

HOME DECOR

## 18 Gorgeous Vintage Wallpapers from a Portland Company's Treasure Trove

Bolling & Co.'s stash of early wallpapers reveals the depth, beauty, and intricacy of a long-ignored medium.

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A century-plus-old wallpaper from Bolling & Co.'s collection depicts Renaissance caravels at sea.

**Walk past the blowing antique fans and gooseneck lamps** and up the wooden staircase at Rejuvenation Hardware on SE Grand Ave. Take a left, and enter **Bolling & Company**, where stacks of musty wallpaper catalogs are warmed by the light of low-hanging gas lamps, and a collection of steel doorknobs hangs in a oblong picture frame resembling a scene out of Alice and Wonderland. In the back you will find architectural historian, designer, and wallpaper aficionado **Bo Sullivan** rolling out his freshest scroll.

“The pendulum swings back and forth on the quest for novelty,” says Sullivan. “Wallpaper is on that pendulum. It has made a comeback.”

Sullivan’s love for **wallpaper** began unexpectedly when he bought two boxes of paper from a couple who showed up at the salvage desk at Rejuvenation, where he worked as a historian, in the mid ’90s. When he later shuffled through the papers, he discovered rare designs valued at \$600 to \$3,000 today. Many of the scrolls were made by wallpaper king **M.H. Birge & Sons**, a manufacturer that had its heyday from 1900 to 1920, when wallpaper was a coveted and sophisticated décor.



Sullivan opened his wallpaper gallery in August, and in every available space hang gracefully organized framed clippings of wallpaper that some of his customers use as living room centerpieces. So far, Sullivan has found only six 19th or early 20th Century homes in Portland with full walls of original wallpaper. His gallery is the only one in the country carrying an extensive collection of wallpaper focused on pre-WWII made papers.

Indeed, wallpaper died as a décor between the 1940s and '50s. The invention of drywall and the paint roller introduced a “do it yourself” culture and the rise of minimalistic design.

**“The most important thing about how paper is made today is that it is not the same,”** says Sullivan. “There are only a handful of machines left that still make wallpaper the way it was made before. Even if someone wanted to reproduce these antique papers, it would be cost-prohibitive or impossible.”

From hand-printed and hand-embossed, pieces in Bolling & Co.’s collection look like tooled leather; a few used the painstaking technique of color block printing. Every piece you touch is textured. Some have geometric patterns, and others are metallic illuminating the space surrounding them.

Curious folks stroll into the gallery and search for the wallpaper they remember from their childhood bedrooms. Sullivan retreats to his flat file drawers and bookshelves and locates the nostalgic piece. Ephemeral décor has become an icon of memory.



See 16 more rare finds from Bolling & Co.’s collection in this slideshow:

























