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A Designer's Comprehensive Guide to Using Wallpaper in the Home

Three of the country's top interior designers offer their sage advice regarding all things wallpaper.

BY LAUREN WICKS PUBLISHED: APR 16, 2021

Via
Douglas Friedman

Wallpaper is back and better than ever. From the year's most popular Netflix series to the 2021 Kips Bay Decorator Show House in Palm Beach, we are thrilled about wallpaper's exalberant return to the forefront of the interior design world. But before you go wallpapering every room in your house, there are a few things to consider.

We tapped three of the country's top interior designers—Gil Melott of of Chicago's Studio 6f, Jan Showers of Dallas-based Jan Showers & Associates, and New York-based Young Huh of her eponymous design firm—to share their sage advice on all things wallpaper.

The Resurgence of Wallpaper

Brittany Bromley designed this spectacular bedroom suite around the space's stunning parrot wallpaper.
Michelle Sargent

"As people sit in their homes and desire a quick fix, there is nothing that packs more of a punch," says New York-based designer Brittany Bromley. "Wallpaper is the single most transformative element in our arsenal."

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Our designers attribute the shift from our Instagram feeds being full of white-on-white or neutral interiors to spaces swathed in colorful, patterned walls to several things. Showers says that as companies like de Gournay, Gracie, Kravet, and many other brands are creating remarkable designs and custom offerings; they are giving us no option but to want to cover our walls with their lively, soothing, or dramatic creations to offer whatever we're hungry for right now in this pandemic world. A year at home—and a global hunger for nature, color, and beauty—is certainly helping wallpaper's case and widespread popularity.

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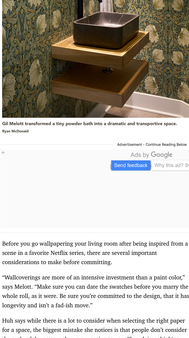
Several of the year's biggest films and TV series featured big, bold patterns, as shown here in Netflix's The Queen's Gambit.
Courtesy of Netflix

"I believe creative risk is making a comeback, and wallpaper is one of the manifestations of design creativity," says Melott. "It has come a long way over the decades, with fresh new designs and uses, and some of the most historic wallpaper companies are putting classic lines back in circulation." Huh's thoughts echo this notion, as she says we're not only finding a shift from minimalist to more layered spaces on social media, but we are also seeing more beautiful wallcoverings in hit TV shows and movies, like *Emma*, *Bridgerton*, *The Goldfinch*, and *The Queen's Gambit*, that leave a lasting impression.

What You Need to Consider Before Wallpapering a Space in Your Home



Gil Melott transformed a tiny powder bath into a dramatic and transportive space.
Ryan McDonald

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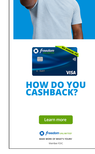
Before you go wallpapering your living room after being inspired from a scene in a favorite Netflix series, there are several important considerations to make before committing.

"Wallcoverings are more of an intensive investment than a paint color," says Melott. "Make sure you can date the swatches before you marry the whole roll, as it were. Be sure you're committed to the design, that it has longevity and isn't a fad-ish move."

Huh says while there is a lot to consider when selecting the right paper for a space, the biggest mistake she notices is that people don't consider the scale of the pattern they are wanting to use. She advises thinking through how the scale of the wallpaper's pattern relates to that of the room's scale—along with any other patterns going on in the room. Showers says one also needs to think about how the paper relates to the art you have or plan to have on your walls, as well as what is happening in the adjacent room.

"I always consider where, who, and how it will be used and go from there," says Melott. "If it is in a high-trafficked area, make sure it can endure the activity and can be cleaned. If it is being used by children, is it responsive to soap and water to remove drawings and love notes? And if it is in the bathroom or kitchen, can it take certain levels of moisture? The rest is aesthetics."



Designers' Favorite Places in the Home to Use Wallpaper

Young Huh designed this breezy living area with different wallpapers for the walls and ceiling.
John Bessler

Wallpaper can be used in numerous spaces throughout the home, but we asked our expert design panel about their absolute favorite wallpaper "destinations." Huh says wallpaper makes its way into nearly all of her projects, but she especially loves to use it on the ceiling.

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"Whether it's a flat ceiling or coffered, wallpaper just adds a special something," says Huh. She recently used a large-scale paper on the ceiling of a Chicago client's sunroom and in her business director's entire foyer—from walls to baseboards to door casings.

Showers especially loves to use wallpaper in entry halls, powder rooms, and dining rooms, but she loves the unexpected delight it can offer in a laundry room, men's study, or a bar. She also suggests trying it in a closet or a bathroom for an extra punch of fun in these spaces.

"We love to use Phillip Jefferies in so many rooms. The texture is wonderful, and they do a great job," Showers says. "Texture is lovely in a kitchen or bathroom."

Melott says there is a "natural inclination" to use wallpaper in smaller spaces, like powder rooms. He says that he likes to add wallpaper in areas that "call for unique elements of texture or pattern or command another layer of color dimension that paint alone may not provide."

Bromley says while she loves utilizing wallpaper in a powder room to make it feel like a jewelry box, one of her favorite places to sneak in a beautiful pattern is in a kitchen pantry, which she considers an unsung hero.

"These spaces need to reflect the personality of the homeowner, and it is a daily joy to have theses paces feel considered," Bromley says.

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Where Not to Use Wallpaper

Summer Thornton replaces a traditional tiled backsplash with wallpaper, thanks to protective glass coverings that keep the beautiful wallcovering from being damaged.
Thomas Loof

While there have been many great advancements in the durability of and materials used to create fantastic wallpaper in recent years, it's still important to consider if your space can handle a wallcovering. Showers says she would hesitate to use wallpaper in any place that gets a lot of wear and tear, especially if you are using an exquisite wallcovering. She avoids using it in spaces like a small child's bathroom or in a room where good art is being displayed.

"I have a belief that anything is reasonable on design within good taste and functionality; however, the practical pause comes into play in areas with high humidity, where wallpaper will have trouble maintaining its adhesiveness," says Melott.

But where there's a will, there's almost always a way. Designer Alexandra Naranjo wallpapered a shower in her guest suite space for this year's Kips Bay Decorator Show House in Palm Beach. She worked with a contractor to help enclose and preserve the beautiful wallcovering with treated glass that has a water-repellant, mold-resistant silicone coating that doesn't obstruct the paper's rich colors. Designer Summer Thornton has also used wallpaper in lieu of a traditional tiled backsplash for a Florida vacation home, which is protected by a glass pane. Discuss your wallpaper dreams with a trusted design expert, and they will help you find the safest way to carry them out.

V

LAUREN WICKS

Lauren Wicks is a Birmingham-based writer covering design trends, must-have products, travel inspiration, and entertaining. She's obsessed with globally inspired textiles, hosting dinner parties, and French cocktails.

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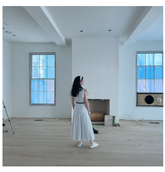

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