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## DESIGN IDEAS

## Fabric of life

We look at the fresh and innovative ways in which decorators are using beautiful textiles in their room schemes



FEATURE ARABELLA YOUNES PHOTOGRAPH PAUL MASSEY

## GATHERED TOGETHER

‘There’s a romance to a four-poster bed that is hard to beat,’ says Henriette von Stockhausen, creative director of VSP Interiors. Her approach to decorating them always finds that delicate balance between tradition and contemporary comfort. She places fabric and pattern front and centre. In this bedroom, she chose a Chinoiserie by Watts 1874 for the walls and picked out the jewel tones for the rest of the fabric for the scheme. ‘I adore having darker fabrics on the inside of the four-posters as it just makes it even cosier. Lots of antiques and another strong colour pop with red lacquer bedside chests create this vibrant mix of traditional and modern which was my main brief from my client.’ →



### ON A PANEL

Lining walls with fabric is a clever way to add colour and pattern to a room and soften its acoustics at the same time, making it an ideal solution for large spaces with high ceilings which are used for entertaining. The traditional route is to install a frame around the perimeter of the walls and cover the walls in padding. The fabric is then stretched across and stapled to the edges of the frame. A looser interpretation of this approach is demonstrated here by interior designer Guy Goodfellow. He's hung three panels of Rendlesham (from his Guy Goodfellow Collection) to cover an entire wall of this drawing room. A narrow border in a matching russet helps to frame the panels and adds a definition to them.



### **THEATRICAL TOUCH**

Pantries are an increasing feature in kitchens. This design by Australian decorator Tamsin Johnson, for a house in Darling Point, Sydney, uses a red velvet curtain in lieu of a door. Not only is it an ingenious way of hiding a mess (which could be anything from a room where all useful but ugly appliances are stored or a laundry space, if not a pantry) but it's much more attractive than a solid door and adds some much-needed softness to a kitchen.

### **BALANCING ACT**

Bathrooms are often flooded with artificial light from the ceiling which can flatten a space, yet the introduction of pleated fabrics will help add depth and shadows. 'I approach a bathroom in two ways,' says interior designer Octavia Dickinson. 'One is to think about the practicalities of the room and then think about the aesthetics and feel. Success comes down to balancing the two, with neither overriding the other.' Here, in her London home, the fabric panels are in Bennison Fabrics' Petites Fleurs.

### **CURTAIN RAISER**

Bed nooks are a great solution for small rooms, making use of every inch, particularly in attics. 'I love a built-in bed nook,' says Tiffany Duggan of Studio Duggan, who used one in a Chelsea house she designed. 'In addition to adding a playful, cocooning feel, they are an excellent tool when it comes to the room's layout. We often design storage into built-in beds such as drawers below the mattress, built-in bookcases or secret cupboards and wardrobes.' →



PHOTOGRAPHS (THEATRICAL TOUCH) ANSON SMART, (BALANCING ACT) HARRY CROWTHER, (CURTAIN RAISER) SARAH GRIGGS



“THE BLUE AND WHITE FABRIC AND LAVENDER PAINT (ABOVE) PLAY BEAUTIFULLY WITH THE SEAGRASS WALLPAPER AND THE LIGHT EMPERADOR MARBLE”

**LUCY DERBYSHIRE AND JENA QUINN**, Studio QD

## BAROQUE GRANDEUR

Using interesting fabric combinations, playing with contrasts and bringing unexpected touches is a sure-fire way to introduce both a narrative and a drama into a room. In this scheme, Rachel Chudley has used shape and pattern with creativity – the result pays a nod to surrealism. The undulating shape of the sofa has a practical purpose: it provides privacy as a screen across the window while still allowing light in. ‘I wanted to pay homage to the use of tapestry in traditional bed hangings but with the feel of something more contemporary,’ says Rachel. ‘The mix of the modern geometric velvet with the chintzy Victorian-inspired floral, both from Schumacher, really gives me a thrill.’

## BATHING BEAUTY

With all their hard surfaces, bathrooms cry out for more softer textures, which is why swapping a more traditional marble or wood-based vanity or pedestal for a fabric curtain is an elegant solution – providing no one is likely to throw water around too often. Once disregarded as a fusty way of decorating, modestly masking the pedestal behind, they are now making a comeback and not just in country house design. Lucy Derbyshire and Jena Quinn of Studio QD say that they were captivated by the ‘romantic allure’ of Justin Van Breda’s floral print Strange Blooms Mono and decided to use it for this en-suite bathroom they designed together with Nicky Haslam. The wall colour is Lavender by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint and the seagrass wallpaper is from Tatiana Tafur.

PHOTOGRAPHS (BATHING BEAUTY) SIMON LIPTON



PHOTOGRAPH ALEXANDER JAMES

### SIMPLY CHIC

For a more restrained finish when layering fabrics, hold back on pattern and use a variety of plains in a scheme instead. The overall result will still have the same softening effect on a space but there's less for the eye to trip over, resulting in a more soothing impact – ideal for a bedroom. ‘This is a little corner of my room for last year’s WOW!house in collaboration with fabric house de Le Cuona, where we used 27 different fabrics in the room, including fabric inset into the wall panelling,’ says interior designer Christian Bense. ‘The bed canopies spoke to the overall concept of London-meets-grand-safari, merging a traditional bed canopy and a safari-style mosquito net.’ →



### COLOUR CELEBRATION

Covering dining chairs in multiple fabrics can be highly impactful when it comes to adding character. This design by Kit Kemp Design Studio has her signature deftness for marshalling colour and pattern with eye-catching results. An embroidered design by Romo adds detail to the front of the chairs while the stripe of the Peace and Love, Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr Cloth, holds it all together. The seats are in a bright orange or peacock blue velvet to add a dash of joy. Then, a geometric on the blinds subtly echoes the window pattern. 'The blinds envelop the space in pattern when down, creating an intimate evening setting, and provide a bold shot of colour when raised,' say Kit's team.



## IN THE FOLD

Veere Grenney is something of a champion of the layered fabric look and his approach has been described as akin to artists building oils on a canvas. A confident command of colour is often the thread that ensures great results. In this fabric-lined TV room he's used a Bennison Fabrics printed linen, Coromandel, as the protagonist: it's on the walls, Roman blinds and the upholstery. Fabric walling is ideal in such a space 'because it's brilliant for acoustics and is immediately atmospheric,' he explains. As a counterbalance to the busy orange and green floral print, he's added cushions and an ottoman in different textures and patterns but maintained a definite current throughout by ensuring everything is in similar shades.

## GREEN WITH ENVY

Baths create a perfect canvas for a bit of theatre, especially when they fit snugly into an alcove or at the end of the bathroom. Here, the Singapore-based decorator Elizabeth Hay designed a playful bright green scheme for a children's bathroom in a property in Connecticut which uses Veere Grenney's cheerful Woodperry pattern on the walls. Rather than settle for an open bath, she's created a stage-like setting. 'We made a scalloped pelmet to frame the bathtub and shower with a pompom trim by Samuel & Sons,' explains Elizabeth. 'The curtain is lined with shower curtain lining to prevent the fabric from getting wet.' A rug by Salvesen Graham x Jennifer Manners continues the scalloped theme and adds a fun finishing touch. →



PHOTOGRAPHS (IN THE FOLD) BOZ GAGOVSKI; (GREEN WITH ENVY) MATTHEW KISIDAY  
STYLING (GREEN WITH ENVY) FRANCES BAILEY





“THE BEDROOM (ABOVE) IN THIS HOUSE FEATURES BEAUTIFUL TEXTILES, WHICH COMBINE TO CREATE A CHARMING, LAYERED LOOK”

**NICOLA HARDING**, interior designer

### CHECKS AND BALANCES

The smallest rooms of all can be the most enjoyable to decorate, especially if the approach is to go all out with one particular fabric. In this bedroom, the team at Salvesen Graham covered nearly every inch of wall space in their own Great Check Fabric design which has been fabric walled (by The Textile Wall Company) on both the main walls and the bed nook to create a supremely cosy feel. When going down this route, be sure to leave somewhere for the room to ‘breathe’: a plain ceiling is essential to prevent the room from feeling overwhelming or like the inside of an elaborate box of chocolates. The check pattern continues on the floor but instead of the moss green, they’ve matched it tonally to the beige carpet for a more calming finish. Blinds and nook curtains in a plain olive grey also help to achieve the right balance.

### LAYER CAKE

The four-poster bed became popular long before central heating was mainstream but they’ve been making a comeback in recent years as a way of creating a cosy and cossetting room-within-a-room. Rather than going down the traditional monotone bed curtain route, some decorators are using the frame of the bed as a canvas for different patterns and designs. The result is a modern, decorative take on the bed canopy. ‘The bed curtains are in a striped floral from Bennison Fabrics, the bolster is in Nicole Fabre Designs’ Lavandou in Tabac and the curtains we sourced from an auction,’ says interior designer Nicola Harding.

PHOTOGRAPHS (CHECKS AND BALANCES) SIMON BROWN; (LAYER CAKE) PAUL MASSEY



### EXIT STRATEGY

This design is a modern nod to the traditional green baize door which would mark a division between the main house and the servants' quarters. These doors were the solution to a practical problem, says Lucy Hammond Giles, associate director of Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler. 'We reconfigured the ground floor and the existing door was too wide. The client suggested swapping it for a pair of doors, which was an excellent idea, and the only way to make this work was by making them feel less like doors.' The hall side is covered in a cinnamon-coloured wool with a geometric pattern, but in the drawing room she used Sibyl Colefax's softer Seaweed linen overlaid with scaled up patterns of swirling nails. →



## GREAT DEPTH

Adding gathered fabric panels to a wardrobe will ensure the clothes remain invisible while adding a sophisticated and more detailed finish to the furniture. The pleats of the gathered fabric bring depth to a traditionally flat surface and are another opportunity to bring in a different pattern or colour into a scheme. Think about which kind of pleat will work best: tighter, sharper pleats will result in a more formal look. This wardrobe is a bespoke piece from The Workshop by Studio Peake. It stands in the bedroom of a home in London. 'We used gathered fabric as it added a soft touch along with additional texture to this painted cabinet,' says Sarah Peake, founder and creative director of Studio Peake.

# Insider insight

## Creative ways with fabric

**ALL AREAS** Right now, any rules about where fabrics can and can't go have almost been removed from the picture. 'We still see our fabrics mainly on furniture or as curtains, but nowadays it extends to every decorative surface such as walls, doors, cabinetry and canopies,' says Benni Frowein, CEO of Schumacher Europe. 'This is a global trend: Schumacher's fabric business has grown faster than other categories but particularly applies to the UK with its history of beautiful textiles.' Long loved for adding charm and character, there is also a return of ruffles, trims and valances to sofas, chairs and beds.

**FABRIC WALLING** This traditional technique is a beautiful way to add greater depth, richness and texture to a scheme, says Laura Tuckwell, senior project lead at Sims Hilditch. 'Fabric walling is a dying art and needs a good degree of precision to make look wonderful.' It can be finished with fabric tapes to add extra detail, she says before adding that tightly woven linens work well for fabric walling as they are hardwearing and retain their shape.

**REPLACING DOORS** Fabric room dividers work well and allow you to open spaces when needed, says Amy Dalrymple, co-founder of Dalrymple Studio. 'Adding a sense of theatre to a space, we love using rugs which can be hung or fixed to a wall to divide space. These work particularly well between a bedroom and a dressing room or in a tighter space where you might not have room for a walk-in wardrobe.' Alberto Pezzato, head of Rubelli Design Studio, says they've noticed an increased interest in room dividers as contemporary

twists on traditional accessories. 'We love to see how homeowners are drawn to fabrics that marry classic motifs with modern design sensibilities,' he adds.

**BED CANOPIES** Looser than a bed tester, a bed canopy is an informal way of adding detail and texture especially around a single bed where the headboard is small against a large wall. One or two fabrics can be incorporated but try and contrast the sizes of pattern or use a pattern with a plain to achieve a balance. Bed canopies are a great solution for children's bedrooms as they are timeless and classic – removing the concern that a child might outgrow the space, believes Amy.

**CABINET CURTAINS** As a foil for toning down the hard surfaces of a kitchen or bathroom, many are embracing cabinet curtains. And spray-on treatments which give fabrics a waterproof quality have meant that this is less risky to do than ever. 'For me the bathroom should be all about softness,' says designer Molly Mahon. 'I've lined my bathroom cupboard with my hand-block-printed Bagru cotton, a fresh take on a botanical pattern. Soft furnishings are everything in a bathroom for the ultimate in peace and luxury.' 📸

**“FABRIC WALLING CAN HAVE GOOD ACOUSTIC PROPERTIES IF IT'S TO BE USED IN AN ENTERTAINING SPACE”**

**LAURA TUCKWELL,**  
senior project lead at Sims Hilditch

### THE SOURCEBOOK: FABRIC CREATIVES

#### THE TEXTILE WALL COMPANY

Firm set up by Hepzabeth Evans in 2019 who spent a decade working with furniture, fabric and wall upholstery in Australia and New Zealand.

#### NEST DESIGN

Lucy Bathurst is both an interior designer and curtain maker who specialises in soft furnishings made by hand using antique and modern textiles.

#### RECOIRE

Designer, producer and manufacturer of upholstered furniture for designers well versed in the art of gathered skirts, headboards, ottomans and fenders.

#### DE LE CUONA

Designer of interior fabrics made from natural fibres with a focus on texture and surfaces, including linen and wool jacquard and cashmere velvet.