

# Digging into design history

## Tracking trends through time



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AROUND THE  
HOUSE

Certain design experts want you to believe they're style savants who can read trends like tea leaves, and that they can pronounce with unerring accuracy what the Next Big Thing will be.

In truth, you don't have to be a rocket scientist or a soothsayer to know that furnishing fads, like all forms of fashion, are in heavy repeat.

Moreover, recurring motifs, such as geometric patterns and themes from nature, have been constantly coming and going since about the time humankind moved into caves.

At a given time, it's pretty easy to see what's cycling in or out. Florals are a good current example. While some designers are sniffing on social media that florals are already fading, legitimate style watchers like Urban Barn [www.urbanbarn.com](http://www.urbanbarn.com) are confident they've still got legs.

At the retailer's recent fall preview, Fauteux showed florals on dark-background bedding and in a sofa covered in a custom floral velvet. "For many people, a full-on sofa in floral might be too much, but on an occasional chair, or on a pillow or artwork, it's a soft and pretty accent," he says.

Anybody can repeat, but it takes artistic vision to reinvent. Few designers have done that better than Alistair McAuley and Paul Simmons, since



A flowery chair makes a pretty accent (Urban Barn.)

opening the Glasgow design studio Timorous Beasties [www.timorousbeasties.com](http://www.timorousbeasties.com) in Glasgow after graduating from that city's School of Art in the late eighties.

Timorous Beasties have played with such patterns as damask, Chinoiserie, and florals, using them as inspiration for contemporary designs.

"These are all things that we studied at some point," McAuley explained in an interview at NewWall House [www.newwall.com](http://www.newwall.com), the Toronto design showroom where their line is available.

"The ideas are interesting and beautiful. To copy them would just be copying archived works. You want to find out what made that particular pattern amazing."

Speaking of repetition, a close look at the Beasties' work might suggest they were

in turn influenced by another famous Glaswegian, architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, whose 150th birthday is being celebrated this year.

Mackintosh — along with his wife, Margaret MacDonald Mackintosh — was a leading figure in the late 19th century Glasgow School movement, one heavily influenced by Art Nouveau and its distinctive features — elongated curving lines and plant, bird, and tree of life motifs.

The same sweeping lines, confidence with scale, and the exquisite rendering of nature is evident in Timorous Beast-

ies' work. And it's all soaked in glorious colour.

Another reliable predictor of trends is current events. A royal wedding, for example, has a high probability of spurring an uptick in crown motifs, such as Graham & Brown's [www.grahambrown.com](http://www.grahambrown.com) Royal Corsage wallpaper, which is adorned with hand-painted pink peonies (Meghan Markle's favorite flower) and metallic crowns and coronets.

In the past, the event may have also been depicted in toile — a fabric decorated with complex scenes that became increasingly popular in the latter half of the 1700's when textile merchant Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf began printing it at a factory just outside Paris.

Patterns were often influenced by topical issues. According to *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* by David Garrioch, Oberkampf began, for example, including potato flower motifs at around the same time military pharmacist and scholar Antoine Augustin Parmentier launched a campaign to promote the potato to the French as a nutritious, inexpensive food, starting a trend that clearly stuck.

Toiles, and their distant cousin, graffiti, have also been reinterpreted by the Timorous Beasties. What was remarkable about historical toiles is

"that they depicted real social issues: wars, commemorative stuff — it all actually happened," says McAuley.

"When we chose to depict Glasgow in toile, there was criticism that we showed goths and junkies and cheap housing. But they existed, right outside our studio. Real

life was the inspiration."

— Vicky Sanderson is the editor of *Around the House* ([www.aroundthehouse.ca](http://www.aroundthehouse.ca)). Follow her on Instagram @ [athwithvicky](https://www.instagram.com/athwithvicky), on Twitter @ [ATHwithVicky](https://twitter.com/ATHwithVicky) and on FB at [www.facebook.com/ATHWithVicky](https://www.facebook.com/ATHWithVicky).



Large panels show off design to the fullest at Timorous Beasties' Glasgow studio.



Timorous Beasties exuberant designs include Cascade (wallpaper shown here in Lacquer Red) with a Tree of Life 'toile' print on the loveseat.



A moody blue background makes florals crisp and fresh. (Urban Barn.)



Graham & Brown's Royal Corsage channels regal themes.