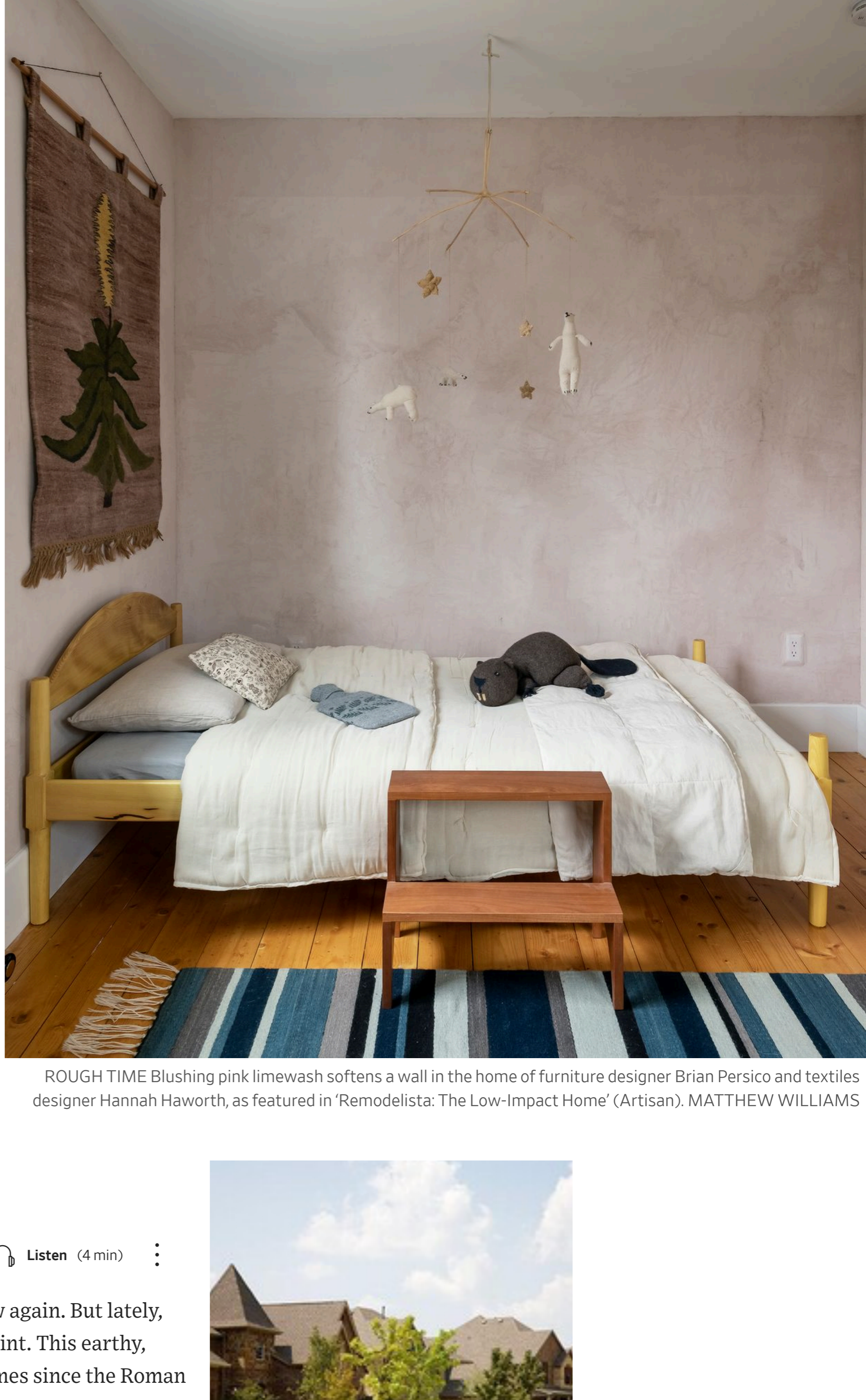


DESIGN

The Specialty Wall Treatment That Just Got Way Easier

Limewash paint gives boring surfaces a mottled, chalky texture with loads of personality. And with new user-friendly mixes, you needn't hire a decorative finisher.



ROUGH TIME Blushing pink limewash softens a wall in the home of furniture designer Brian Persico and textiles designer Hannah Harworth, as featured in 'Remodelista: The Low-Impact Home' (Artisan). MATTHEW WILLIAMS

By [Sarah Karnasiewicz](#) [Follow](#)

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IN INTERIORS as in fashion, eventually everything old is new again. But lately, we've noticed a truly ancient material trending: limewash paint. This earthy, mottled wall finish with a chalky texture has embellished homes since the Roman empire. Even more remarkable: Its components—a toxin-free combination of burnt crushed limestone, water and natural pigment—have remained essentially unaltered.

Though Europe has long welcomed limewash, until recently, relatively few Americans had made its acquaintance, except as a semi-obscure, specialty technique. That's changing as international concerns like Dutch brand Pure & Original and Australia's Bauwerk Colour expand distribution, and upstart U.S. makers such as Portola Paints & Glazes, Color Atelier, JH Wall Paints and James Alexander Specialty Paints bring ready-made lime paints to market.

"When we started out, you'd hire a decorative painter to do limewash," explained Mary Graham of London design firm Salvesen Graham, "but that's definitely shifting." Ms. Graham, who often works on historic homes with partner Nicole Salvesen, added that the uneven, painterly look—achieved with a large, coarse, natural-bristled brush and applying thin layers in sweeping strokes—can particularly suit older dwellings. As Ms. Salvesen put it, "When you're dealing with a room that has wobbly walls, there's something to be said for leaning into the beauty of irregularity."



Chicago designer Caroline Turner gave a dining room in Highland Park, Ill., moody texture with custom limewash paint from JH Wall Paints. PHOTO: AIMEE MAZZENGA

Still, she added, don't pigeonhole limewash, noting it can work equally well in newer spaces. In a modern London townhouse, for instance, the firm recently introduced a soft backdrop of Bauwerk's Stone paint as a foil for the home's harder, more contemporary details.

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Our craving for soothing spaces, seemingly intensified by the pandemic, might also explain why limewash has taken off. "We've been seeing [homeowners] return to warmer tones in design and a desire for more of a lived-in, comfortable feel," said Lindye Galloway, a designer in Orange County, Calif.

Limewash evokes ancient Italian frescoes and sun-kissed Greek villas where generations of children have nibbled spanakopita. When dealing with a nondescript builder-grade space, that old-world effect can serve as a handy "historic" shortcut, says Alyssa Longobucco of the Hudson Valley, N.Y., firm Studio Botts. The designer recently chose Portola's limewash, in a dusky khaki called Dune Shack, to cocoon a newly built powder room. "Because it was an addition, it didn't feel as lived-in as the rest of the home," she explained. "But now it's like a little velvet jewel box."



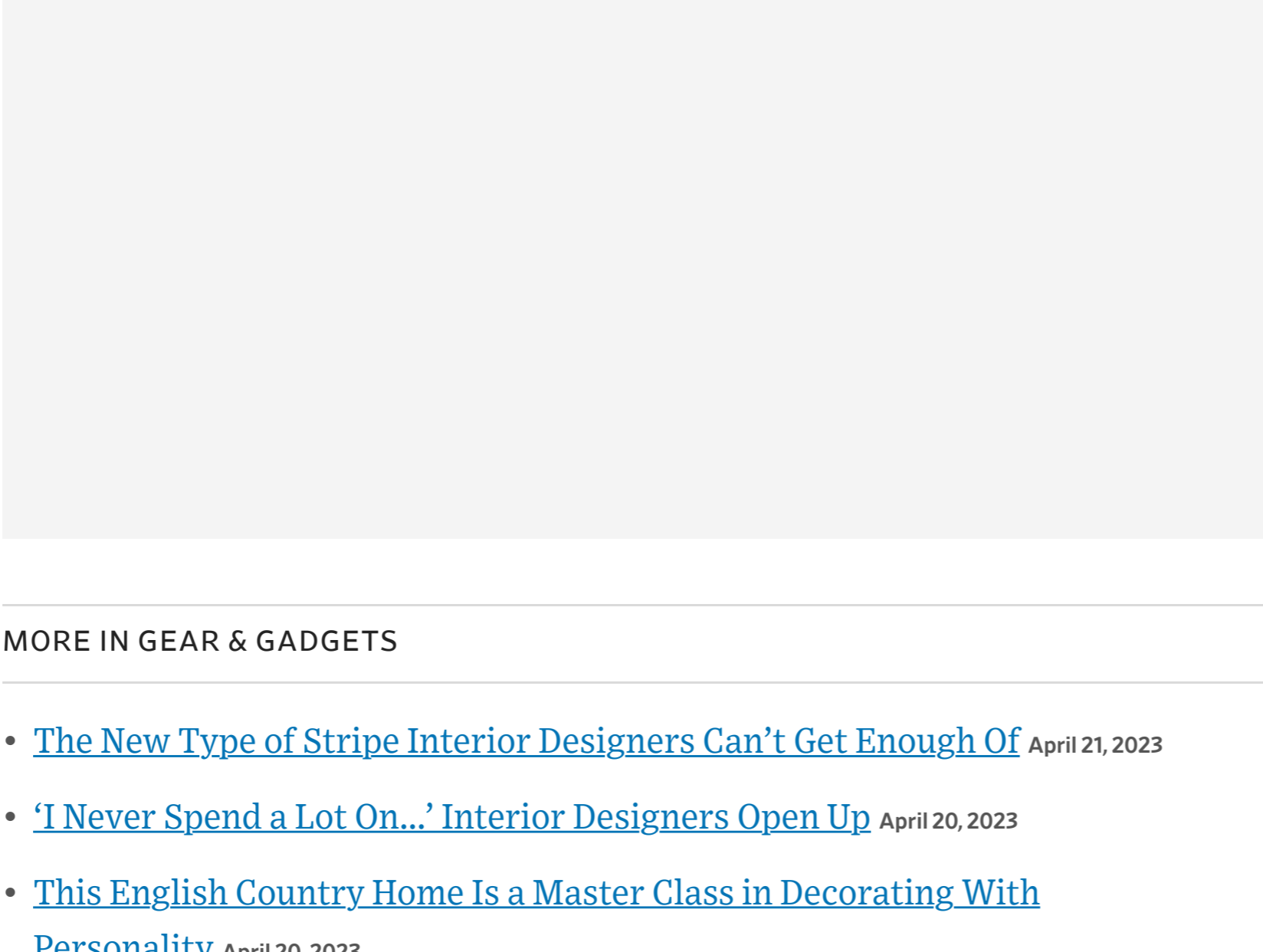
Hudson Valley, N.Y., designer Alyssa Longobucco used a Portola limewash to lend a newly-added powder room old world charm. PHOTO: ALYSSA LONGOBUCCO

Other benefits extend beyond aesthetics. Unlike most conventional interior paints that are stabilized with oil-based or plastic binders, limewash's mineral and water formula is nontoxic and free of polluting volatile organic compounds (VOCs)—which makes it especially appealing for kids' rooms, says Ms. Graham. And thanks to limestone's high alkalinity, limewashed walls naturally resist nasties like mold and bacteria.

Premixed lime paints have made the technique more accessible to amateurs. Just scroll Instagram for evidence. "This is totally a weekend warrior project," said Ms. Longobucco. "Imperfection is the whole point, so it's hard to mess up."

Beyond that, adds Ms. Longobucco, there's only one pitfall to avoid: loading too much rustic furniture and accessories into your newly rustic room, which "can veer into cosplay," she cautioned. "Limewash should feel like a whisper."

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