FLIGHTS OF BIRDS THROUGH NEWEST FABRICS: BRILLIANT COLORS AND TROPICAL DESIGNS

It may be that our present fancy for wall papers, cretonnes and hangings with designs of curious birds, tropical flowers and grotesque vines is but a faint stirring of our race memory of those prehistoric days when we lived in the treetops, sheltered from the outside world by tangles of big-leaved vines hung with bold flowers and astonishingly queer seed pods, when parrots, cockatoos and Birds of Paradise perched screaming upon the branches, squirrels frisked up and down the trees and tree toads piped from the shelter of a bark crevasse. With the return of every spring comes our longing not only for real flowers in gardens, but glowing images and likenesses of them within our homes. Bird motifs migrate, as it were, upon our wall papers and curtains as surely as do their living models upon our fields and marshes, coming and going, following some style or instinct, some "uncharted way" of design.

Our present extravagant use of color is perhaps merely the swinging back of the pendulum, a reaction from the too sober, lifeless and dull color schemes of the past few years. Many of us use a little bold color in vases, in cushions, and are immensely pleased with our daring. The more courageous reach out hungrily for the colorful cretonnes temptingly displayed for our surrender and rejoice in the change they create in our homes. Some day perhaps we will have the pleasure of seeing color enlivening our streets in the form of floating banners, tiling in buildings, more flowers in the windows and in our dress.

Our makers of printed fabrics with prophetic insight have been gradually leading us up to an acceptance of more color in our homes. They are now triumphantly showing materials of such attractive glowing color that the most wren-like, modest and Quakerish of us long inexplicably to possess their hypnotic beauty in our homes. It would take a dour soul indeed to remain unmoved by their pleasant suggestion of cheeriness.

In the Happy Valley of Shiraz many hundreds of years ago, the Persians looked into their gardens and conceived the idea of improving the walls of their rooms with the flower patterns they had already woven into their rugs. Patiently and with ever increasing skill, they cut designs upon wood and with these blocks printed the cottons which covered their walls. The history of block-printed fabrics is full of interest, for it includes the discovery of color dyes, the influence of nations upon design, the development of art and creation of new crafts.
The linen fabric at the left shows a bird motif of a large green crane against a background of mauve and gray conventionalized waves. Rose-colored flowers, flashes of light mauve, gray high lights lift the color: this design has a Japanese fidelity to nature. When used as hangings in large halls or dining rooms, it has all the charm of a mellow old tapestry. It is suitable for wall coverings, portières, curtains, pillows and chair cushions: the poise and dignity of the cranes are a delightful variation upon the usual proudly strutting peacocks.

At the right is another linen block fabric: a tan-colored bird of paradise perched upon a light brown branching vine, bright red tree-peonies larger than the bird itself, scarlet trumpet flowers, pale daturas, lavender passion flowers and small flying tropical-colored birds are but a few of the garden reminders that within the compass of a thirty-inch square design are grouped upon a black background.
The upper photograph shows the new use of large checkeredboard gingham used to freshen the hall of Goshen Inn. The lower room done in figured chintz, in the same inn, shows the use of chair covering as a frieze and portière.
IN THE UPPER PHOTOGRAPH A GINGHAM OF SMALL CHECK IS USED IN CONNECTION WITH PAINTED FURNITURE; IN THE LOWER PICTURE FLOWERED CHINTZ IS SEEN ALSO WITH PAINTED FURNITURE; BOTH GIVE GOOD SUGGESTIONS FOR FURNISHING THE SUMMER BEDROOM.
A RICH COMBINATION OF ORANGE-YELLOW FLOWERS, GREEN VINES, WHITE AND GRAY BIRDS AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF SMALL GEOMETRIC GRAY AND GREEN PATTERN IS SHOWN AT THE RIGHT: THIS DESIGN IS ALSO SHOWN IN MANY OTHER COLOR COMBINATIONS: IN ONE THE BIRDS ARE PROMINENT, IN ANOTHER THE VINE.

THIS MORE CONVENTIONALIZED BLOCK-LINEN FABRIC IS OF OLD BLUE ROSES IN THE FORM OF A LATTICE THROUGH WHICH TWO YELLOW BIRDS SITTING UPON A PALE GREEN VASE FILLED WITH SMALL BLUE FLOWERS CAN BE SEEN: CROSSING THE WHITE BACKGROUND ARE BROKEN BLACK STRIPES, A GRAYISH SHADOW FROM THE ROSE TRELIS SOFTENS THE WHITE GROUND: COMBINED WITH BLUE SUNDOUR IT WOULD MAKE A MOST ATTRACTIVE HANGING FOR DINING ROOM, BEDROOM OR EVEN SUN PARLOR: THIS SAME DESIGN IS ALSO SHOWN IN SHADES OF PINK AND YELLOW.
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But it is only the results that we must touch upon at present. Our print makers have evolved from the intricate records of the past, designs that will remain beautiful in any age, of likable and livable colors that will not weary the beholder. True, they introduce a few novelties that they know will live for but a year, but their chief endeavor is for patterns that are so essentially good that no coming or going of fashion will displace them. Once a perfect design has been achieved, they vary it in color upon linen, cotton or silk fabrics of every weight. They have accomplished most noticeable results perhaps with the block-printed linens and cottons, because these fill a demand for material to take the place of the old tapestries, at an expense within the reach of the average purse. These block prints come thirty-one and fifty inches in width, in the most crazed of Futurist colors, as well as in imitation of mellow historic tapestries. With these, are sun-fast, tub-fast silks known as Kapock, plain or patterned, heavy or thin enough for the sun to shine through pleasantly when hung at the windows. There are floral designs for girls’ bedrooms and tapestry designs for sitting and dining rooms. Shadow taffeta made on a pattern-printed warp is a really wonderful material. The Moquette of French flax, with designs like silk velvet, but without its luster—and the better for it in many cases—being fifty inches in width, is welcomed for both hangings and upholsteries.

Then there is figured silk and linen damask that shows the Chinese influence, created especially for use with the Chinese Chippendale, and a marvelous new casement cloth to be drawn across windows in place of shades, made of sun-proof silk and ramie, soft, durable, elegant and altogether perfect for windows almost any size or style. Mohair that will last a lifetime, striped in the narrow or wide width and in the colors so in demand at present, Frizette mohair in two-toned Greek key pattern, or plain, imperial velours, novelty silk velvets, Heppelwhite velvets, soft silks, linen cretonnes, chintzes, even gingham and calicoes, are all to be had suitable for every house in the land, from the sumptuous palace on the hill to the cottage in its lee.

The demand for exclusive designs in interior furnishings has created a revival of the old-time hand-made block prints. With block printing, the decorator can evolve draperies of linen, cotton or silk, chiffons, velours, in fact, any material, that carries out the desired decorative motif and the owner will enjoy the knowledge that her rooms are distinctive, unlike others, and carry the impress of her personality and individual taste. Block-printed fabrics bear the stamp of the exclusiveness that belongs to any hand-made thing. There is the slight variation of tone brought about by varying hand pressure that
gives delightful quality. There is as much difference between this and machine-made fabrics as there is between the sensitive music of a skilled pianist and the expressionless perfection of the mechanical piano player.

Block printing is much the same in process as the famous color prints of the Japanese. A design is first drawn on transparent paper, then pasted on the block of fine close-grained wood. The edge of the design is cut around with a sharp tool and the background chiseled away. The color—oils or dyes—is rubbed into a pad of coarse muslin made a little larger than the pattern block. The block is pressed into this pad to absorb the color, and in turn pressed upon the fabric. There are a number of good books now published which give detailed descriptions as to just how this may be done, so that simple patterns may be cut and transferred to cloth by amateurs clever in handicraft. It is not a difficult thing to do, but requires painstaking care, keen judgment, a firm hand and good taste. The average woman could by a study of the method easily make a simple pattern upon a curtain length, portière, bed and couch covers or pillow cases.

Our illustrations show designs both simple and elaborate. Some are of but a single tone upon a neutral linen. Notice that in one of these, consisting of three black stripes broken by an open square formed of twelve small solid squares, the lines and squares have not only been irregularly bitten into a trifle to prevent stiffness, but that no attempt has been made to have the design mechanically perfect. The little squares sometimes do not touch and sometimes overlap. It is the sign of the hand-formed design, instead of the machine; as in the Oriental rug the variations of pattern but give it value.
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It is interesting that though they show their Viennese ancestry, these designs are bright and signs striking. They are not as confused as the gardener's or sea; here is a playfulness, of child-like delight in fantastic colors.

One of the most striking of the new linen machine-block fabrics is a tan Bird of Paradise, perched upon a light brown branching vine. Bright red tree-peonies, larger than the bird itself, scarlet trumpet flowers, pale daturas, lavender passion flowers and small flying tropical-colored birds are but a few of the garden reminders that within the compass of a thirty-inch square design are grouped with the Bird of Paradise upon the black background. Yet it does not seem crowded, only rich of color, delightful to contemplate. Combined with deep rose sundour, it would make a most attractive dining-room wall covering.

Another of the new bird tapestries is its direct antithesis. Conventionalized old-blue roses form a lattice about two yellow birds, sitting upon a pale green vase filled with small blue flowers. Crossing the white background run broken black stripes and a grayish shadow from the rose trellis. In combination with old-blue velour, this chaste, delightful design would enliven a room, giving it a breezy sense of the out of doors.

Still another wonderful linen fabric with a bird motif is of a large green crane against a background of mauve and gray conventionalized waves. Rose-colored flowers, flashes of light mauve, gray high lights, lift
the color harmoniously. This design, drawn with Japanese fidelity to nature, with its suggestive wave repetitions, combined with rich green velour and lighter green silk draperies, makes a rich, yet inexpensive color scheme for hall, dining room or studio. It has quite the effect of mellowed old tapestries. The same design is worked out in various other color combinations to blend with other plain colors.

One of the lavender linen fabrics shows, with French color daring, a wide floral stripe of yellow and pink roses, violet shadows and green leaves. The whole effect is charming and will be welcomed by decorators creating violet or lavender rooms. It is rich enough to be used with velours, yet dainty enough for sundours or plain linens. An unusual combination is of orange yellow flowers, green vines, white and gray birds against a background of small geometric gray and green pattern.

Nearly all of these linen fabric designs are carried out in various changes of colors; as in one case, yellow birds would be prominent against a gray background. Another time the birds would be greenish purple with yellow background. Color schemes can thus be worked out with flower, bird or background emphasizing the dominant note.

Among the new chintzes we find the modern use of the old-time dainty shepherdess and sheep motif. Now we use instead nursery stories and humorous little country scenes, Noah's Ark trees, full-skirted ladies mincing along the path beside them, decked out in yellow and blue and pink dresses, violet, scarlet and mauve kerciefs, black, white and green parasols, charming things indeed for hangings and screens, for schoolgirls' bedrooms, as pillows for the boys' couches and coverings for the children's nurseries. There are so many
such half-humorous, quaint little designs in every conceivable color plan, that choice becomes difficult. There is one fat decorative little blue-green tree, beneath the branches of which may be seen a red-roofed village in the distance. Another shows stiff little round trees in square tubs in prim little rows.

The modern craze for black and white is worked out in conspicuous squares and stripes, splashed and crossed by Cubist fruits, flowers and birds of the most dashing colors the dye-vats can evolve. As a contrast to these up-to-date colors, are those of normal conventional two-toned stencil designs, cool, fresh and clean-looking, most suitable for breezy seaside cottages and country bedrooms or sleeping porches.

We are showing a few of the many ways in which block-prints, cretonnes, chintzes and even gingham are being used to freshen country homes. The photographs of the two bedrooms, sitting room and hall illustrate the way in which one hotel keeper freshened up his inn. The sitting-room chairs were covered with a summer chintz, which was also used to modernize the fresco. Valances of the same brightened the windows, drawing them into close association with the room. In the hall a large checkerboard gingham was used as covering for the cozy chairs, as pillows for the willow chairs, and as portières for the door. A smaller checkerboard gingham with painted furniture brought one of the bedrooms up to modern demands. The flowered chintz of the second bedroom, though not as novel, would please some guests better perhaps. The screen in the corner, the chintz border of the bedspread and the painted furniture lift the room quite out of the realm of the usual country hotel bedroom into a pleasant cheerful, livable, homey place.