

by James Eden



London-based textiles designer Clara Vuletich has taken the art of bespoke wallpaper design in a fresh new direction. Her experimental, hand-printed arrangements combine botanical patterns with early twentieth century references to striking effect. Drawing upon a wealth of inspirational sources, from Kew Gardens to junk shop collecting and antique books, Clara's designs are the product of an eclectic creative background and a uniquely intuitive approach.

clara vuletich

from airwaves to wallpapers

An education in broadcasting may be an unusual beginning for a professional textile designer, but it was this media production training that brought Australian-born Clara Vuletich to London and a position in film production. Although she worked in a variety of uninspiring odd jobs, during her lunch breaks she would explore the art galleries, museums and the offbeat shops of London's West End.

"One day I stumbled across a fashion boutique that I'd read about in *Time Out* magazine. I had to knock on the door and wait for them to let me up—it was very exclusive." Serendipitously, the owner was an Australian woman who gave Clara a job.

Clara became immersed in the fashion industry as an assistant buyer for two years. It was a whole new adventure: attending fashion shows and scouting for new talent brought her closer to unearthing her own creative talents. "I had a lot of students coming to show me their portfolios and all I was thinking was: I want to be doing what you're

doing. I wanted to be more involved in the creative design, I didn't want to be on the buying and retail side."

By age 28, Clara was determined to follow her own creative path and so she decided to pursue an education in printed textiles at the Chelsea College of Art. In her third and final year, her teacher, renowned textile designer Rebecca Earley, sparked Clara's enthusiasm for ecologically responsible textiles. Clara's final dissertation on theoretical sustainable textiles secured her a position as her mentor's research assistant.

The Textiles Environment Design (TED) project at Chelsea College develops ways for designers to reduce the ecological impact of textile production through conscientious use of colour, sourcing sustainable substrates as well as recycling materials whenever possible. Methods for upcycling materials are of particular interest. "With recycling you downgrade the weave of the material when you reuse it," Clara explains. "Upcycling is making something more valuable when you reuse it... we need to rethink

the way product designers and architects make things." This philosophy has impacted Clara's work in textiles and informs her innovative approach to wallpaper design.

Her design education offered valuable training. "You have to learn a craft skill; so I did screen printing and my colleagues learned how to knit, either by hand or using a machine, and if you're a weaver you'd learn how to weave on a loom. This sort of training is so important because it gives you many opportunities to develop your own sensibility. It forces you to become a maker." This hands-on work ethic and desire to experiment is evident in her designs.

inspiration & process

From the random vernacular of items found in thrift shops to the expertise of the master of pattern, William Morris, Clara can find inspiration. "I buy lots of old junk. I love the old patterns and materials and I've built a very big collection of vintage textiles. ... I love looking at old historic buildings; like some cottage on a Scandinavian island or a beautiful old country house. So I do soak up a lot of historic influences, but I never like to think that I'm just re-hashing the old—I'm always looking at ways to make things more modern and contemporary."

"I'm not someone who sketches obsessively at all. I read a lot of books so I'd say I'm more of a researcher." Clara references the rich history of botanical pattern in textiles while incorporating her personal interpretations. For example, some wallpaper and surface design was inspired by a vine at Kew Gardens. She describes her inspiration, "Climbing up against a glass wall and lit from behind, the



leafy structure made an amazing silhouette." With a loose ink wash over lining paper and a tactile screenprinted pattern resembling a rustic monoprint, the pattern weaves up to the ceiling with an awkward grace. This broken visual rhythm holds as many human qualities of error and instinct as it does botanical influence.

tradition & experimentation

The thing that sets Clara's designs apart from most traditional wallpapers of the last century is the lack of a repeat pattern. The individual lengths, although usually comprising the same elements, do not match up at the edges. Before the days of mass production of uniform patterns, wallpaper was printed onto silk or other fabric and the complete image, usually a landscape, was backed onto paper. Clara's work starts with an entire image, often eschewing a matching system altogether with randomly and intuitively applied patterns printed in the workshop or created in situ with inked wood blocks.

With her innovative working process, the finished products transcend the readily available source materials. Ink washes provide a warm, organic and unpredictable background upon which she screenprints a pattern design. For added texture, extra layers of torn paper may be applied. A thin clear coating is just enough to protect the surface while still preserving the handmade qualities of the artwork and keeping the texture quite raw.

For the past year Clara has shared a workspace at an arts and crafts centre. Holding classes for a growing number of amateur craftspeople in London, The Papered Parlour also acts as a studio space where she is establishing a textiles collective with two of her colleagues. "It's not really official as yet, it's just a loose grouping of textile designers who are all doing interiors. I do wallpaper, one does chairs and somebody else does curtains and other things so we can share our work as a whole room setting." Keep an eye out for Clara's creative textiles and her work with the collaborative; the group plans to exhibit at a London trade show this September. 



claravuletich.com
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