

Instant art: Wall decor ideas that will really stick on you

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

"Trading Spaces" has Wallies. "Extreme Makeover Home Edition" featured blik. People haven't had this much fun decorating their walls since glow-in-the-dark paint was popular in the '60s.

The new trend started eight years ago with the invention of Wallies.

"It seems like a no-brainer, but there was never anything like that," said Julie Campbell, creator of Wallies, of the prepasted wallpaper cutouts designed to look like custom, hand-painted artwork.

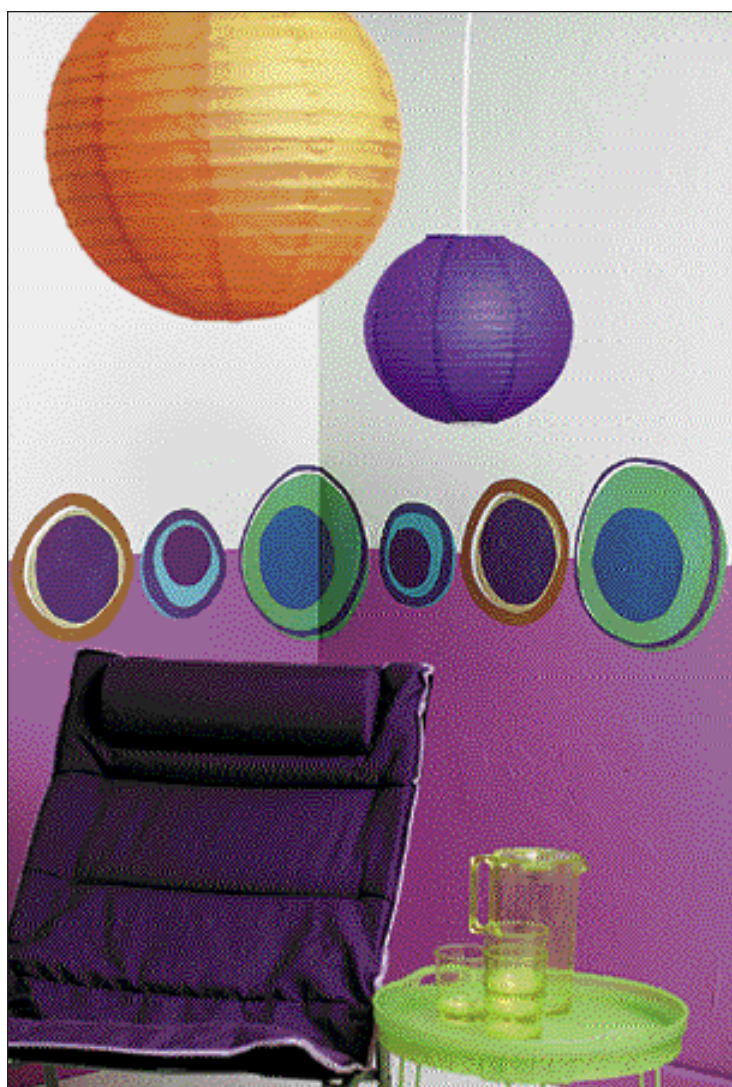
A former graphic designer with a hobby in printmaking, Campbell stumbled upon the idea for Wallies while on maternity leave.

"After my second child was born, I was home decorating my kids' room. I was painting medieval flags on paper then using spray mount to hang them — and wondering why there wasn't a product like this out there," she said.

Campbell's decorating ingenuity quickly blossomed into a full-fledged business venture.

"Very quickly it took over my design agency," she said.

The wallpaper cutouts quickly took over the home decor market as well, as other companies followed in her path. Today, customers can find a multitude of designs on the market, all



Photo/Copley News Service

Wallies graphic prints range from a serene beach scene to bold patterns.

intended to make home decor a snap.

Blik, which is hot on the heels of Wallies as a premier source for unique wall treatments, specializes in bold, colorful graphics with

a mod, artsy feel. Boxes, dots and ovals predominate the stark, solid-color designs.

Whether dotting the walls of a sleek urban loft or spicing up a drab college dorm,

blik surface graphics are instantly removable — the company touts them as stickers for grown-ups — making them the perfect option for renters or those who just want to shake up their decor from time to time.

Prices start at \$24 for a package of the Eames Crosspatch design, four illustration-style boxes, each 15-inches-square, available in tangerine, grass, lemon and mint. The Paisley and Flock designs are the priciest items in the blik line, but the \$56 tags include up to nine graphics in various sizes and colors, including cocoa, graphite, charcoal and silver.

Wallies also has a take on the mod, uber-trendy graphics, but the Hot Dots collection, which features purple, periwinkle, blue, green, orange and tan dots in various sizes, has a more rugged, hand-drawn look.

Whether used as a border or as a free-form collection of orbs crawling the walls, Hot Dots complements the Cool Squares collection, a series of 1950s-inspired blocks in similar colors.

"The Hot Dots are very trendy and modern," said Campbell. "Everything I do has an organic shape to it, so people don't have to measure or put them the right way up or down."

The "Trading Spaces" Hot Stuff collection from Wallies is equally funky.

Stripes and solid blocks in fuchsia, magenta and garden green complement an oversized flower mural. Each element is sold separately so DIY designers can pick their options. But retro graphics are not the only option.

From fairies to flowers to the lodge look — three of the company's most popular lines — to the full-size murals of sunny seaside windows, tiled Tuscan windows and rustic cabin windows, there is, literally, something for every room.

"It's wall art. It coordinates with so many looks out there," said Campbell. "Whether someone is a Pottery Barn person or a Martha Stewart person, you put it up and it coordinates with so many styles out there."

Perhaps the most stunning collections are those designed as ready-made artwork. The Cheri Blum Frescoes, which come in packs of two, feature lush, delicate birds and fruit in a style reminiscent of old Italy, while the "Trading Spaces" Tapestry Floral mural looks as if it was plucked straight from an antique heirloom.

"They look like an original painting," Campbell said of the ready-to-hang artwork. "It's a custom, instant hand-painted look."

With a price tag of just \$8.99 for 25 cutouts or \$18.95 for a pack of murals, deco-

rating divas could quickly find themselves addicted.

"It's a really quick and easy solution to decorating, and it's affordable," Campbell said. "My whole mission was to have something affordable that people could put up on their walls and feel really good about."

And, feel good they do.

"The thing we hear the most is, 'Even I can do that,'" Campbell said.

"They're just so beautiful and in five minutes you put them up and it's done."

Applying the cutouts is as easy as wetting the back with a damp sponge, then smoothing them on the wall. Taking them off is just as simple.

"It will just tear off,"

Campbell said. "If there's anything left on the wall, you just wet it with a sponge, and it will deactivate the paste so you can just take it right off. Really

you can't look at it as wallpaper, even though it's made of wallpaper. It's so much easier to take off."

Wallies are available at Michaels, Jo-Ann Fabric and Crafts, Ace Hardware and Sherwin Williams stores nationwide. The "Trading Spaces" line is available exclusively at Wal-Mart. For more information: www.wallies.com.

Blik graphics are available at gift stores and home-decor venues nationwide or through the Web site, www.whatisblik.com.

Designers are having whimsical fun with upscale wallpaper

BY PATRICIA DANE ROGERS
Special to The Washington Post

It may be less insistent than cicadas, but wallpaper is definitely getting buzz.

Especially since May, when a clutch of talented young designers and entrepreneurial types with audacious ideas and catchy company names unveiled their offerings at New York's International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF), the country's premier venue for cutting-edge furnishings.

"There was a real sense of excitement, a younger generation treating it in a completely different way than the staid, conventional patterns we've seen for so long," said Arlene Hirst, an editor at Metropolitan Home. "It was witty and it was fun."

The new patterns were less about putting something pretty on the wall and more about making a statement. Good-bye ditsy daisies.

Hello jumbo punctuation marks, Doppler radar dots and seven-foot forks and spoons. Some designs recalled op and pop art of the '60s and '70s. Some had the kinetic intensity of Summer of Love acid trips.

Glossy decorating magazines took note and gave the new papers a ton of ink.

Newsweek weighed in, declaring white walls and Zen-like minimalism so yesterday. Mass marketers like Target snapped up paint-by-numbers Gerber daisy wallpaper from 2Jane, an importer of cool home furnishings (www.2jane.com) and featured it on its Red Hot Shop on-line site.

Technical innovations and the recent spurt of interest have been a shot in the arm for an industry in the doldrums since the early '80s, when homeowners weary of pattern fled to the relative safety of paint and paint faux effects.

"People just stopped using wallcoverings," said Nick Cichiello, CEO of the Paint and Decorating Retailers' Association.

In 1983, U.S. sales were \$4.2 billion and by 2003, the figure was \$1.03 billion. Sales dropped 75 percent in 20 years — 19.9 percent between 2001 and 2003.

Even so, he is cautiously optimistic: "Our projections are that 2004 will be a break-even year."

Jon Sherman, founder of New Orleans-based Flavor

Paper, is characteristic of the new breed of wallpaper artisans. He took his hand-screened psychedelic patterns called "Flower of Love" and "Highway 66" to ICFF and is now fielding orders right and left (www.flavorpaper.com).

A former real-estate developer, Sherman saw samples of shiny '70s papers a year ago when their creator, an Oregonian known only as Ted, had died and his archives were about to be torched by his relatives.

Working against the clock, Sherman rescued 300 of the original designs, invested in new equipment, quit his day job and updated Ted's handwork in fresh colors.

"People looked at me like I had three heads when I told them I was thinking about bringing back funky designs on Mylar," said Sherman, 32. "Everybody said, 'Who uses wallpaper?'"

A sampling of Flavor Paper's palette includes "Sweet Potato on Silver" and "Roquefort on Gravy," a custom version of "Highway 66" for the New Orleans pad of rocker Lenny Kravitz.

The New York event showcased other factories: Timorous Beasties of Edinburgh with op-art zigzags to larger-than-life thistles (www.timorousbeasties.com); London-based Tracy Kendall experimenting with hand-stitched sequins, fluttery paper squares and shreds and huge flowers, feathers and silverware — www.tracykendall.com; Knoll Textiles with "Pause," enormous punctuation marks by the New York graphic design firm 2x4 — www.knoll.com; and Brooklyn-based Twenty2 with printed geometrics and ginkgo leaves on Mylar — www.shoptwenty2.com.

Product designer Jaime Salm of Philadelphia-based Mio brought "V2," wallpaper tiles of molded cardboard that can be painted and installed temporarily with two-sided tape (www.mioculture.com).

"They're beyond wallpaper. I'm sorry we didn't think of them ourselves," said Ignaz Gorisczek, vice president of visual planning for Neiman Marcus, which next month will feature the tiles in fall window displays.

Gregory Herringshaw is assistant curator at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, where he heads the country's

largest wallpaper archive: 10,000 documents. Part of the excitement at the furniture fair this year, he says, was that "these are mostly smaller companies producing a handmade product. ... They're very individual, very high quality. Most are made to order, not printed en masse."

In general, it costs more to

wallpaper a room than to paint it, especially if professionally installed, and the prices of these wallcoverings fall in a wide range. At \$28 for a box of a dozen 12-inch squares, Mio's "V2" is the least expensive. Others average from \$100 to \$300 per roll — high compared with \$18 to \$40 for most mass-produced lines.

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Beyond price, wallpaper is a commitment. Even those marketed as strippable tend to hang in there. This is another issue the industry is seeking to address.

"Our new Waverly 4 is so easy to remove that you just grab a corner and peel it off when you want to get rid of it," said Kathy O'Brien, vice president of marketing for FSC, the wallpaper division

of F. Schumacher & Co., Waverly's parent.

For the installation-challenged, there's Paper Illusion from FSC's Village line.

"In-house, we describe it as 'rip and stick.' It's a faux-finish design that you tear into pieces, dip into water and slap on the wall," she says. "You don't even have to measure or use scissors."

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