



DOMINO EFFECT

How Antoinette Poisson revived old wallpaper techniques

Stepping into Antoinette Poisson's studio in Paris, you feel a serene and cosy atmosphere. In the foyer, the scenic wallpaper offers a warm background for a newly upholstered antique sofa, folding screens and tastefully arranged printed cushions. The soft colour palette and the brand's signature patterns highlight the exquisite elegance of domino papers, a virtually forgotten decorative art until this budding atelier took the chance to revive the legacy of the French Dominotiers. Before wallpaper could be produced in continuous rolls, single sheets called "dominos" were printed and coloured by hand. These decorated papers reached their heyday in the 18th century and were typically used for lining chests, boxes and books, occasionally adorning the walls of intimate rooms.

Julie Stordiau, Jean-Baptiste Martin and Vincent Farelly were studying paper conservation when they met in Paris. They bonded over their mutual interest in antique papers, and after graduating in 2006 they went to work as freelance restorers, often collaborating on conservation projects across Europe. In 2011, they gathered to restore a state owned mansion in the Auvergne region where the 18th century domino wallpaper was in very poor condition and had to be reproduced. "We'd seen domino paper scraps before, usually as book endpapers or lining the backs of picture frames, but it was the first time we actually had to treat a whole room. We suddenly realized it was a vanishing craft when we failed to find an artisan who could reproduce the dominos from the original

documents for us. Since we had the skills and knowledge, we agreed we would do it ourselves," explains Julie Stordiau. When this challenging project was completed, they couldn't help but admire the striking effect of pattern repeats revealed by the 250 sheets pasted together. Their enthusiasm prompted them to join forces to launch their own firm, named after the Marquise de Pompadour, born Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson and widely known as patron of the arts and mistress to King Louis XV.

Although they do maintain a conservation department, their focus has clearly shifted toward interior design and home accessories. "Art conservation is mainly about chemistry and we all felt the need to be truly creative. We've always had a great interest in wallpaper and we love the idea of showing the lesser-known, not so opulent 18th century styles," says Julie Stordiau.

They began by reissuing a series of motifs that lined devotional shadow-boxes dating from the 18th century and originally made by nuns, for the New National Museum of Monaco. Their current portfolio includes these reproductions, but the busy designers have since created their own motifs and exclusive colours, drawing inspiration from 18th century arts. "We compiled an exhaustive list of the existing colours during the Enlightenment period; we scrutinized paintings, decorative arts, even fashion before we established our own colour palette. Our collection reflects 18th century arts and styles, but we've adapted the materials to our ▶





production process. Practical and technical issues such as colour fastness or paper permanence and light fastness were addressed very early on. Single sheets measure approximately 42 x 32cm each, and are actually easier to hang than wallpaper rolls. Large floral motifs can create spectacular effects when they are joined together and each colourway brings a different mood to the room," says Julie Stordiau. The new dominos are hand-printed on smooth handmade paper or high quality linens, offering a wide range of decorative possibilities. They are now routinely used as wallpaper, but may equally embellish notebooks, stationery, linen cushions or lampshades. But the latest fad is to frame the elegant, eye-catching dominos and display them as works of art.

Domino papers have such a unique and tactile finish, people often wonder whether it is in fact paper or fabric. Finding the perfect laid paper took some digging too. They turned to Master Papermaker Jacques Brejoux at the Moulin du Verger established near Angouleme, whom they knew from their college years. "We solely use rag paper made from old linen and hemp sheets that have been ripped into pieces, then turned into pulp slurry in a pile à maillet beater that dates back to the 19th century," explains Julie Stordiau.

The paper sheets (or linens) are hand-printed one by one in the studio, using the traditional relief printing technique. Few tools and materials are required besides the printer's own skill. The matrix (an engraved plate) is first covered with

ink, then the sheet of paper is laid over the inked plate. The beautiful modern engraved blocks are faithful duplicates of the originals, with a cartridge bearing the printer's name along with the place of printing and the pattern's number.

The printing process is done on a hand press, set in motion by pulling the lever. The sheets have been dampened prior to printing and dry over many hours. The colour is then finally applied with stencils, and each colour requires a separate stencil. It seems like repetitive work but every sheet is unique, showing tiny imperfections that come with handcrafted items, making dominos even more appealing as one-off artworks. They are produced on a made-to-order basis to fit specific requirements; regular projects may need only 100 sheets, while more ambitious ones may involve working with up to 800.

The team behind Antoinette Poisson is keen to share this artistry, and have just hosted their debut exhibition last December as part of a collection owned by Valerie Hubert. The team is also collaborating with the emerging Parisian fashion label Sezane by creating beautiful tote bags, and have also recently worked with the luxury beauty brand Diptyque in Paris by designing a domino wallpaper inspired package for the Rosa Mundi Valentine's Day candle that was launched at Diptyque earlier this year. With such a busy, diverse and collaborative portfolio, it seems like their inaugural exhibition is just the starting point of a long and fruitful career. ●●● **Anne Laure Camilleri**

