

Super Size My Walls: Patterns of Epic Proportions

(ARA) - Americans are living large these days. And we're not just talking about meal portions and expanding waistlines. You don't need big eyes to notice that cars have morphed into SUVs; house sizes have ballooned; even the charcoal grill has been supplanted by a built-in gas model the size of a sports car. Inside the home, wallpaper designers have been inspired to scale great new heights in design.

This makes sense considering that ceiling heights on new homes are on the rise. Up until the 1980s, the standard was eight feet; now it is ten. Factor in the customary two-story great rooms and there's a lot of wall space to cover. But there is much more to this trend than meets the eye.

"Homeowners have become savvy decorators," says Stacy Senior Allen of Thibaut Design. "They're tired of the predictable and are more willing to be adventurous in their decorating choices, so they are embracing large-scale patterns."

If you haven't looked at wallpaper lately, you may be in for a big surprise. Traditional patterns such as florals, damasks and scrolls are completely revitalized by this super-sized scale. A densely-packed paisley can appear very ornate and even busy when small, but magnify it a few times and give it some space, and its characteristic teardrop shape is transformed into something fresh and exciting.

This new twist on the classics lends patterns the power to enliven traditional interiors and counterbalance contemporary settings. Similarly, retro-inspired patterns and geometrics in this more exaggerated scale can complement a host of decorating styles beyond tried-and-true modern. "Wallpaper in a large scale adds an element of surprise and drama to any room," says Barbara Bower, designer, Wallquest, Inc. Paula Berberian of Brewster Wallcoverings adds, "Many of these bold designs are actually taking the place of artwork and they make a statement on their own."

Color plays an equally big role in these grand designs. The scale of these patterns lends itself to a streamlined palette, yet has also unleashed wallpaper designers' sense of daring as they unite fashion-forward combinations such as brown-and-blue, pink-and-black and red-and-cream. They are in step with today's sophisticated consumer who is well-versed in the language of color. "Consumers love looking at familiar motifs in this new format and in unexpected colors. They are so surprised to see how wallpaper can be so current," says Bower. "Wallpaper is moving out of its old, traditional comfort zone and into the world of leading-edge design."



Photo Courtesy of Brewster Wallcovering Company



Photo Courtesy of Printer's Guild

The scale of these patterns does pose some challenges for the wallpaper sample book, where consumers may only see a rather small piece of an actual pattern. Wallpaper companies include photos of rooms decorated in these wallpapers to convey the scale and drama of larger patterns. You may expect to see these patterns in rooms with exceptionally high ceilings, but the sample books are as likely to show the pattern in one section of a room, or behind a single piece of furniture. The message is that these patterns are not exclusively for more cavernous rooms; they can, in fact, make smaller rooms appear more expansive. As long as there's enough space to step back from the walls to appreciate the pattern, large-scale wallpapers can make a strong, confident statement -- and envelop a room in beauty.

Wallpaper sample book photos are also meant to be a launch pad for decorating ideas, such as using large-scale wallpapers to create a "feature wall" in a great room or above the fireplace mantel. There's really no limit to how you can use these super-size wallpapers -- and never any worry about adding extra weight. For more ideas, explore www.wallcoverings.org.