

ornament and design wallpaper studies

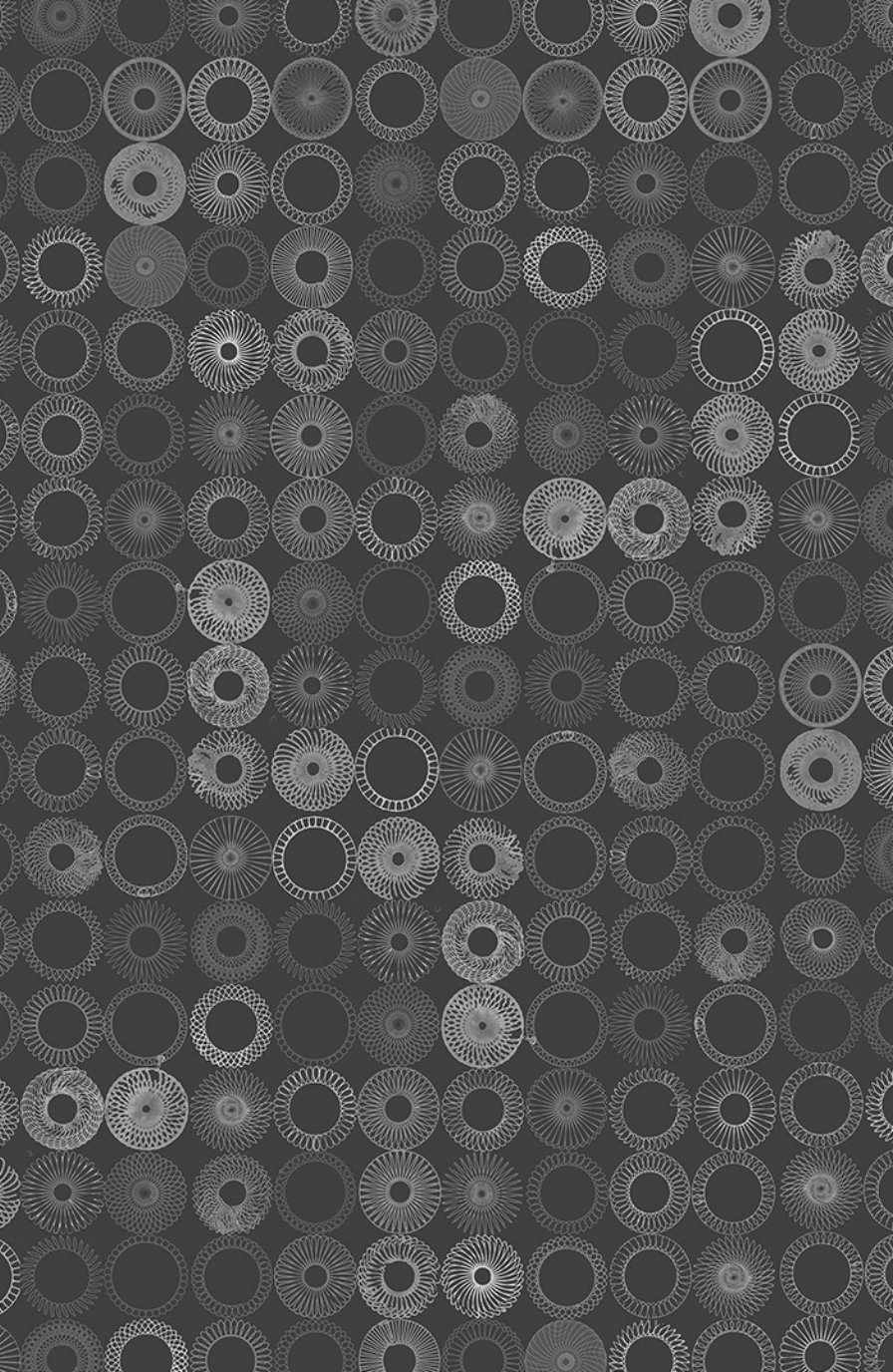
Design Stories

Spring 2015

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wallpaper studies

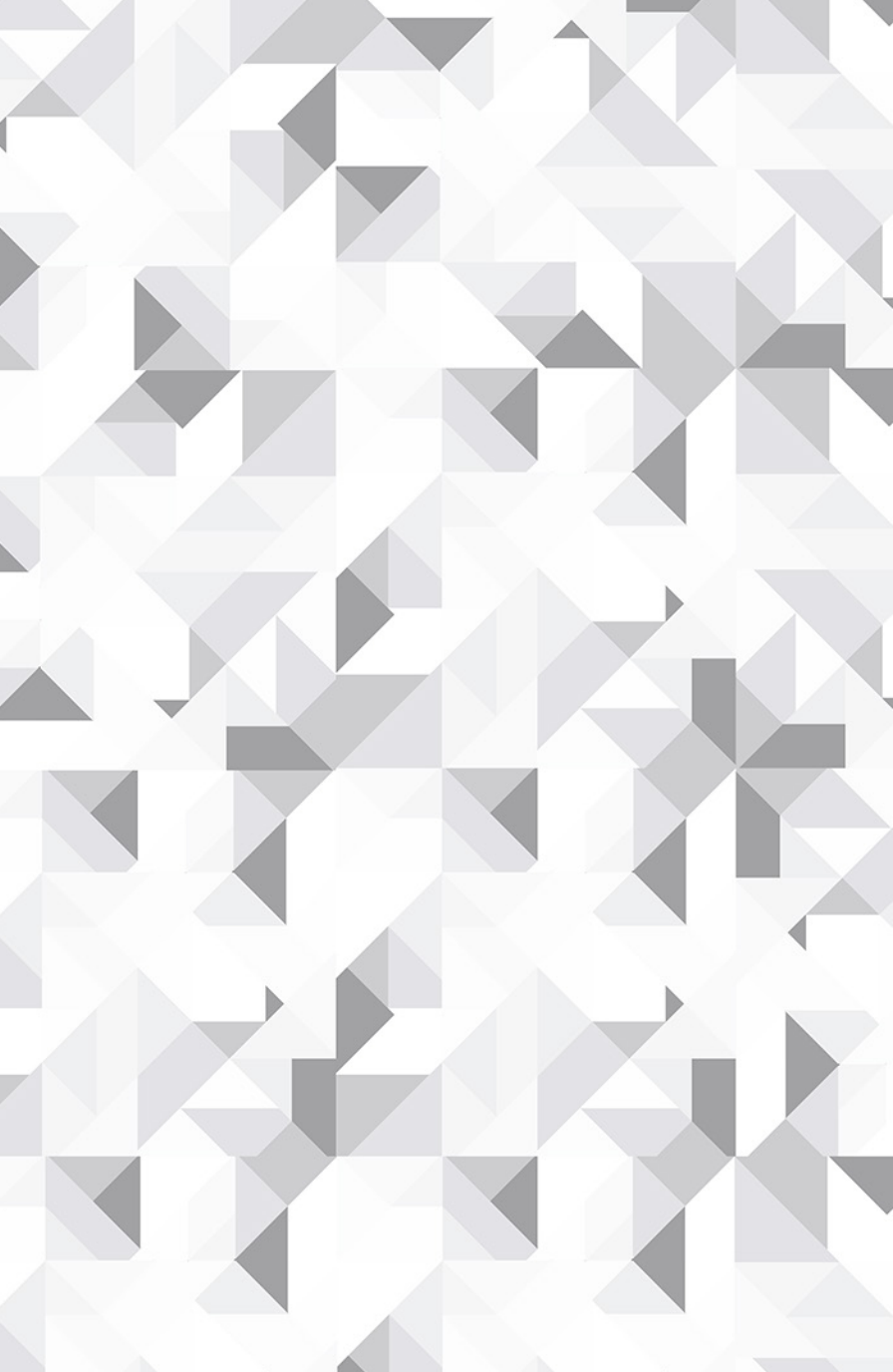
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Can wallpaper be interactive or is it just a rather boring thing we paste up on the wall and cover with photographs, furniture, and other far more sentimental objects? Do the designers who create these wall coverings intend to make something simply pretty (or repulsive), or do they attempt to inject a bit of meaning to something that often goes unnoticed? I attempted to break the stereotype.

I  
When first presented with this project, I groaned in annoyance. Wallpaper? Really?! Wallpaper, with its boring patterns that provide nothing interesting to the room they occupy, was not something I would ever have been excited to design. I struggled for a spark of inspiration as a result. I spent the next few days scribbling in my notebook. Just scribbling, unable to come up with anything even remotely interesting. I was quickly getting discouraged and felt I would have to use a simple pattern in order to just get the assignment done and over with when I stumbled upon a link to an online SPIROGRAPH maker. I was entranced by it for hours before I remembered I had a Spirograph kit tucked under my bed. I had an idea, one I actually liked.

Of course, it's never that simple. After creating over seventy different Spirograph designs, I spent several hours scanning them into the computer and cleaning up the images. From there I started to layer them, change their size, and alter their opacity. Nothing worked. It was just far too complicated of an image to be wallpaper. Honestly, it was far too complicated to be much of anything at that point. So I stepped back and decided to start over by incorporating a grid where each design would fill a square of that grid. I thought carefully about their placement, working to alternate thinner and simple designs with thicker and more complex ones. As a result, a natural gradient emerged, creating a pattern all its own. It created multiple layers of depth and a pattern that seemed to mimic binary in structure. I shrank the size, copy and pasted, and rotated the piece to create a 36×36 image that

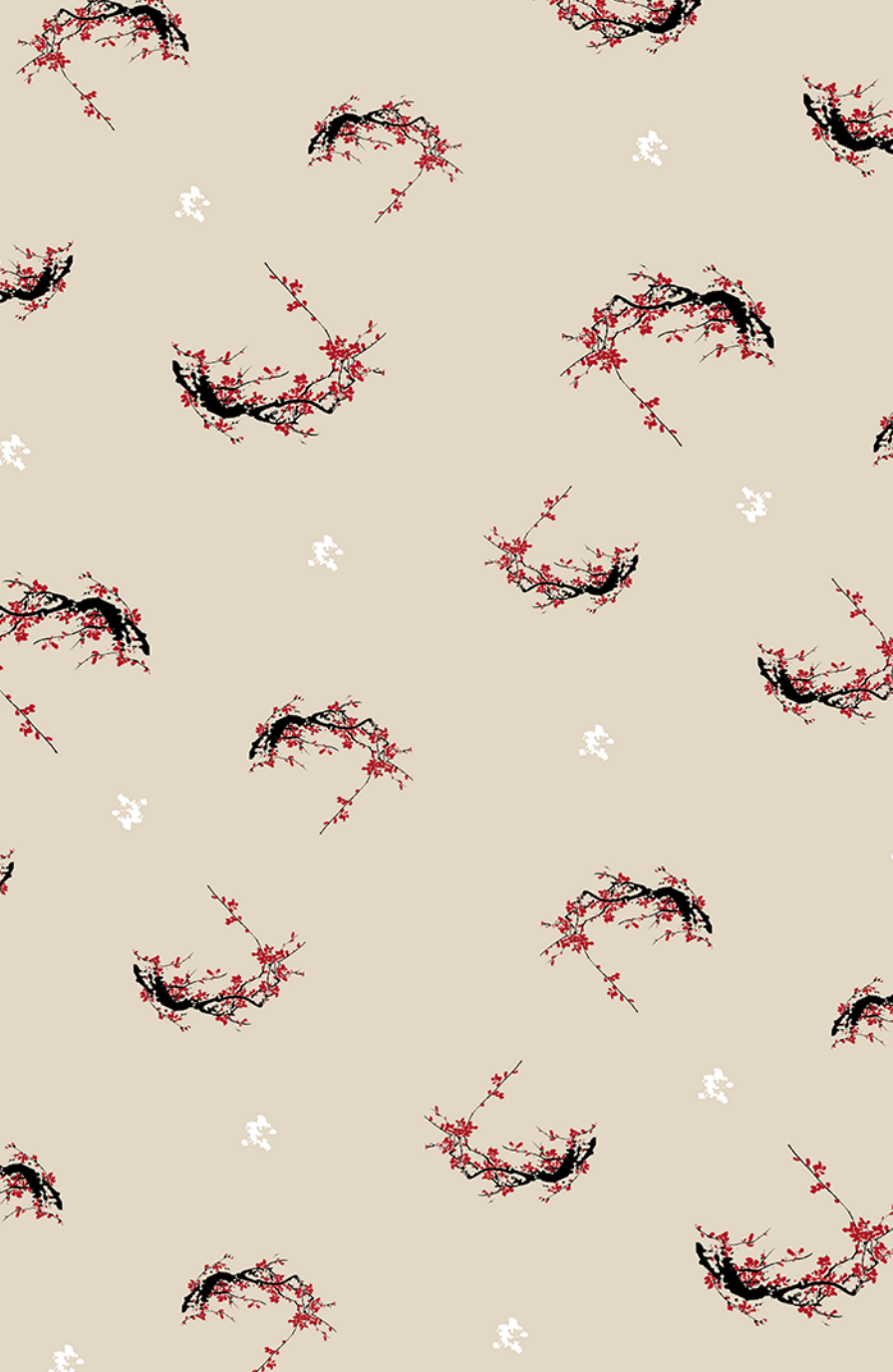


was not only pretty, but also deeply interested me. It was simple enough that someone could place objects over it without overwhelming the room's occupant but strong enough that it could also stand on its own.

So, is it functional? It covers a wall, so it does its job. Is it pretty? A subjective matter, but probably. Is that all it is? Does it provoke an emotion? Does it intrigue? Did this designer succeed or fail? The design has texture, depth, and even color although it is completely made of black, white and grays. It looks interesting both far away and close up. It is calming yet also highly cerebral. I feel like my brain is more awake just by looking at it. There is this ability to interact in a three-dimensional manner with a two-dimensional object. As for whether I succeeded or failed, well that's not really up to me.

## II

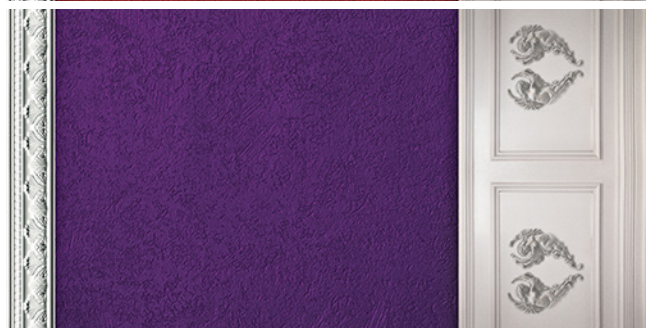
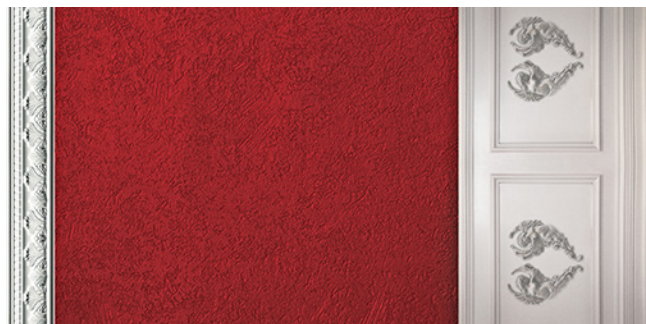
After completing the Spirograph version, I was told to keep going and try something else. I had been working with a sort of FRACTAL PATTERN for an assignment in another class, and I was curious to see if it would translate as wallpaper. I did a simple version at first in Illustrator and was told to repeat the image to make it more interesting. I went a little overboard at first, making the original image repeat in every inch of the 36×36 surface, and the finished result was far too complex to even look at, let alone be wallpaper. So, back to the drawing board. I went back to my first version and carefully repeated it, allowing the original design to fill up a 12×12 space nine times. I flipped, rotated, and reflected the designs to make it more interesting, and I eventually brought it into Photoshop to turn the brightness to 100%. This let the less important information fade away and brought out a simple, yet unique pattern.





It is kind of interesting to design wallpaper. In the beginning, I only have a simple idea that I want to use flowers as my main element. However, this thought is too general and I need to decide a species of flowers. Because I am an Asian, I started to think about what is the most classic flower element used in Asian culture. And I found it is the PLUM BLOSSOM. So at first, I made a branch with plum blossom on it. I repeated them by combine them to rhombus in the first time, but it looks so strong and did not show the beauty of the plum blossom well. So I take suggestion, and try to make them look more separate but still in shape. With John's help, I take off some of the plum blossom from the branch and turn them into decoration. After a few experiment, the final pattern was created. For the background color, I tried six versions included light pink and light blue. But I finally decided to use the original color I create for the plum blossom. It is a color similar to the color of the old paper, light yellow with a little bit brown.

In my opinion, this wallpaper can be used in dining room or Asian restaurant. The overall color is warm and suits these places.



For my wallpaper project I attacked the design problem from a rather industrial perspective. I thought of college students like myself – creative individuals who like expressing their creativity in nearly every aspect of their lives. However one facet of our existence remains relatively untouched by our imaginations due to certain restrictions set upon us by our superiors; our walls.

Our dorm rooms remain bare and lifeless with the exception of a few posters that we hesitantly put up – fearing we may be charged later for the new tack holes in the wall. Then I realized that renting an apartment is not much better – landlords won't let you paint a new color, or add a new shelf, or change the face of the apartment in any way. This is a really sad fact of life for me, as I so love elegance and vintage charm – neither of which are commonly found in college dorms, or run-of-the-mill first apartments.

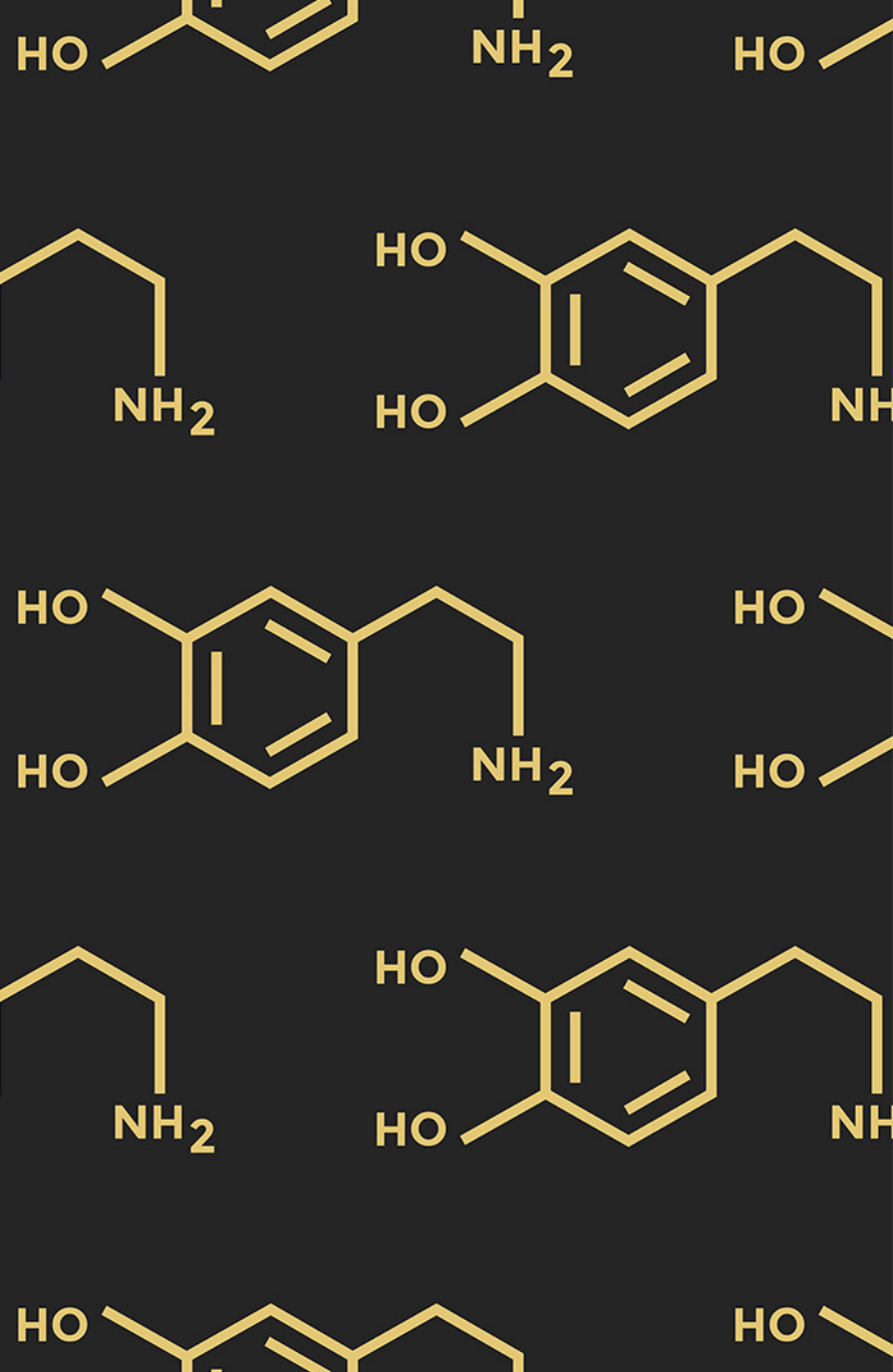
With this thought in mind, I decided to create a wallpaper that added the illusion of sophistication and vintage class in your apartment, in a way that appeased aesthetics-hating landlords. I wanted a wallpaper that could be removed with ease at the will of the owner, without damaging the wall behind it; but while it was up it added beloved features not commonly found in any college life setting. They added things like old paint texture, wainscoting, and molding, even wooden reliefs. With my wallpaper the stereotypically bland apartment can have the illusion of vintage charm.



Jessica Hegenberger

The wallpaper that I designed was originally going to be something very vertical, mathematical seeming along with being very subtle. It started out as vertical lines with very faint roses within them. I decided to expand from that and to arrange the roses onto a page. It was after this that the idea of adding the branches came in, making it into something more of a mystical, almost fairytale like.

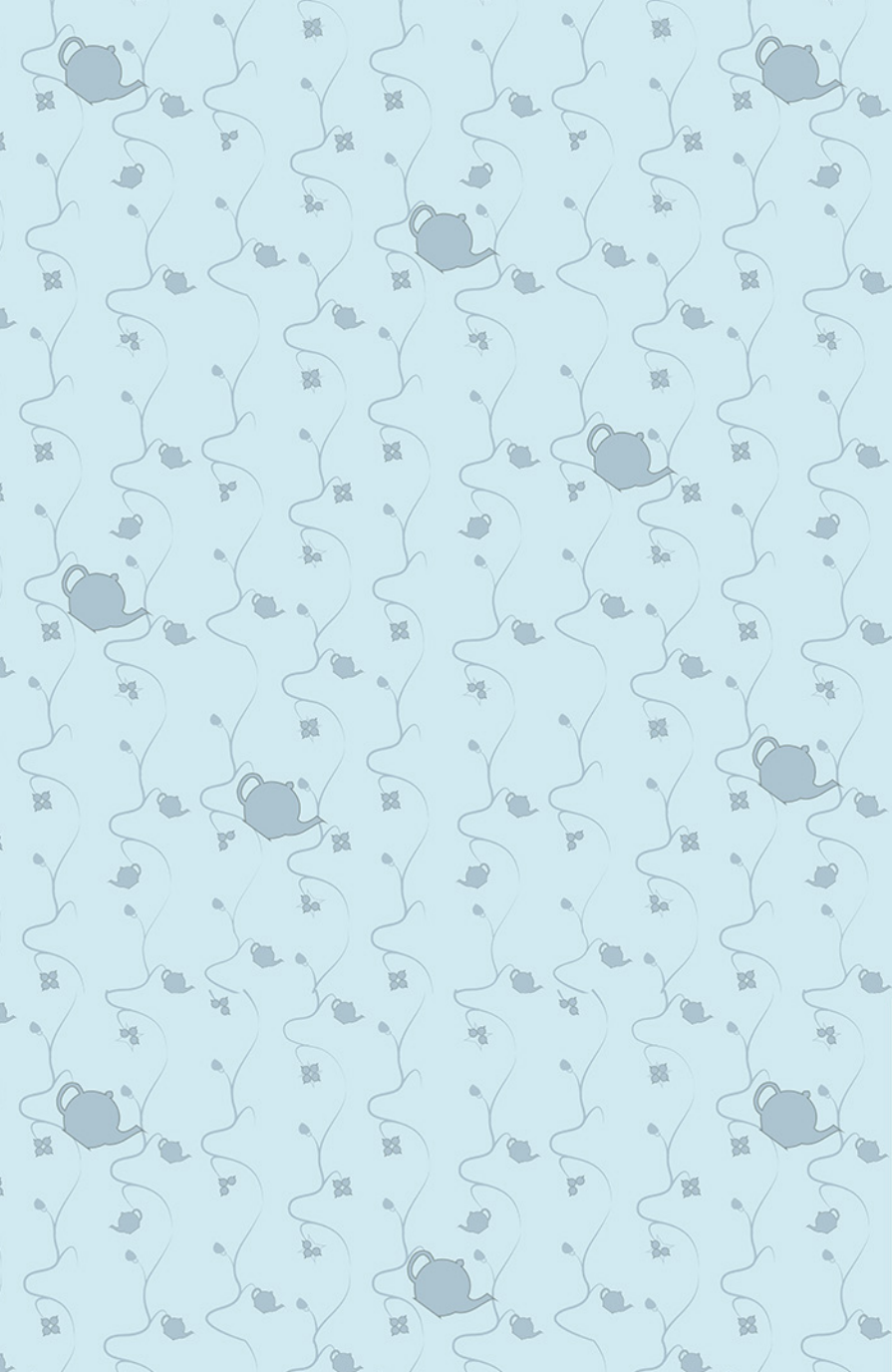
From then it was a struggle to decide on colors, but I decided to go with something that was a very pale pink, along with a red and pale red brown. My idea behind this was to keep with the theme of roses – and thus a mystical feel while keeping it earthy and real.



The Neurotransmitter and hormone commonly known as DOPAMINE (*dihydroxyphenethylamine*) is responsible for reward motivated behavior and what in the brain translates to the feeling of happiness, accomplishment etc. I decided to focus my wallpaper design on this idea in hopes to accomplish the idea of a room lined with a symbol of happiness and accomplishment that would give the individual in the room the same sensation.

Although not everyone who sees this chemical symbol will be able to recognize it, I feel those who do will understand its message and appreciate the idea. The symbol itself is mainly a hexagon with two diagonals on each side which connect it to their chemical formulas ( i.e. HO, HO, NH<sub>2</sub> ). The layout sits at 12 chemical symbols per tile, eight of which bleed off the edge of the tile to connect it to future surrounding tiles. After much debate I decided to go with a dark grey background and an off yellow color to the symbol so there is a bit of contrast between the symbols that are spaced out enough that it evens the design out.

Over all the design of the wallpaper has very few arbitrary elements. The symbols do not change size, color, or orientation; the lack of additional ornament makes it solely about the chemical symbol of dopamine. If I were to redo the design I would make the symbols smaller and distribute them less often.



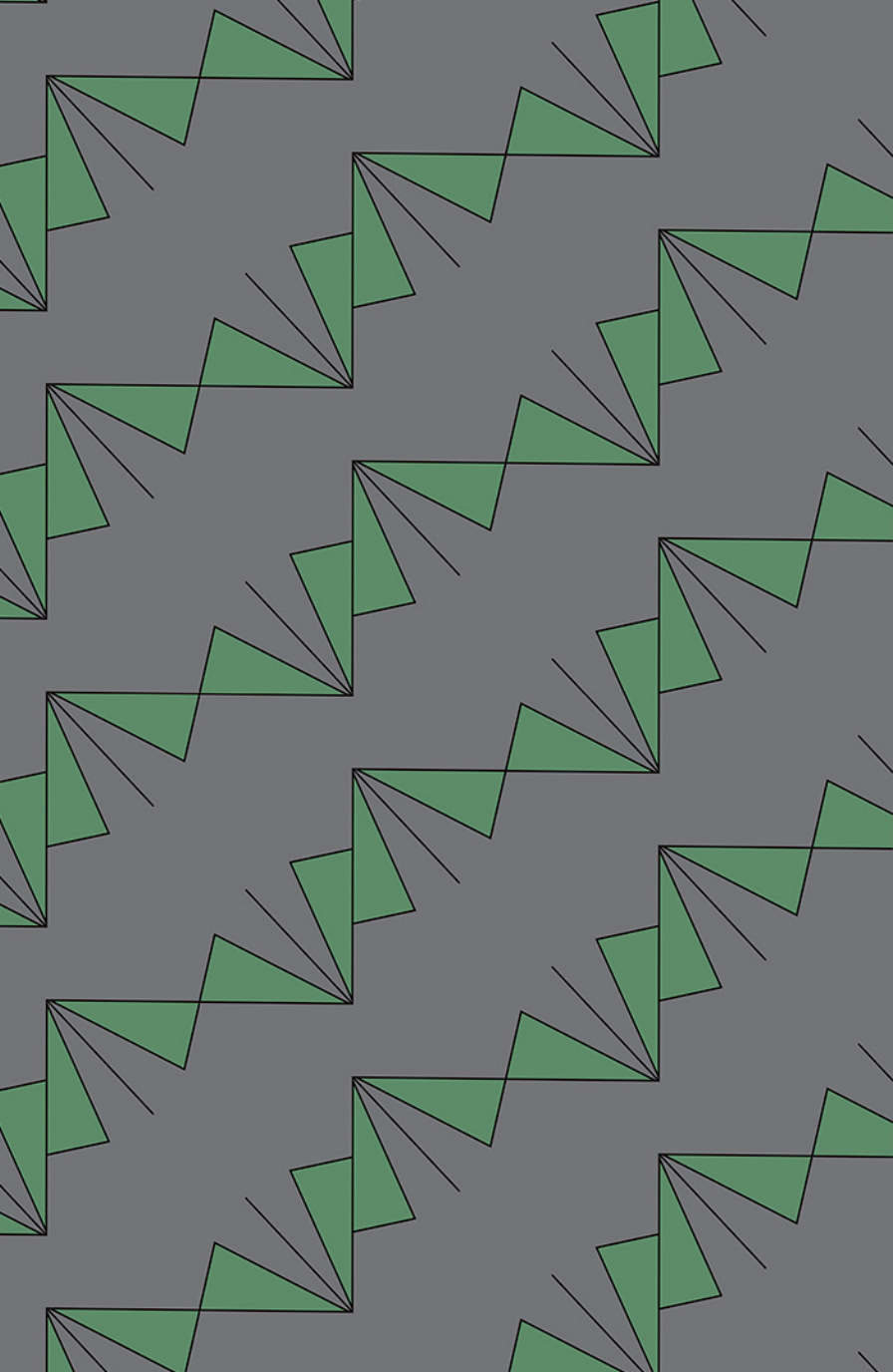


For this project, I was a bit stuck on to where to start, juggling around the ideas of trying to merge classical Greek vase painting and patterning with modern themes and stories. Through searching the previous year's examples, I saw a pattern that was simple but reminded me of a flowery, older woman's kitchen or dining room. From that I decided to create WALLPAPER FOR AN OLD WOMAN'S TEA TIME ROOM. This was against almost everything that I've designed in the past so I liked the challenge of something new.

What I came up with was a very pastel blue piece, with lines imitating vines and flowering stems, with the blossoms on the stems being tea paraphernalia, cups, pots, doilies, spotted all over the place. The biggest challenge of this project was actually taking away and restraining how many objects I included in the final piece. I was thinking too vertically and was too caught up in making sure the pattern repeated and lined up properly in vertical orientation and I didn't pay enough attention to horizontality.



The wallpaper I designed came to fruition after much deliberation on color, pattern, and texture. Throughout the process I researched surface design, and industrial design. These helped me decide on the color palette and texture. It has a sort of grainy, concrete, handmade paper look about it. The color palette revolved mostly around earth tones for the background, and warm/cool grays for the pattern. As it stands the pattern was created using inspiration from modern architecture, which is a subject I'm very interested in. This exercise was enjoyable for me since it allowed exploration of subjects I enjoy, and to dive into other areas I did not know much about.



With the idea of ornament design in mind I went into the making my wallpaper with the intent of making it stand out and be a statement in the room without drawing too much attention. I wanted my wallpaper to be something you notice and think about but doesn't draw you away from things like conversation going on inside the room or entertaining guest. Originally I did and still do agree with Loos's opinion on wallpaper, that it isn't really necessary or in good taste. My preference for the walls in a room is that they shouldn't be the focal point of the environment; the things in the room should be what draws the attention of its residents. Already aware of my disapproval of wallpaper I tried to design mine around my interest in geometry so I would find it atheistically pleasing enough that I wouldn't be bothered by the idea of it consuming the room. the beauty of a geometric shape is that with a little repetition it becomes something completely different. After trying different pattern layouts on Illustrator I settled on one that warped the shapes that were created into diagonal row. As opposed to the other patterns, the one with the diagonal rows turned out to be much easier to look at because of the skewed appearance.



In Design Stories we have gone over ideas of decoration vs little or no decoration. Discussing if decoration is to be the focal point or just an aesthetic to the overall design. This directly impacted my decisions on creating a wallpaper. First decision was whether or not decoration was going to be the focal point or fade into the background. Choosing to fade the decoration into the background was something that interested me. That if you were to stand some distance away the wall would look like a solid color but close up one notices something completely different. Up close the pattern is comprised of both-knock out four sided shapes over solids and darker outlined four sided shapes. A simple shape is intended to not take much away from the conceptual idea of design coming second to the feel. The colors are similar in shade to allow for the effect of blurring the shapes into a solid color from a far to be achieve the conceptual idea. Doing so was so that the wallpaper would not be overwhelming to someone entering the room. The location of which would be intended for a hallway or office space.





The image that is shown through the wallpaper is a DEAD ROSE that I took a picture of. I put the image through image trace while canceling out the background in Illustrator. I also took apart the photo by deleting some of the darker areas in the rose. While trying to come up with a pattern I found that it fought with the idea of being natural. A flower has a natural form to it. You could find this wallpaper in a living space or a dining room. If placed in a dining room I would use it as a visual piece on one wall.

There are several components to this wallpaper. To obtain this wallpaper you create it online by first putting in the dimensions of your wall. Then you will be shown different versions of the flower to create any pattern that you wish to have. It is about customizing your own wallpaper. The user has control. They can change the scale, the opacity of the flower, and overlaying pattern on any of the roses, but can not change the color.

You can think of it as taking a splatter gun with the image in it and just shooting it at the wall.

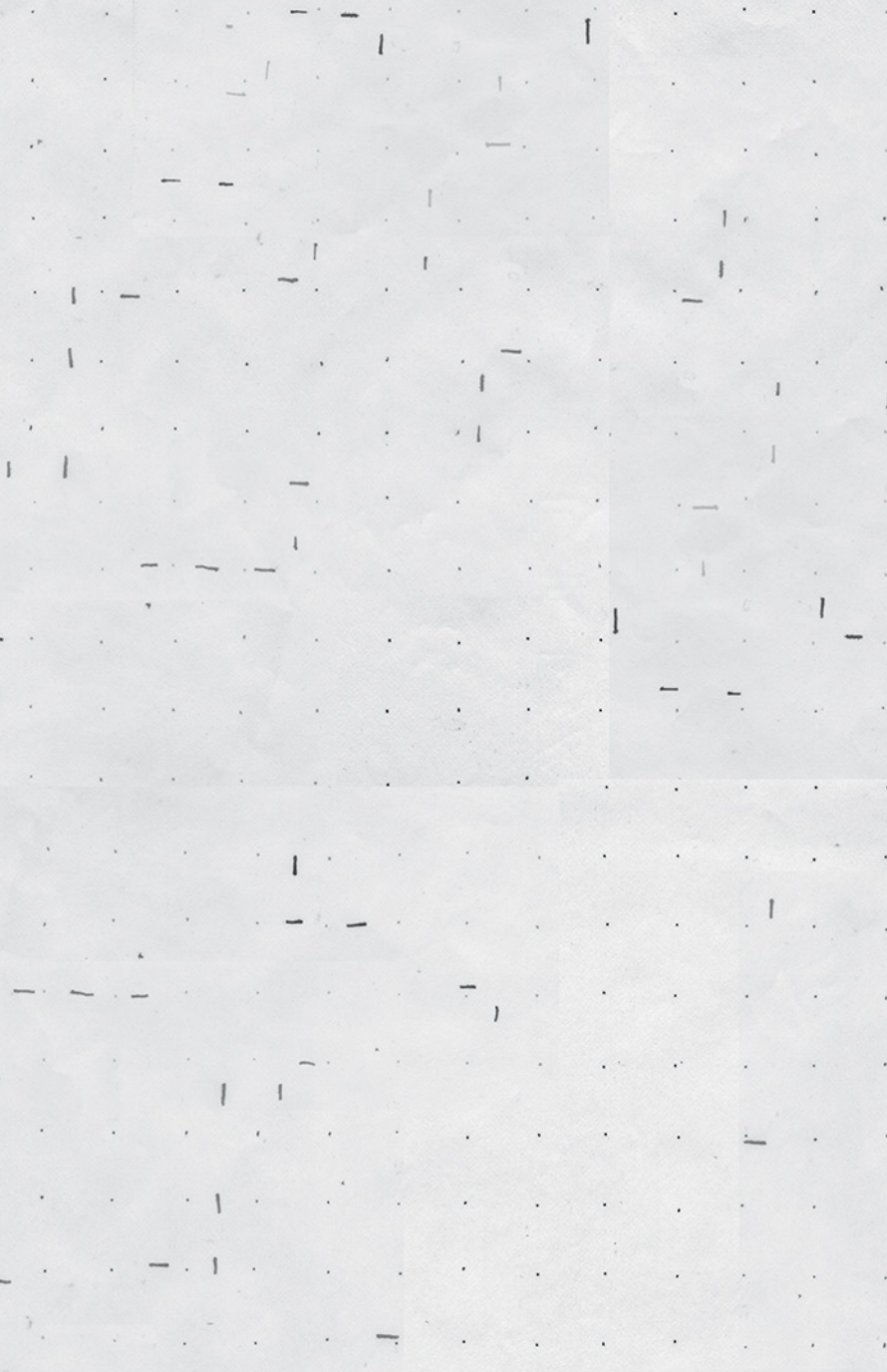


My initial idea for a wallpaper design was to take pre-made designs from different cultural backgrounds and ‘modernize’ them. I decided to take my cultural backgrounds (Italy, Puerto Rico and Poland) and combine their traditional styles to create a unique design catered to myself.

To create my design, I first found images and patterns from each of my nationalities. Each area varied in design, but all had a few similarities. There are three different icons total and each has a distinctive look to it. Each design is focused either on PUERTO RICAN style, ITALIAN style, or a POLISH style. In traditional Italian designs, there were many geometric and organic patterns. In traditional Puerto Rican designs, there were also geometric patterns, but these pattern contained more edges and lines. The designs from Poland consisted mainly of bright colors and flower imagery.



The wall paper design that I created started out as a tea inspired wall paper, colored to mimic a subtle tint of youth berry tea, and evolved to be more fruit inspired than anything. I took images of SLICED FRUITS and vectorized them, then turned the fruit itself to white and knocked it out of a subtle pink background. The pattern came about by accident, using the confusing “pattern tool” in Illustrator, and then pasting the pattern beside one another, and rotating it, until a larger pattern came about. The end result suggests a fractal-like quality, where the image almost repeats itself over and over at a larger scale, but still remaining tied together as one.



Originally, I wanted my wallpaper to be just A SIMPLE, CLEAN, GRID that could be placed on the wall to provide the user with a way to easily compose one's furniture and wall hangings in front of and on the wall more easily. As I think most graphic designers will agree, a grid has a simple beauty to it in its clean lines and perfect geometry. It does lack, however, warmth. Warmth, as well as personality, and a feeling of home are all things one probably wants in their house, and a perfect grid lacks all of that.

Next, I looked at the work of Agnes Martin for inspiration. Martin created seemingly perfect, geometric, clean lined paintings and drawings, yet she created them all by hand. The handmade quality injects the clean geometry with a personality, a humanity, that one desires in their homes. I then decided to create my own grid pattern by using tracing paper and making dots with a micron pen. The dot grid was still a little sterile so I added some small lines of varying opacities over the dots. The resulting wallpaper has the same basic functionality as the basic grid, but I think it also has a certain charm in the hand drawn quality and more random use of the lines.

We discussed the concept of *sprezzatura* in class earlier in the year and I think that my wallpaper has some aspect of that in it. Effortless beauty, even if it actually took a lot of effort is what the word means, and I think grids in general, as well as my wallpaper, fit that idea.

Creating the grid pattern of dots was quite meticulous and the lines, although they look randomly placed, were rearranged and adjusted to fit just the way I wanted. But the resulting pattern does not look strained, or painstaking, it just has a kind of simple elegant look I think. Which is exactly what I wanted to design; a functional, beautiful, *sprezzatura*-feeling wallpaper.





Jack Truong

My wallpaper is inspired by the natural sense of movement and growth displayed by floral patterns. However, since floral patterns in general are a bit too busy for my tastes, I wanted to minimize the design as much as possible. In the end, my design turned out to be an abstraction of PLANT FORMS. All of the shapes here with the exception of the circles were cut out on colored paper, scanned, and digitally edited on photoshop with custom brushes in order to create texture and to enhance the shadows. Since the circular form was done completely digitally, I decided not to add in any shadows to it.

I can envision this wallpaper being used in kitchens, bathrooms, and other small rooms due to its welcoming and calming colors.



When I first approached this project, I had the idea that I wanted to do a tessellation design. I researched M.C. Escher and some other artists who worked with this form of design, along with the mathematics of tessellations. I also knew that I wanted to use a squid or an octopus sort of design, but abstracted just enough so that at first glance, it wouldn't immediately be recognized as such. The problem I ran into is that the creation of tessellations is even more complicated than I imagined it was, and I simply didn't have enough time with this project to continue with it. A bit reluctantly, I began to look instead at complex vintage floral-based wallpaper designs, and modeled my design after these.

I based my imagery on CTHULHU, the monster of H.P. Lovecraft's invention. I chose Cthulhu for many reasons; one, of course, being that Lovecraft is one of my favorite writers, and also because the character of Cthulhu has become something of a pop culture icon. I also chose him because of the ironic nature of associating a creature of otherworldly horror in a design with a feeling of antiquated elegance. Similar to the idea I had for the tessellation, I wanted it to appear abstract at first glance but reveal its surprising imagery upon closer inspection. To do this, I made the image more stylized than realistic, and when I created the repeating pattern, I used the image both normally and rotated 180 degrees, playing with the negative space to create a flowing sort of pattern that would carry the viewer's eyes continuously around the design. Afterwards, I also added some texture over it, which added an aged look and also helped to integrate the Cthulhu imagery better with the background. I used a sort of ugly swamp green for the finished wallpaper because this is usually the color Cthulhu himself is depicted as being, and the rather unsightly color provides further visual irony between the ornate design and the sinister being depicted with it.

afterword

We're thinking about the functions of ornament (and beauty) in design, in light of our readings of Gelernter (beauty as defense against complexity), Castiglione (*sprezzatura*), and Ulrich (aesthetics as separate from, almost supplemental to, function).

We've been thinking about ornament, connected with developments in the nineteenth century, including the Crystal Palace exhibition (1851), designs for mass-produced goods, pattern books (Owen Jones *The Grammar of Ornament* 1856), and the combination of motifs from different times, places, cultures.

We designed wallpaper in parallel and in conversation with these and other readings.

Basic principles are, that wallpaper does not call attention to itself: it is a background to whatever else is going on in a room (or hallway, stairwell, etc.). It might be said to camouflage itself. This does not mean that wallpaper does not play an important role in setting tone, providing hints for the meanings and functions of spaces, and thus signals for appropriate behavior in them.

In the past, we designed four square "domino" panels, with emphasis on the repeats, especially the so-called "half-drop" repeat. Something about repeats here (scroll down to pattern matches). That remains a good way of proceeding with this project, but the nature of wallpaper has changed so much in recent years, particularly with custom digital wall coverings, that other approaches are welcome.

Repeats can take even the most unlikely motifs, and turn them into pattern and semi-invisibility. One of our questions might be, how does wallpaper differ from murals? How much leakage is there between these two categories? What about Chinese landscape murals?

*specifications from previous years*

Design a suite of "domino" type decorative panels, abstract or representational, whose images continue across their borders and that can be multiplied without limit, to fill a wall.

A 10-inch square would work, but any repeatable shape is

acceptable. It will become apparent that the domino units ultimately regroup (chunk?) themselves into larger groups, but the main principle of “repeating pattern” is probably what allows wallpaper to recede to the background, in ways that murals and some large scale pictorial wallpaper does not.

It may also be the case that the presentation of symmetry and harmony, in 19th century wallpapers, replaced “*narrative, pictorial or emblematic-symbolic transactions*” as a reminder and/or model of moral rectitude. (Brett 1992: 36)

You may design a frieze border as well, but it must be in addition to the four required panels. Block printing, screen printing, stenciling, or even xerography may be employed.

### *afterthoughts*

Our design of a decorative wallpaper provides an occasion for reflection on the notion of ornament as supplemental, as something extra, and therefore either devotional or wasteful. What are the consequences and opportunities afforded by repeats?

Ornament as supplemental to the manufactured commodity, able to differentiate it, suggest craft labor that might have (but didn't!) go into its production. In this sense, a countermove to the *sprezzatura* principle as applied to design. Mass production of wallpaper in the 19th century brings what had previously been a luxury (going back to tapestries) to the working class home.

### *previous years*

2010

<http://montserrat.edu/studio/gd/stories/index.htm#tapeten>

2009

<http://montserrat.edu/studio/gd/stories/index.htm#walls>

2007

<http://montserrat.edu/studio/gd/216So7/wallpaper.htm>

2004

[http://montserrat.edu/studio/gd/wallpaper\\_04/index.htm](http://montserrat.edu/studio/gd/wallpaper_04/index.htm)

*readings, extracts*

David Brett, *On Decoration* (1992) –

*The desire for decoration, however, appears to be a cultural constant and is, historically, one of the defining characteristics of specific cultures.*

Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (written between 1508 and 1528, when it was first published; Charles H. Singleton translation, 1959) –

*...to practice in all things a certain sprezzatura [nonchalance], so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it. And I believe much grace comes of this...*

Hal Foster, “Design and Crime” (2002)

originally appeared under title “Hey, that’s me,” a review of Bruce Mau’s *Life Style* (Phaidon, 2000), in the *London Review of Books* 23:7 (5 April 2001): 13-14

Isabelle Frank, introduction to her *The Theory of Decorative Art : An Anthology of European & American Writings, 1750-1940* (Yale UP, 2000) : 5-10 –

*The Crystal Palace exhibition helped transform decorative art from a domain of relatively limited interest into one of public consequence, exposing for all to see the relative merits and weaknesses of national products.*

David Gelernter, *Machine Beauty : Elegance and the heart of technology* (1998) : 22 –

*Beauty is the ultimate defense against complexity. Beauty is our most reliable guide...*

Lesley Hoskins, *The Papered Wall : History, Pattern, Technique* (1994, 2005) –

*Ever since wallpaper first became widely available its status has been questioned: is it background or foreground, art or decoration, vulgar or respectable, a substitute or the real thing?*

Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime” (1908/1929), in Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime : Selected Essays* (1998). —

*The urge to decorate one’s face and anything else within reach is the origin of the fine arts. It is the childish babble of painting.... A person of our times who gives way to the urge to daub the walls with erotic symbols is a criminal or a degenerate.... the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use.*

Alice Twemlow. “The Decriminalization of ornament. Spurned and marginalised for a century, decoration is enjoying a guilt-free renaissance.” *Eye* 58 (Winter 2005) : 18-29

Karl T. Ulrich, *Design : Creation of Artifacts in Society* (2005-11), especially chapter 7 “Aesthetics in Design”

“Ornament,” from Ralph Nicholson Wornum’s “The Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste,” published with other essays at the end of *The Great Exhibition : The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue : The Industry of All Nations* (1851) : pp XXI-XXII, from Section IX.

*course blog* —

<http://jmcvey.net/stories/>