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WALLPAPER

Creative uses for a 20th-century classic

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF VENDORS

From the pastel floral prints of the 1950s to the geometric patterns and the faux-country aesthetic of the '80s and '90s, wallpaper has seen its share of changing trends. Now, it's experiencing another transformation.

Wallpaper dates to the Renaissance, when it was created as an affordable wall covering alternative to tapestries and woven fabrics. Throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, wallpaper patterns were block-printed and colored by hand. By the mid-1800s, machines made wallpaper easier and less expensive to produce, and in the 1950s, pre-pasted wallpaper was invented.

Although wallpaper's popularity waned during the late '90s and 2000s as design trends veered toward more streamlined decor, it's now back with a fresh look.

"People are using wallpaper in more interesting ways," says April Force Pardoe, owner and interior designer at AFP Interiors in Elkridge. Going beyond the typical four walls, Pardoe says that wallpaper can be used to line the backs of bookshelves or to designate an accent wall.

Her clients often request geometric shapes and metallic prints, but Pardoe says creating a custom pattern is also an option (try designyourwall.com or spoonflower.com). For those favoring an understated route, Pardoe suggests textured wallpaper, which comes in a neutral color and can be hung and painted or left as is. "Wallpaper doesn't have to be bold or bright," Pardoe says. "It can be subtle. It's a neat way to personalize a space."

1 Blue birds print, \$42 per roll

With the rest of the room decorated in a neutral palette, this off-white wallpaper from Laura Ashley's Casual Country collection takes center stage but doesn't feel overwhelming. lauraashley.com.

2 Feuille print, \$225 per roll

Farrow & Ball used this jacquard-inspired pattern to line the back of a bookshelf, creating an eye-catching piece. farrow-ball.com.

3 Eden print, \$30 per roll

Pardoe painted Graham & Brown's textured leaf print wallpaper with Amazing Gray (7044) by Sherwin Williams for a neutral, versatile look. grahambrown.com.