THE BORDER ANALYZED AS A DECORATIVE AGENT. FROM THE FRENCH OF A. GRASSET, TRANSLATED BY IRENE SARGENT

A THEORETICAL study of ornament can be very useful to the decorator; at the same time, it may interest the lay lover of art, by disclosing to him the laws of composition. It will further reveal all the difficulties which must be conquered by the designer.

With the intention of fulfilling the valuable ends just mentioned, a selection of notes is here offered, drawn from an exhaustive preface written by M. Grasset for a volume of decorative borders recently published, which is destined to render the most important services to the public.

GENERALITIES

Every border serves to bound a plain or a wrought surface, in order to emphasize its general form. When, as upon a vertical wall—for instance, that of an apartment—the border runs only above, near the ceiling, and below, directly over the baseboard, the decorative feature serves as a modulation leading to the ceiling, at one extremity, and to the moldings at the other. But when a border completely surrounds a surface, as, for instance, that of a dish, it emphasizes not only the edges of this object, but it may further constitute its only ornament; becoming then a true frame.

The elaboration of the border is made proportionate to that of the ground; the former part always exceeding the latter in richness, and often projecting itself upon a perfectly plain surface.

Generally speaking, the border consists of three parts: first, the field destined to receive the ornament and occupying the greater part of the space; second, the listels, which are rectilinear bands, simple or multiple, limiting the field on either hand, in the direction of its length. The listels placed at the exterior boundary of the field are
more numerous, or more important, than those which define it against the ground, and take the name of talons. The talons are also called galons when they themselves receive decoration.

But borders are not always enclosed between listels, and, quite often, especially when they are executed in painting, their inner portion, contiguous to the ground, need not be limited by these bands of enclosure. In this case, the principal field upon which the ornaments are displayed, is the background itself. Only, if this solution were accepted, the border would show a disagreeable thinness, unless the ornaments were thickly distributed. Therefore, a background is carefully prepared in a tone approaching that of the ornament, which gives the required effect of solidity. For it must not be forgotten that the principal essential of a border is to bound and to limit sharply. Now, experience has shown that when the background is light, the field of the border should be dark, and that when the ground is dark, the field of the border should be light. This is a truth more often misunderstood than one would suppose possible, and not seldom a superb border fails to produce an adequate effect, because this principle has been ignored in its composition.

FRIEZES AND VERTICALS

An important question lies in the sharp distinction which must be made between borders and friezes. The latter, in general, possess horizontal elements only, and can not be turned about. In a frieze, the artist is at liberty to use his imagination; but, if the reproduction of the frieze is to be executed by mechanical means, the adjustment of the parts must be kept in mind, and the subject chosen must not be so striking that its frequent repetition becomes fatiguing. On the
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contrary, it is preferable to adopt a certain similarity of surface, color, and effect, which scarcely reveals the recurrence of the motif at the point of juncture.

Again, a distinction must be made between borders and verticals. As their name indicates, the latter can not be used except in a single vertical situation. Their composition precludes them from being set horizontally, or turned upside down. Their use, like that of friezes, is limited, and they can not be repeated in a great number of mechanical reproductions, except in the case of the walls of a room which, having a plain surface, may be decorated at fixed distances. These perpendiculartzs should be accompanied, at top and bottom, by one or two special borders with a defining listel or a joining motif determining, in this instance, the width of the intervening spaces.

![Image of a border design](image)

**FIGURE III**

**INDETERMINATE BORDERS**

If friezes and perpendiculartzs are subject to no other conditions than those which have just been indicated, it is otherwise with the border. The latter, playing a more modest and more usual part, fulfills its best use when it may be placed equally well, above or below, at the right or the left; having these characteristics, it may be called an indeterminate border.

The composition of borders of this class is restricted in possibilities, although it can be effected in several ways: first of all, by the simple repetition of the same, or similar motifs, having no direction; but a very definite balance may be obtained by the alternation of equal motifs, if their axes are perpendicular to the two edges of the border, and if the motifs are symmetrical upon these axes. However, the motifs are not necessarily attached to the listels which limit the
field, and it is possible to employ systems of juxtaposed and alternate curves having no connection with the listels. Further, use can be made of a waved line, in the concaves of which may be placed motifs having no top or bottom; or an all-over pattern may be employed, set in an order which is exactly repeated, as is shown in Figure VII. It is seen that the axes must always be perpendicular to the length of the border; then, the motifs placed upon the line B. C. (the axis) will be cut into two equal parts; the whole design being contained in the triangle A. B. C. A good example of reversible border occurs in Figure I., in which the floral design is equally effective, if it be turned top downward.

CONTINUOUS ALTERNATING BORDERS

Next to the borders which we have just noted, alternating designs are the most practical, for the exact alternation of the motifs gives them a perfect equilibrium in a direction in which they appear to proceed, or rather, to run.

If we consider regular and equal motifs placed upon oblique axes parallel to each other, their alternation will be perfectly balanced. These motifs would produce a reversible border, if the inclination of the axes did not occur in an opposite direction for the vertical and for the horizontal border; and, further, if account being taken of the exterior of the surface so bordered, the motifs were not ascending on the right, and descending on the left, or vice versa, as is often the case.

Contrasted oblique axes will give the same result, whether the lines are
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straight or curved. (As an example of the first condition, see Figure XI.) In the balance of a subsequent figure, there is noticeable a line or movement, of which the festoon is a type. (Figure IX.) This line can be materially absent, and yet make its presence felt beneath very thick ornaments, composed simply of alternate motifs.

In borders of this kind, if the listels are equal and there is no talon, it will be possible to place them at the right and the left of the space to be framed, under the form of ascending motifs having the same direction. The two horizontal directions may then be the same, or they may be opposite, as is indicated in Figure XIV.

To a certain degree, these alternating borders may be made similar to those of the reversible class, if care be taken to balance the principal elements upward and downward; the attachment only of the motifs will then proceed in a non-reversible direction, and the less visible the attachment, the more available will be the border. Thus, if in Figure III., the upper border is a good example of alternation, we must not forget that it demands a symmetrical opposing motif, because of a black ground filled above and exteriorly to the left. But nothing would be easier than to treat the other side similarly, so as to be able to place the design horizontally or vertically, without having recourse to its symmetrical correspondent. In the case of a border upon paper hangings, it would be easy to turn it upside down, upon its axis or axes, in the middle of the panel to be bordered, and thus to obtain a perfectly balanced effect.
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Alternating borders can therefore have their *motifs*, either grafted upon the two listels, as in Figure XII., or formed of juxtaposed curves (Figure VI.), or again, of modulated curves (Figure VIII.). But it is preferable to dissimilate as much as possible the course of the movement, in order that the design may be easily reversible. (Figure XIII.)

UNILATERAL BORDERS

Beside alternating borders, there are unilateral designs which in themselves form a characteristic division. Of the latter two principal classes may be distinguished: those which, composed like the alternating borders, vary the alternated *motif*, and offer balance sufficient to make them easy to use; and those in which the two borders differ greatly in importance and composition. The latter are reversed to the right, if they run to the left; but the effect may be corrected by the addition of opposing *motifs*.

A large proportion of unilateral borders may be reversed without injury to the design, upon condition that the side destined to edge the ground be always turned toward the latter. But, as borders are not always applied to vertical walls, there are cases in which a unilateral design is not only permissible, but rather required, as is true of borders upon plates, tables, tablecloths, and the like.

If the unilateral border becomes such that it can be placed only in a single position, it is then a frieze properly speaking, and re-enters the class first treated in the present article.

DIAGONAL BORDERS

True diagonal borders are less frequently used than others, and are designed especially for execution in painting (Figure XV.). In such rendering, the stencil pattern can be reversed for a diagonal border having an opposite direction. But the inclina-
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tion must be the same, for if there is a vertical motif, as in Figure XV., this condition becomes necessary; but if, on the contrary, the motif is composed of a single pattern, the inclination, as well as the inversion, is ineffective. But all alternating borders may be used as diagonal patterns: the latter being specialized only by the presence of vertical motifs.

CIRCULAR BORDERS

Any straight border can be easily adapted to a circle by a change which slightly contracts its inner side. A necessary precaution is to establish the whole number of divisions within which each motif or unit will be contained, and if there are alternating borders, there must be an even number of divisions; so that the adjustment may be normal, unless the two alternating motifs are contained in a single division. This observation has its usefulness, when both sides of a stencil plate are used. It must be noted also that each circular surface to be bordered, requires a stencil-plate adapted to its radius.

ANGLES

The question of the angle is one of the most difficult existing in the entire subject of borders. The problem varies, according as the border is composed of two separate designs, symmetrical one with the other, or again if it be simple, and run in a single direction. The first problem is very easy to solve; the second is much more difficult, but, at the same time, of much greater commercial importance.

A principle resulting from experience, requires that the angle motif of a border be more important than that of the running portion, and that the angle be accentuated exteriorly: a precaution without which the border would have no character.

In commercial designs which demand economy
of drawing, the problem becomes somewhat difficult. If we construct a regular motif upon an oblique axis, in an alternating or a unilateral border, there will be a difference in the breadth of the backgrounds which separate the motifs of the border from the ornament of the angle, as is shown in Figure X., in which the void H is noted as larger than the void G, and the angle motif no longer appears to belong to its border. The best means to employ is to incline the movement of the supports of the angle motif in the same direction as those of the running border, attempting to provide the angle with motifs proportionately stronger and more numerous (Figure IV.).

It is useless to formulate any rules concerning borders without fixed direction, since they can be cut at any point between two units of design; the only essential condition being that similarity of form shall exist between the angle-motif and the units of the sides. An observation applicable to all borders, concerns especially those showing an ornamented background, the which must adjust itself also to the background of the angle, without leaving the juncture visible.

In designs subjected to mechanical reproduction, sometimes a special case occurs. This is when the ground and the border are woven separately to be adapted to each other in different lengths and widths. In this case, if the border is very ornate and quite broad, it will be composed of two principal and different motifs, repeated at short and regular intervals, and arranged so as to adjust themselves together at an angle of forty-five degrees; thus forming a new motif composed of the two halves of the other two. The place of the motifs is regulated by the width of the breadths of the background material, which can include one or several, and the adjustment of the angle is thus always exact. These two motifs can be designed with the greatest freedom, on condition that a line at an inclination of forty-five degrees, in a
direction symmetrical for each of them and bisecting them, allows a perfect adjustment. The background will be occupied by running ornament subjected to the same rule. Here, the limited space at our disposal forbids us to establish an exact formula regulating the distance between the two *motifs*; but the beautiful antique oriental borders, composed of large animal *motifs*, are the best models from which modern art can seek its inspiration, although it must express itself in new formulas. Further, in antique art, which has produced so many marvels, we find splendid examples of borders in which all the principles which we have barely indicated, attain full development. For this reason, any designer wishing to create something comparable with the old work, must have studied the latter thoroughly and patiently sought the beauty contained therein,

*FIGURE XV*

the like of which can not spring full-grown from the brain of the greatest genius. Thus in oriental borders, always very simple in principle, and, for the most part, belonging to the alternating system, we note the use of a festoon rather simple in detail with somewhat wide *motifs* which cross at the curves and prevent a too easy reading of the plan. When these *motifs* are derived from animal forms, viewed from the long side of their silhouette, the directions of their lines are put in opposition, in order to produce a satisfying balance.

Beyond this richness, there remains a more modest field to be cultivated. This is that of pure ornament, too much abandoned to-day
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for exact natural forms, which quickly weary us, because they permit no play of fancy. These considerations appear very ambitious for simple borders, but they apply to all departments of decorative art.

Finally, a fact plain to all decorators must here be noted: namely, that a design must be accurately adapted to the material in which it is executed. For example, decorative glass, incrustation, repoussé, require numerous "simplifications"; while sculpture and painting demand enrichment; stamping and weaving require strict conditions of execution and economy for a repetition of the same motifs; while the sculpture of frames and tapestry-weaving allow a variety limited only by the proper balance of lines and of motifs.

The tapestries of the Renascence period and of the seventeenth century have bequeathed us the finest borders ever designed, and it would be difficult to surpass their sumptuous effects. These borders are often composed of great garlands of flowers, mingled with the most pleasing ornament; at other times, the flowers are mingled with figures, which form motifs at the angles. But always there is observable a regular repetition of the same masses in which all the details are different, while the centers, above and below, are occupied by special motifs designed to receive inscriptions. It is evident that, if such borders can serve as models for painted decoration, they are not adaptable to industrial purposes.

The subject which we have here treated is susceptible of ample development, but in the present article we have taken but a succinct glance at the laws governing the composition of borders; limiting ourselves to the most essential conditions.

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