

# A soft touch

*Cushions and curtains, bed linens and covers in a vast range of colours and fabrics add the 'soft' touch to our homes, but they can also pack a punch. Their impact should not be underestimated. Interior designer Emma Rees points out how they can make or break a design scheme.*

Soft furnishings is an inadequate way to describe something which, in interior design terms, should promote vibrancy, excitement, curiosity, luxury, and a stylish finish to a room. More apt would be something that exudes excitement and glamour – “soft decorative pieces of art.” Their addition can make or break a design scheme. It is imperative that they complement and integrate with the colours and textures of fixed design elements such as paint, wallpaper, furniture and lighting.

Choosing furnishings and accessories can be overwhelming. There are so many design and fabric houses - Osbourne & Little, Zoffany, Designers Guild and Harlequin to name but a few, each stocking a complete cross-section of furnishing accoutrements. Many of these companies are adapting to harsher market conditions and have introduced fabric ranges to suit all budgets and styles. With so much choice it is hard to know where to start? The following tips may help.

A good starting point is fabric choice. This could be a painting, a photograph, a beloved rug or an antique piece of fabric or furniture. Our lives are littered with memories associated with items we have inherited or purchased on our travels and having these treasured possessions as focal points in our homes can be personally rewarding.

Once you have made your selection, it will guide you to a colour or combination of colours that will form the overall look. A complicated rug design may need a simpler, textured fabric to complement it rather than vie with it for attention. Likewise, if you choose a plain muted fabric for a settee you are free to use more diverse and dramatic fabrics to add texture and interest to the room.

If money is the driving factor in room renovation, and let's face it, it often is, then the price of the fabric will be an important consideration. Fabric starts from as little as £15 per metre, but this cost can run as high as £350 for



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a single metre. If you do find a fabric that you absolutely love that is prohibitively expensive, use it on a smaller scale. Cushions, for example, can add opulence and diversity – yet they require only small quantities of fabric making them more affordable. Mixing striped fabrics with plain or checks and adding trim will also add interest without breaking the bank.

Cost can also be a major determinant when choosing a fabric selection for curtains. Curtains use a large amount of fabric and it is important to establish what you want the window dressing to do to avoid costly mistakes. If you would like to maintain a degree of privacy or block unpleasant views you may want to use sheers or voiles. These can often be double the width of standard fabrics helping reduce costs.

Sheers now come in many fabric options and can be used as style statements in their own right. If light control is important, particularly for children's' rooms, blackout blinds are recommended. Alternatively, if heat control is a major consideration, interlining curtains is a must, albeit a more costly exercise.

The practicality of fabric is also an important consideration. One of the biggest tips is to consider whether you want or need curtains at all. It may seem a little controversial but curtains can be fabulous dust collectors, hiding the clean lines of windows. You may instead wish to consider blinds; perhaps a roman or roller blind. These can often be more economical choices than curtains.

If you opt for silk for either curtains or upholstery, bear in mind that it needs protecting from the harsh rays of the sun. Upholstery fabric has a rub test and fire code to ensure the fabric is both safe to use and resistant to wear and tear. To ensure the fabric will look good on upholstery, get hold of a larger fabric sample and consider how the pattern will work with the shape of the piece you intend to cover.



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Designers Guild

Turning to other soft accessory options, selecting the most appropriate bed linen and towels to complete an interior design finish is an equally important consideration. The quality of the bed linen you use is something to take into account. I recently completed a scheme for a child's room that looked fantastic on completion, but as the black and white striped duvet covers were washed, they quickly faded and affected the overall look. Look for a strong supplier, such as The Linen Press, which has a fantastic supply of duvet covers made from excellent quality cotton and linen. These are bound to wash well. Pure Egyptian white cotton bed linen with loads of pillows is always a winner. In design terms it can be wise to stay with the philosophy that less is more.

Finally, as ever, ensure your "soft, decorative, artistic furnishings" are professionally made. The bottom line is to make sure you love the fabric you choose so that it will endure for years to come. Quality products will stand the test of time and you can take them with you when you move home. ■



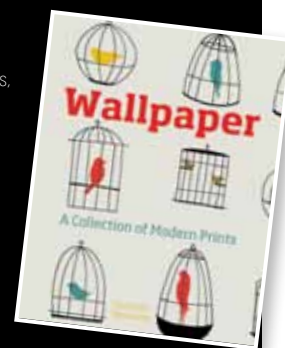
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## VISUAL CELEBRATION

### New book release

Wallpaper, from still life repeats to sweeping panoramic landscapes, can add style and wit to our homes, says Charlotte Abrahams in her new book titled simply *Wallpaper – A Collection of Modern Prints*.



The book has an astonishing index of wallpaper prints that will leave you itching to redecorate. It comprises a full history of wallpaper with sections including architectural illusions such as depictions of brick walls, subtly coloured or hot house bright florals, and designs featuring pasted pictures.



Charlotte, a design journalist who trained in St Martin's, discovers the origins of the use of wallpaper as an architectural illusion. She looks at its illusory beginnings, from graphic to textural, and explains why they are new amongst the most popular designs on the market.



In the section on pasted pictures she reveals how designers have been using pictures on their papers for almost as long as they have used pattern. In her guide to the brief history of wallpaper, Charlotte explains that the popularity of wallpaper fluctuates with fashions. "Today, as in the 18th Century, wallpaper is the last word in decorative chic," says Charlotte. "Its continual resurgence can be put down to two things – technical innovation, and more importantly, our innate desire to decorate the walls which surround us."

The book is a visual celebration of the designs available and the range of papers and index to them will prove invaluable to anyone planning to decorate their home and considering how to use wallpaper designs to the best effect.



'Life' readers can buy *'Wallpaper' – A Collection of Modern Prints*, published by Quadrille Publishing, for the special price of **£11.99 including p&p (RRP £14.99)**. Just telephone **01256 302699** and quote reference **9CV**.

The first three Life Magazine readers who contact us will receive a free copy of the book. Just fill out the form here, cut out and send off.

### Wallpaper: A Collection of Modern Prints Draw

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Winners will receive their free copy to the address provided. ■

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