forever

At the end of the day, Sinkin says, don’t fear the permanency of wallpaper. Looking back at photos of her own house from more than 10 years ago, she is reminded at least two of the rooms have been re-wallpapered since then. “It’s not the end of the world,” says Sinkin about hiring a handyman to take your wallpaper down and replace it with something new. Wallpaper may feel trendy right now, but it’s also steeped in history for thousands of years. In the last century, wallpaper has evolved from Victorian era florals to playful bright colors of the ’50s to groovy prints of the ’70s. In the 1980s, country prints and borders were popular. Suddenly, in the 1990s, we ripped down wallpaper and wanted plain white walls. “The pendulum has swung again,” says Sinkin. “People want rooms to feel warmth and be more organic. We started turning to grass cloth but now more natural elements and patterns have come back in a really strong way. I think wallpaper is just going to continue to grow.”

GET THE LOOK

Still not sure wallpaper is for you? Whether you’re looking for something textured or botanical, eco-friendly or traditionally crafted, there is a paper perfect for your space. We’ve founded up a few of our favorites for inspiration.

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