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Wallpaper Is Back In: Here's Why



Designers, homeowners and apartment dwellers have long turned their noses up at wallpaper for walls. For some, wallpaper conjures up images of gaudy, flocked flowers and “me too” designs that offered little in the way of uniqueness or individualism.

“Wallpaper earned its bad reputation years ago because of its 1980’s extreme overuse and difficulty to remove,” says Leslie Bowman, the founder and design director of [The Design Bar](#). Bowman was recently awarded the coveted ARTS Award and named one of Chicago’s top 30 interior designers by PowerHouse SMART.

“Wallpaper has a long history in home decor and is more likely to stir up memories of your grandmother’s floral powder room than images of modern design trends,” says Sarah Schwuchow, the owner and principal interior designer with [Sarah Jacquelyn Interiors](#).

But today’s wallpapers are far afield from the floral wallpaper for walls that grandma loved. The many options, bold creative designs and innovative ways wallpaper is being used to define and personalize spaces is causing a comeback.

“Wallpaper has the ability to transform a space in different ways than paint can. It can breathe life back into a dreary or tight spaces,” Schwuchow says. Today, wallpaper is an increasingly popular, versatile and trendy option for home décor. And, it’s much easier to put up and take down than in the past. One big drawback of the wallpaper of years past was worries about how to get wallpaper off walls.

Where Did Wallpaper Come From?

[Wallpaperinstaller.com](#) provides a detailed history of wallpaper, from its earliest days and rising popularity in China, to adoption in early America by colonials who copied European fashions, to a fall from favor in the 20th century as “modernism frowned on embellishments.” Recent advances in “digital, photo, and printing technologies have allowed modern printing facilities to replicate historic papers and other digital media on a variety of substrates,” says the site. All leading to re-surg-ing interest and adoption in wallpaper for walls.

How Has Wallpaper Changed?

What caused the drop in popularity of wallpaper? Justin Riordan, the founder of Portland-based [Spade and Archer Design Agency](#) with offices in Portland and Seattle, points to cost and difficult application as two key factors. But now, he says, “with new technologies, wallpaper has been reinvented into wall coverings. Easy pull and stick, washable, and decals are the cousin to the old-time permanent wallpaper.”

Wallpaper, says Riordan, “gone from frumpy to fabulous.” And, with improvements in imaging and printing technology, the cost of wallpaper for walls has also broadened its appeal.

The shift back to wallpaper is happening now, says Schwuchow, because people want living spaces that are unique and customized. “Young homeowners are seeing modern and innovative advancements in wallpapers and want to express themselves through design. Wallpapers today can even be custom printed with your own photography or art at any scale you desire.”

“With the durable, removable and creative patterns we’re seeing now, wallpaper and wall coverings are now en vogue again,” Riordan says.

What’s Trending in Wallpaper

Today, says Bowman, “maximalism is in and bold colors are making statements everywhere.” Wallpaper, she says, “is a perfect on-trend way to completely change a room.”

Riordan agrees. “Go big or go home,” he says. “Big, bold, bright prints are popular.” Best of all, he says: “You can find peel and stick designs that are bold and funky or subtle and sweet.” The lower costs and ease of application and removal take the worry out of experimenting.

One big trend right now, says Schwuchow, is using wallpaper on the ceiling. “This is a great place for large pattern, but make sure to use a paper that is non-directional,” she advises. Trends also include bold prints, whimsical patterns, and large scale designs with minimal repeat, says Schwuchow. “Wallcoverings allow you to bring in texture like grass cloth, hemp, velvet, and even gold leaf metallic. I love hand painted wallpapers and large scale murals that allow you to get lost in the story that the room is telling.”





Blue and Brown Cork Wallpaper



Brick-and-Mortar Wallpaper



Metallic Gold Cork Wallpaper

Designers and home owners are also experimenting with accent walls.

“A great way to dip your toe into the wallpaper trend is to apply a design that makes your heart flutter to an accent wall,” says Riordan. “Behind the bed, around a fireplace, the entry space are all great places to add design with wallpaper.” “Play with mixing textures and scale, Schwuchow suggests. For instance: “Use a large scale, bold, pattern and compliment it was a textured grass cloth in the same room.”

With so many wallpaper designs for walls, and the opportunity to readily create your own designs, there's never been a better time to reconsider how [wallpaper](#) could enhance your living spaces.