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Designers Say: More Chintz, Less 'Cool'

What the arbiters of décor are looking forward to using and losing this year

By WILLIAM L. HAMILTON



Drue Wagner for The Wall Street Journal, F. Martin Ramin for The Wall Street Journal, Styling by Anne Cardenas (3)

Clockwise from top: Benjamin Moore Traditional Yellow 170 Paint; Jean-Michel Frank Coffee Table from Morateur Gallery at 1stdibs.com; Colefax & Fowler Fabric; Farrow & Ball Brinjal No. 222 Paint; Antique Flemish Heraldic Tapestry from Nazmiyal at 1stdibs.com

YOU'VE MADE A resolution for 2013 to get back to the gym, but Nick Olsen, a New York interior designer, has resolved to use more purple and yellow.

"I'm gravitating toward them specifically," he said. "They feel more fresh, and cheerful." Mr. Olsen also sees more peach-colored mirror in his future.

With a bright new year ahead, decorators and designers make their resolutions, like the rest of us. But unlike you taking aim at that extra 10 pounds, what they resolve to do could become the look of the next 12 months, for everyone, everywhere.

"Using black where it's not supposed to be," Stephen Alesch, of the design firm Roman and Williams, resolved. Ceilings, trim and floors, he explained.

Or white. "You wouldn't think it would make a person nervous," said Jay Jeffers, a San Francisco designer. But Mr. Jeffers, who celebrates color, painted the walls of

his own home white recently, and he's still breathing hard. "Using color in more subtle ways," he has decided will be his resolution, "in a rug or a photograph, not upholstery and walls."

Or not. Jennifer Post, high priestess of white on white, sees this as her year of beyond white. "Wood colors and grains," she said. Ms. Post is also taking A/V classes to understand the devices she's building into clients' homes. Finally being as smart as your "smart home" might be an excellent universal resolution.

Jamie Drake, the New York designer, has 2013 firmly blocked out, with barely enough months for his scheme. "Clear bright coral tones, orangy pinks—sunset colors—balanced by graphite, black diamond, deep grays, onyx, with accents of plum and purple," he said, on one exhale. Mr. Drake's working motto for the year: "Never say never."

*More than a few designers are discovering and reintroducing
the Print That Ate the 1980s: chintz.*

This year might not be remembered as the year Tammy Connor, a designer in Birmingham, Ala., dipped her palette into pumpkin and pea-green, but it could become historic for the fact that Ms. Connor, like more than a few designers we spoke to, is discovering and reintroducing the Print That Ate the 1980s: chintz.

Even decorators stuttered bringing it up. "I'm not a huge floral person," said Ms. Connor, hesitantly, "but chintz is making a comeback, reinterpreted and tweaked—printed on linen not glazed cotton, with fewer colors, say, three instead of 10."

James Andrew, a New York designer known for his highly amplified versions of "traditional" (an entryway lacquered Hermès-orange, with 8-foot-tall ebonized doors), said of his direction going forward, "I'm loving this idea of things gone a bit out of favor, like chintz, and making them modern. Chintz adds a bit of excitement to a room—a big bold trellis print on a sofa with traditional chintz on small chairs. It feels very fresh."

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Mr. Andrew is also determined in 2013 to find the client who will let him use LCD screens as wallpaper. "It's the next version of mirrored halls, expanding a space virtually," he said. "You could have a butterfly aviary in an entry—something that changed with your mood."

Bunny Williams is taking technology out of the box, too. "I'm doing a dining room right now based on photos of 18th-century landscape painting," said the New York designer. "We've digitalized it and blown it up to make murals to print the walls with. You understand it's a photograph, instead of just another Chinese wallpaper."

Other designers are taking pattern in a new direction this year. Specifically, onto the floor.

Mr. Andrew is determined to do oriental rugs, in another what-goes-around-comes-around, "a Flemish carpet with a Jean-Michel Frank coffee table on it." Anne Maxwell Foster and Suysel dePedro Cunningham of Tilton Fenwick in New York are taking their formula of full-on pattern in upholstery, accessories and walls down to the ground—soon to be a sisal-free zone—with decorative carpeting and floor finishes. "360 degrees of pattern," said Ms. Cunningham. "Usually it's just 300."

Blogger and decorator Jenny Komenda is seeing paisley for 2013. Chintz is still a pain threshold—"a little too fresh," she said—but balloon window shades, white-painted floors, faux wall finishes and other decorating touches from her mother's generation are circling her head like the Furies. "I'm shocked how much I'm loving it," she said.

In fact, designers' resolutions are loaded with the kinds of decoration that the recent fashion for cool, contemporary hasn't allowed. For younger designers, in particular, it seems like a nostalgia for things they've never known: the fantasy and the fun of decorating. Rose Cumming, the grande dame of eccentric, eclectic interiors, came up, as did the great Albert Hadley, who died last year. The news for 2013 could be a bold appreciation for some of the best of the old-school rules.

"In the past, designers played a lot with beauty, and we've pared back to neutrals and texture, and modernized everything," New York designer Elizabeth Bauer said. "I walk into fabric showrooms and see the older designs, and think, 'God, that's gorgeous.' "

Peering into his peach-colored mirror, Nick Olsen has caught a glimpse of what used to be called "glamour."

"Super high-style," he said, with resolve. "I was a little afraid, but I'm trying it out."

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