

# 8 Simple ways to master upholstery with WOOL

*Warm, natural and sustainable, choose wool upholstery fabrics for the ultimate feel-good furniture. **MAGGIE STEVENSON** tells us how to use wool alongside antique and vintage pieces*

## 1 COMFORT ZONE

We love to curl up when it's cold outside, but a wool-covered chair can look just as good in a summery room when you choose the right fabric. 'There is an abundance of fantastic colours and patterns,' says Martin Aveyard of luxury wool fabric manufacturer, Moon, 'and tonal hues can adapt to the ever-changing moods of interiors.' Consider texture as well as colour, opting for bouclé, waffle or decorative weaves to give plain colours an added dimension.

Chair upholstered in 'Parquet' in turquoise; curtain, 'Parquet' in silver, 100 per cent pure new wool, £49.95 per m, Moon





**2 SOFT TOUCH**  
Linen and velvet are popular cover choices for bedroom furniture, but if you want a relaxed country look, consider wool as an alternative. 'Warm, cosy and textural, from both an aesthetic and practical point of view, wool is the perfect upholstery fabric for beds and headboards,' says David Collinge of British fabric company, Ian Mankin. Sharing the same natural credentials,

rustic tweeds team well with pure cotton bed linen and, woven in a range of heathery colours inspired by the landscape and familiar checked and striped designs, they make a great starting point for a traditional scheme. Contrast can be added in a variety of ways: for texture, introduce knitted cushions and throws or velvet cushions in jewel-bright colours; and for pattern, add cushions and blinds in printed linens.



Headboard is covered in 'Stanley Grey', throw in 'Gisburn Grey' and cushions in 'Ripon', 'Sutton' and 'Malham' wool, all £49.50 per m, 'Ashfield' collection, Ian Mankin



**3 A RICH MIX**  
 In the 18th century, upholsterers eked out precious furnishing fabrics by covering the inner surfaces of a chair or sofa with the best cloth and using cheaper materials for the less visible back and outer arms. Now, a well-shaped occasional chair is more likely to be covered in contrasting fabrics to make it a striking statement piece. Mixing plain, check or patterned wools can give striking results but Wendy Shorter, director of training at the Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers advises: 'If you're using different fabrics on the same piece, make sure they are a similar weight, particularly if you have to seam them together'.

A combination of wool and leather gives a traditional armchair a masculine look. 'St Kilda' armchair in Harris Tweed 'Peat Herringbone' with leather arms and piping, from £1,298, Sofas & Stuff

## 4 BENCH WORK

A surprisingly versatile piece of furniture, an upholstered stool is a valuable addition to any living room. Use it for extra seating, as a smart coffee table or just as a place to rest your feet.

Stools come in all shapes and sizes, each with its own merits. Bought as a pair, small stools can be used individually as soft side tables or moved together when a larger surface is needed. Long stools can be placed in front of the hearth in the living room, used as a bench in the hallway or at the foot of the bed as a handy place to put books or a breakfast tray. As the focus of a seating group, a large square or rectangular stool unites the surrounding furniture. Cover it in a shade of fabric to match the furniture if you want a quiet, understated look or opt for a brighter tone to draw the eye to the centre of the room.

Wool upholstery gives any room a naturally luxurious feel and is hard-wearing too. Depending on the look you desire, wool is available in a wide range of textures from felted and tweed styles to silky and smooth finishes. 'We've chosen wool that combines durability with a soft handle,' says Rebecca Maylon, head of design and product development at Neptune. 'After two years, my woollen footstool looks as good as new. It's even survived a puppy!'



A long, low footstool makes a handy and good-looking seat for a hallway. 'Arthur' stool in 'Elliot' wool, £420, Neptune



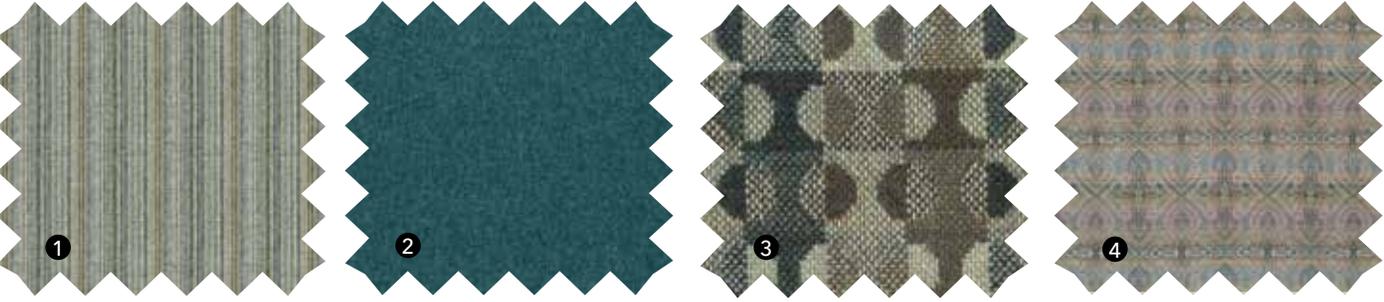
# 5 RESTORED TO GLORY

Upholsterer Stephanie Leclere of Kiki Voltaire has a talent for restoring and reinventing vintage furniture and she loves to work with wool. 'I prefer natural materials. They feel more comfortable and take on a patina as they age that goes well with antique furniture,' she says. Her preference is for British wool and British-made cloth. 'I like to support home industry. It has a long history and *savoir faire*. British-made wool is good value and although not easy to find in retail shops, boutique upholsterers know where to get it.'



A vintage chair, restored and re-covered, is ready to provide many more years of comfort. Green wool 'Retro' armchair, £795, Florrie & Bill

## EIGHT OF THE BEST woollen upholstery fabrics



1 'New England Wool Stripe' in 'Wedgewood', 100 per cent wool, £46.90 per m, Art of the Loom 2 'Barathea' in 'Sapphire', 80 per cent wool, 20 per cent polyamide, £65 per m, Designers Guild 3 'Luna' in 'Aqua', 100 per cent wool, £100 per m, Melin Tregwynt 4 'Boisdale' in colourway '02', 87 per cent wool, 13 per cent linen, £123 per m, 'Kinloch' collection, Osborne & Little



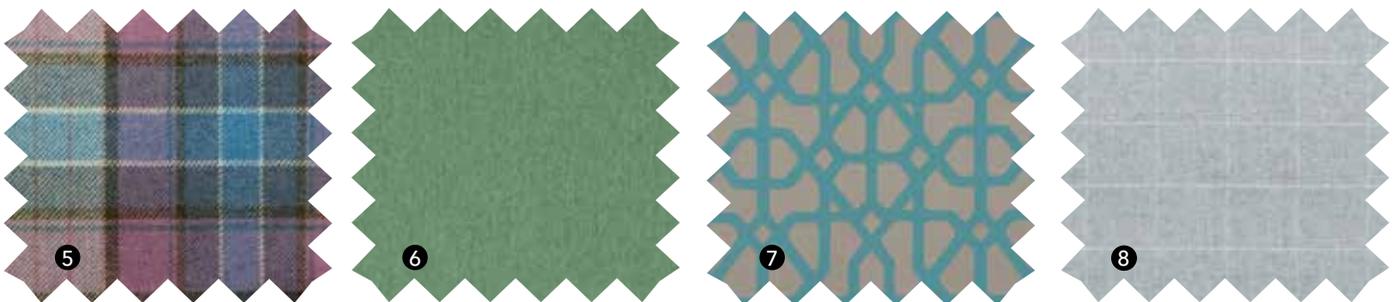
Cover seating in coordinating fabrics for a more individual look. 'Stratford' sofa by Kingcome in 'Erskine Plaid' 100 per cent wool, £98 per m. Bespoke chairs by Kingcome. Chair in background covered in 'Sinclair' 75 per cent wool, 25 per cent cotton, £98 per m; chair in foreground is in 'Merrick' cotton/linen mix, £77 per m. All fabrics, Colefax & Fowler

## 6 MADE TO MEASURE

Finding the right chair or sofa takes time and a lot of legwork. Non-standard sizing makes it hard to compare similar styles from different manufacturers and each offers their own selection of cover fabrics. Many suppliers now provide a customised service covering furniture in your own choice of fabric and with alternative cushion fillings. But if you want to adjust the size of the furniture because you'd find a deeper seat, lower arm or higher back more comfortable, specialist companies like The Odd Chair Company, George Smith or Kingcome, who offer bespoke services can help. Variations to the design of the cover gives furniture an individual look. 'The permutations are endless', says Frank Phipps, design director for Kingcome. 'An interior designer might request the use of different fabrics for the inside and outside faces of the chair or sofa, contrast piping, decorative nail detailing or cord and bullion fringes. Deep buttoning is very much in favour at the moment.'

Fully bespoke furniture, made to complete a matching set of chairs, copy an antique or bring to life an idea of your own, can be produced by smaller, independent upholsterers. Find them via the Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers website, which lists members and the services they provide.

Choose this season's freshest new palette of hazy blues and soft greens



5 'Iona' in 'Juniper', 100 per cent merino wool, £75 per m, 'Highlands' collection, Voyage 6 'Lana' in 'Shamrock', 70 per cent wool, 5 per cent acrylic, 20 per cent polyester, 5 per cent nylon, £39.90 per m, Linwood 7 'Mazara' in 'Viridian', 59 per cent wool, 41 per cent cotton, £79.50 per m, 'Dauphine' collection, Romo 8 'Herringbone Tweed' in 'Duck Egg/Ivory Check', 100 per cent wool, £64 per m, Susie Watson Designs



## 7 THE CASE FOR HOMESPUN WOOL

Warm, resilient, flameproof and easy to dye in wonderful colours, wool is uniquely suited to home furnishings. Fabrics and accessories labelled 'British Wool' are made from the fleece of British sheep reared in the UK. 'It is the strongest natural wool in the world,' says Bridgette Kelly, interior textiles director for the Campaign for Wool, 'and it is taken from a number of British breeds that produce fibre in a range of textures and colours'. A popular choice for floor coverings, British wool is also woven exclusively

or blended with imported wools and other fibres to make furnishing fabrics. Wool fabrics are woven throughout the UK but different areas have their own historic traditions, with Yorkshire mills known for flannels and finer cloths, Wales for double cloths and Scotland for plaids and tweeds. Probably the most famous is Harris Tweed, with a worldwide reputation as a clothing material but has latterly become popular as an upholstery cloth, too. Spun, dyed and handwoven in the Scottish Western Isles from 100 per cent virgin wool, the certified cloth carries the Orb Mark to denote authenticity.



## 8 SOFT CENTRE

Traditional upholstery is built on an inner core of metal springs which ensures that chairs, sofas and beds are supportive and resilient. This is overlaid with layers of padding materials to cushion the metal coils and provide a smooth base for the cover fabric. Natural padding materials include vegetable fibres such as coir and cotton and products of animal origin such as horsehair and wool. Alistair Hughes of Savoir Beds values wool fillings. 'We use English lambswool as a top layer in our mattresses because it is soft and a great temperature regulator,' a quality that helps sleepers stay comfortable, whatever the weather.

When it comes to seating, wool is used in the form of thick felt made from recycled materials. 'A very long-lasting padding, the felt has a high wool content making it inherently flame-retardant,' says Karen Roach of Wesley-Barrell. Placed over the springy horse- or hog-hair filling, it gives another layer of comfort and prevents coarse fibres making their way through to the surface. A final layer of soft cotton batting ensures the top is perfectly smooth before the cover is applied.



ABOVE Woolen felt padding adds comfort, as well as cushioning the springs and the frame's hard edges to protect the cover fabric from excess wear  
BELOW Horse tail hair, curled to give it more bounce, is teased out over the springs to give a resilient base for the top layer of soft lambswool



ABOVE LEFT 'Calmsden' sofa in 'Tweed Sea', from £1,827; cushions in 'Tweed Grass', £68 per m; 'Wild & Free' linen in 'Damask Brick', £48 per m; 'Acorn & Leaf Duck Egg' linen/cotton, £46 per m, all Vanessa Arbuthnott ABOVE 'Laird' dining chairs in a choice of eight 100 per cent wool tweed fabrics, £319 each, Barker & Stonehouse



# 6 of the best WOOLLEN FURNISHINGS

*A montage of antique and modern pieces that are warm to the touch*



1 'Mistral' footstool in 'Boucle wool Olive', £645, Heal's 2 'Arles' double bed in 'Skye Wool Check', £1,044, Sofas & Stuff 3 'Mitsu' lambswool throw, £295, Margo Selby 4 'Tetrad Harris Tweed' for John Lewis 'Gleneagles' snuggler, £1,649 5 Vintage 'French Bridge' chair in Moon wool felt, £790 for a pair, Kiki Voltaire 6 'Nude on a Terrace' Victorian chaise longue reupholstered using 'Melrose' green wool by Bute Fabrics, 'Colline' patterned wool by Kvadrat and green metallic velvet, £8,650, Urban Upholstery

## STOCKISTS

- \* Art of the Loom 01200 427744; artoftheloom.co.uk
- \* Barker & Stonehouse 0333 355 9392; barkerandstonehouse.co.uk
- \* Bute Fabrics 01700 503734; butefabrics.com
- \* Colefax & Fowler 020 7244 7427; colefax.com
- \* Designers Guild 020 7351 5775; designersguild.com
- \* Florrie & Bill 07710 089234; florrieandbill.com
- \* George Smith 020 7384 1004; georgesmith.co.uk
- \* Heal's 020 7896 7451; heals.com
- \* Ian Mankin 020 7722 0997; ianmankin.co.uk
- \* John Lewis 0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com
- \* Kiki Voltaire 07946 618907; kikivoltaire.com
- \* Kingcome Sofas 020 7244 7747; kingcomesofas.co.uk
- \* Linwood 01425 461176; linwoodfabric.com
- \* Margo Selby 01227 282758; margoselby.com
- \* Mellin Tregwynt 01348 891644; melintregwynt.co.uk
- \* Moon 01943 873181; moons.co.uk
- \* Neptune 01793 427450; neptune.com
- \* Osborne & Little 020 8812 3123; osborneandlittle.com
- \* Romo 01623 756699; romo.com
- \* Savoir Beds 020 8838 4838; savoirbeds.co.uk
- \* Sofas & Stuff 0808 178 3211; sofasandstuff.com
- \* Susie Watson 0844 980 8185; susiewatsondesigns.co.uk
- \* The Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers 01494 569120; upholsterers.co.uk
- \* The Harris Tweed Authority 01851 702269; harristweed.org
- \* The Odd Chair Company 01772 691777; theoddchaircompany.com
- \* Urban Upholstery 020 7275 9436; urbanupholstery.com
- \* Vanessa Arbuthnott 01285 831437; vanessaarbuthnott.co.uk
- \* Voyage 0141 641 1700; voyagedecoration.com
- \* Wesley-Barrell 01993 893111; wesley-barrell.co.uk

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### BRITISH WOOL

The British Wool Marketing Board is owned by over 45,000 sheep farmers in the UK and sells quality British Wool all over the world. Naturally robust, British-grown wool is an excellent choice for flooring and interior fabrics, and provides lasting good appearance to home furnishings. For more information, visit [britishwool.org.uk](http://britishwool.org.uk)