

Trends in Wallcovering

From the extravagant to the aromatic, there is nothing you can't stick to a wall

By Emily Howard

Another year has passed, and wallcovering manufacturers have come through with new and exciting product features and benefits. As in all industries, there has been no hiding from the economic nosedive over the last year, but the good news is that those homeowners who are less affected by the economy are becoming more interested in wallcovering. And it's no wonder as consumers discover the materials and techniques that have come to the surface over the last decade.

Today's wallcovering is not what you found in your grandma's dining room. "The overall decrease in wallpaper sales was due to the new generation of consumers who didn't want 'their parents' prints, e.g., monotonous little designs, washed-out tone on tones, English style throwback themes. What have gradually taken over are new mediums and reworked processes," says Anthony Stone, owner of Anthony Stone Designs. This generation of wallcoverings includes a plethora of creatively manufactured materials. From grandiose glass bead and crystal to the laid back el natural bamboo and grass weaves, there is virtually no material that cannot be artistically installed to please any homeowner's desired look.

Who are the newcomers to the wallcovering bandwagon? "This new generation, the twentysomethings of today, are starting to like wallcovering, and they have disposable income," says David DiBacco, owner of Artistic Designs in Rochester, N.Y., and national vice president of the National Guild of Professional Paperhangers (NGPP). DiBacco isn't the only one in the market who has seen an influx of younger homeowners flocking toward wallcovering. "As an installer I've been impressed recently with the interest shown by younger people in wallcoverings. That trend has been helped, in my opinion, by



Photo courtesy of The Paint, www.thepaintdesign.com.



the use of dramatic materials on popular TV shows," says Phil Reinhard, owner of Reinhard Wallcovering in Atlantic City, N.J. As HGTV and tons of reality decorating shows entering prime-time television feature unique papers and wallcoverings, the younger generations have stopped seeing tea roses and old-fashioned prints and instead see beautiful and interesting environments. "This renewed interest is the best news in the business, for without youthful interest, no industry can survive, let alone flourish," says Reinhard.

So reality television and the millennial generation are migrating toward the new wallcoverings of today. What exactly are they buying? Here are some of the innovative materials flying onto residential and commercial walls across the U.S.

DIGITAL WALLCOVERING

"Commercial projects, especially retail spaces, are using digital graphics to create unique and distinct buying environ-

ments," says Reinhard. Wallcovering continues to grow as a popular alternative to hand-painted murals. Both end users and muralists are seeing the benefits of the medium, as it decreases the price of a large job and allows muralists to produce their art on a larger scale for masses of clients. "The ease of changing a properly installed digital wallcovering makes it possible to redecorate in a dramatic fashion, changing the entire atmosphere of a store, which creates a benefit for a store's visual display department. Some stores change these graphics on a regular cycle, keeping the store current and interesting for its clients," says Reinhard.

BACK TO NATURE

Nature still has a firm grasp on residential paint colors and wallcovering. With "green" moving into every aspect of the business, the outdoors is coming in. "From the beginning of the manufacturing process to the adhesives, installations,

removal and disposal, there is a real environmental consciousness from both the commercial design and the residential market," DiBacco. Among the natural fibers available in wallcovering are arrowroot, bamboo, cattail, paper weaves, grass weaves and stone.

UNIQUE WALLCOVERINGS

Some of the wilder wallcoverings we've seen include crystal, holographic, 3-D, scratch-and-sniff and even light-emitting wallpaper. "Specialty materials, such as glass-beaded wallcovering, gold and silver leaf, woods, and other similar goods, seem to be gaining interest with designers, as is mixing wallcoverings in a room or even on a single wall," says Reinhard.

Reinhard recently completed a job that consisted of panels in different colors of a textured paper being used to create stripes around a room. The panels were balanced along the walls so that, even though each wall section had different sized stripes,

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there was an illusion of perfectly equal-sized stripes around the room.

Not only are the materials changing, but manufacturers are offering nonpanel options as well. "One trend that we have seen is that consumers are looking for a high-end, one-of-a-kind look with a simplified installation. We have found that installers love the fact that they can put the paper up in pieces rather than panels, and that enables them to leave their own artistic touch at every job," says Jennifer Adkisson for Vahallan Papers.

TECHNIQUES FOR THE NEW AGE OF WALLCOVERING

With all these new, exciting materials on the market, you might be wondering how you can get a piece of the pie. Strangely enough, technique might be both the major driver and hindrance for contractors in this market. Because the materials are new, there are new techniques and skills that should be learned. "There are materials that have never been used in wallcovering being used, and that means that new techniques need to be devel-

oped. People who are skilled in carpentry are getting to use those skills in wallcovering," says DiBacco. In addition to learning these skills through various workshops and practice, manufacturers are also becoming more involved in training qualified installers for their products. "NGPP has been working to partner with manufacturers

Photo courtesy of Thibaut, www.thibautdesign.com



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ly installed. "There is less of the 'anybody can do it' mentality out there because you might be able to get the material to stick to the wall but there is more to wallcovering than just having it stick," says DiBacco. "There is an aesthetic side that, without some experience and attention, you'll get it to stick but it won't look that great." If you have the skill set, there is a market out there for you.

In the end, the experts agree about actions that contractors should take to stay competitive in the changing wallcovering

market. "The survivors, both in the supply and installation facets of the industry, will be those who keep abreast of the new trends, respond quickly and place themselves in a position to take advantage of each new opportunity," says Reinhardt. DiBacco's advice: "If you think it is going to stay the same and you don't need to take the time to pay attention and educate yourself, then you will miss the boat." **APC**

However, because these materials require a more refined skill set, homeowners are less likely to try the DIY approach, and instead they hire a professional in order to have the wallcovering proper-

ly installed. "There is less of the 'anybody can do it' mentality out there because you might be able to get the material to stick to the wall but there is more to wallcovering than just having it stick," says DiBacco. "There is an aesthetic side that, without some experience and attention, you'll get it to stick but it won't look that great." If you have the skill set, there is a market out there for you.

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Emily Howard is the editor of American Painting Contractor. She can be reached at ehoward@briefingsmediagroup.com.