



Wallpaper and Art Nouveau, Création, production, distribution

Room Texts - Current Exhibition

The Arts and Crafts Movement

The aesthetic revival of wallpaper at the end of the 19th Century principally originated in England, mainly thanks to William Morris (1834-1896), the way having, however, been opened by artists such as Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-1852) and Owen Jones (1809-1874). Advocating stylised patterns drawn from the natural world, Morris designed a large number of wallpapers during his career. The first, *Trellis*, designed in 1862, with Philip Webb (1831-1915) who designed the birds, was printed in 1864. Published by Morris and Co. and block printed by the manufacturer Jeffrey & Co., these wallpapers illustrate a stylistic evolution with curvilinear shapes becoming increasingly prevalent, starting in particular with *Acanthus* (1875) and *Pimpernel* (1876). In terms of their use, however, they were unable to live up to the artist's social ideals which advocated art created by the people for the people. Their traditional manufacturing method meant that the price was too high for the lower classes to be able to afford them. Posterity has allowed Morris' wallpapers to enjoy much greater success: having become emblematic of British production they are still being printed a century and a half later by the Sanderson factory.

Wallpaper and Art Nouveau

Creation, production, distribution

Emerging at the start of the 1890s and developing into the early 20th Century, Art Nouveau traces its origins back to the British Arts and Crafts Movement, the rationalist theories of the French architect Viollet-le-Duc and the craze for Japanese art. Aesthetically speaking, Art Nouveau is defined by its rejection of eclecticism, by the natural world, from which it takes its inspiration, and by its use of asymmetric curved lines often referred to as "whiplash" curves. The movement developed in many artistic centres and its distribution was assisted by an increase in the importance of world fairs and international exhibitions as well as the proliferation of artistic magazines. As time passed, the style inclined increasingly towards geometric shapes, particularly in certain centres such as Glasgow, Vienna and those of the German *Jugendstil* movement, although it retained an enduring passion for stylised patterns.

In fact, it is their shared ideals that unify the diverse interpretations of Art Nouveau. Architects and interior designers wanted aesthetic uniformity in their buildings - from the architectural design right down to the tiniest detail of interior décor. They advocated the abolition of artistic hierarchy which subsequently resulted in a considerable revival of the decorative arts and a use of the modern style in all areas of every-day life. Above all, the movement's social agenda confirmed the desire to integrate art into life and the daily routine, in short the desire for an aesthetic which promised to be accessible to everybody. Although these ideas often came up against opposition, wallpaper, an affordable and popular product, satisfied these expectations because it could be incorporated into the interiors of every social class. Although they continued to offer products which took inspiration from the past, wallpaper manufacturers actually succeeded in bringing many Art Nouveau items onto the market.

The British Wallpaper Industry of 1900

Although the social ideals of William Morris, which called for a return to traditional modes of production such as block printing, proved to be utopian, the stylistic revival was rapidly adapted to machine-printed wallpaper. During the 1890s, the stylistic development, which saw an increase in the scale of the patterns and the number of curves, also extended to include a large number of mechanically produced items. At the same time, what are regarded as some of the most outstanding block-printed patterns were also being produced. The number of manufacturers operating in Great Britain around 1900 was considerable. The fruits of their labours brought a huge quantity of wallpaper onto the market, a large proportion of which may be described Art Nouveau.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, mechanical printing made up over 90% of British production. A large proportion of these products were called *sanitary*. These items, which were described as washable, appeared in the early 1870s and were made using counter-relief engraved copper cylinders. They enjoyed considerable success and the technique was used for printing a variety of both high-quality items and more affordable ones. The modern style was used extensively in this context becoming, from then on, very widely available. The period from the 1890s to the beginning of the 1910s was without question the golden age of *sanitaries*. Their use was particularly recommended for areas exposed to dirt, water or frequent use such as kitchens, bathrooms, corridors and staircases; and their properties were also in line with the hygienist ideas of the time.

The British Wallpaper Designers

Following William Morris, many designers took part in the revival of wallpaper in Great Britain. Some major artists of the time became particularly well-known in the field, such as Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), Walter Crane (1845-1915) and Charles Voysey (1857-1921). But many other individuals may be cited as having collaborated with the industry, for example Thomas Ralph Spence (1845-1918), famous in equal measure as painter and architect, and Arthur L. Gwatkin (1858-1947), whose wallpapers with their very vigorous, serpentine lines, are characteristic of the decorative trend of the 1890s. The profusion of modern wallpapers which were brought onto the market also owes a great deal to the work of the Silver Studio in London. Founded in 1880 by Arthur Silver, the studio reached its peak at the turn of the 19th century, supplying manufacturers in various industries with decorative designs.

In the 1890s, wallpapers from British designers also played a role in the development of Art Nouveau in continental Europe. The main exponents of Belgian Art Nouveau, the architects Victor Horta (1861-1947) and Henry van de Velde (1863-1957), for example, used wallpaper by Voysey in some of the layouts which they designed. English products enjoyed great success and, at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900, those presented by Jeffrey & Co., Essex & Co. and Anaglypta attracted particularly attention. Indeed, faced with such enthusiasm, the continental manufacturers did not hesitate to make contact with the British designers. Some of the designs from the studio of Christopher Dresser, for example, were printed by the manufacturers Salubra and Zuber.

French Wallpaper Manufacturers : Provincial

Away from Paris, several large French manufacturers contributed to the production of Art Nouveau wallpaper. Such is true of the Grantil factory which closed its doors in 2013 having been in operation for a century and a half. Its origins in fact date back to 1839 when Damien Grandthille joined the factory of his cousin Nicolas Page in Metz. The business was transferred to Montigny-lès-Metz in 1844 and Damien's brother Michel-Victor Grandthille, took the helm in 1851. Following defeat against the Prussians in 1870, he opted to stay in France, relocating his operations to Châlons-sur-Marne where a new factory was built in 1872. Trading under the simplified version of the family name, Grantil, the factory saw its reputation grow. Like Leroy, the company won a *Grand Prix* at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 in Paris, in other words the highest possible accolade. The wallpapers which it presented, on a particularly elaborate exhibition stand, bore witness to an inspiration drawn largely from the Art Nouveau style, an aesthetic which predominated in its production for several years.

The French wallpaper company known in recent years under the brand name ESSEF, which ceased operations in 2006, apparently traces its origins back to the creation of a wallpaper factory in Moineau, near Mouy in the department of Oise, in 1867. In 1881, its Director, Jules Roger called on investors to secure the construction of a new factory in Balagny-sur-Thérain, also in Oise. Around 1900, the company, directed by G. Veret, was well established in the market and also among those manufacturers making extensive use of Art Nouveau.

Finally, we come to the Zuber factory in Rixheim, which at this time was on German territory although its management was still conducted in French and its accounting still carried out in Francs. Although it continued, in 1900, to print a large number of products in the style of those which had brought it to the height of its fame in the past, it did not hesitate to launch a number of models which were clearly characterised by the modern aesthetic.

French Wallpaper Manufacturers : Paris

Of the French manufacturers who included Art Nouveau in their wallpaper collections, a large number were Parisian, such as Buzin, Turquetil, Petitjean and Follot. Nevertheless, one of the most important Parisian companies was without question that of Isidore Leroy which, when it was set up in the early 1840s, was responsible for the development of mechanical printing in France. At the turn of the 19th Century, its products were clearly among the most widespread. Winning a *Grand Prix* at the *Exposition Universelle* in 1900, the company adopted the Art Nouveau style which dominated its collections for some years.

With a production of forty thousand rolls per day in 1898, the manufacturer Gillou et fils was also one of the most active Parisian companies. Using both block and mechanical printing, this company, founded in 1814 and passed down from father to son, acquired a solid reputation and by 1900 was already buoyed by numerous successes. In that year, it was none other than its Director, Émile Gillou, who presided over the "wallpaper" section at the *Exposition Universelle*. The company was nevertheless taken over by Leroy in 1907. Its production was still little known in 1900 but would have contained numerous Art Nouveau products as evidenced by several documents preserved by the Museum of Wallpaper in Rixheim.

As for the manufacturers Desfossé & Karth and Alfred Hans, having built up quite a large and luxurious block-printed production, they continued to produce historical wallpapers as well as Art Nouveau designs as demonstrated by some of the examples on display here.

Artists and Wallpapers in France

The French artistic scene is considered to be one of the most important in the development of Art Nouveau. In this context, and in line with the desire to use the modern aesthetic for all everyday objects, particular attention was given to décor, as numerous collections confirm. Those of Eugène Grasset (1845-1917) and Maurice Pillard-Verneuil (1869-1942), for example, offered designs for use in a variety of decorative media. Over and above this didactic approach, however, there were also practical collaborations between wallpaper factories and various artists, whether major figures from the Art Nouveau movement such as Hector Guimard (1867-1942) and Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), or less well-known personalities such as Jacques Bille (1880-1943). One notable example was that of Félix Aubert (1866-1940), member of the *L'Art dans Tout* group which came up with many designs for textiles and wallpapers. Thus according to the art critic Julius Meier-Graefe (1867-1935), these works were "in a thousand hands; the bourgeoisie [...] and even the people [live], as it were, in harmony with them".

Other examples were more unusual, such as that of Count Lovatelli-Colombo, who was designer on the expedition of Prince Albert I of Monaco to the Arctic Ocean in 1898, before he entered the field of decorative arts. As for Jean-François Auburtin (1866-1930), although he is well known as a painter of seascapes, his collaboration with the Zuber factory on a frieze with a pattern using macaws and on the *L'Île des pins* scenery has, until now, been less well known. Finally, we should mention Maurice Dufrené (1876-1955) who, before becoming one of the major players in the world of Art Deco, began with Art Nouveau. His frieze depicting the edge of a forest, printed by Petitjean, is one of the oldest known designs by this artist.

Industrial Designers :

Example of the Ruepp Studio

Although the wallpaper manufacturers did occasionally call on artists, the vast majority of patterns which they printed were devised by industrial designers employed by the factories themselves or working in independent studios. Being inclined to supply designs in all different styles according to the demand, they were often held in low esteem at the artistic level and seen as copycats whose work was aimed solely at making a profit. Some of them did sometimes copy patterns into a collection having modified only a few details but, around 1900, the fact remains that, with their ability to adapt to aesthetic trends, many of them were among the main contributors to the spread of the Art Nouveau aesthetic within industrial wallpaper manufacturing.

Such was true of Robert Ruepp (1854 - after 1935), who led one of the largest Belle Époque industrial design studios for textiles and wallpapers. Having opened his studio in Paris in the early 1880s, Swiss-born Ruepp sold patterns to a large number of wallpaper manufacturers both French and foreign, notably Grantil, Leroy, la Société française des papiers peints, Gillou et fils, Hans Zuber, Salubra, Potter and Marburg. His work was just as significant in the textile sector both for printed and woven patterns. The business, which consisted of a large number of employees, supplied designs in all genres but particularly forged its reputation with its wholehearted adoption of Art Nouveau. Ruepp distinguished himself at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, where a whole salon was devoted to the presentation of his designs, an installation which drew particular attention from the press and earned him a gold medal.

Germany : From Floral *Jugendstil* to Geometric Severity

In Germany, where Art Nouveau was known as *Jugendstil*, the movement asserted itself in several artistic centres including Munich and Darmstadt. In the area of artist-designed wallpapers, floral *Jugendstil*, which immortalised the use of curvilinear elements, notably found expression in the patterns designed by Otto Eckmann (1865 - 1902), block printed by the Engelhard factory in Mannheim. Other important *Jugendstil* artists, such as Hans Christiansen (1866-1945) or Bernhard Pankok (1872-1943), had their designs printed by German manufacturers but, with the style becoming more widespread in 1900, designers with more varied profiles can also be cited, such as the Berlin architect and decorator Alfred Dunskey or the writer Georg Bötticher (1849-1918). Some are also known for publishing decorative collections in the modern style, such as Ludwig Pronberger, whose designs were printed by various manufacturers including Salubra and Zuber.

At the end of the 19th Century, with Germany joining the ranks of the main players in the wallpaper industry, numerous industrial design studios were active across the Rhine. Most notable were those of Paul Leschke in Brunswick and Heinrich Raabe in Cologne, who sold designs to many manufacturers in Germany, France and even England. Ultimately, the *Jugendstil* centres were among the first to take a stand against the excesses of the curvilinear approach turning to a more sober, geometric style. This development towards severity became increasingly prevalent in the wallpaper collections being brought onto the market.

The Themes of Art Nouveau

During the Belle Époque, the natural world became inseparable from the Art Nouveau movement which developed an aesthetic founded on the stylisation of organic shapes. The ideal of applying the style to everyday objects had the effect of placing the individual at the centre of a home environment dominated by shapes which were derived from nature but which had been given a new interpretation. The Art Nouveau flowers used for wallpaper formed part of this conception of interior space. Some species appear more frequently than others. Thus, poppies were among the most commonly used motifs, but chrysanthemums, tulip, orchids, irises and thistles were also highly valued. The same flowers were also most often chosen for various other media, such as glassware and ceramics. The use of symbols was popular at the time and explains why one or another species was chosen; the poppy, for example, represented sleep. At an artistic level, however, certain flowers were probably seen as particularly suitable for depicting the exuberance of Art Nouveau. The poppy's broad petals and profusion of stamens are thus elements which lend themselves to being accentuated and interpreted in a very curvaceous style. In some cases, the same flower was depicted in various stages of life; in bud, coming into bloom, its petals unfurling to their full size then fading, thus reflecting the much favoured symbolic theme of the cycle of life.

Fauna was also an important source of inspiration for Art Nouveau but was less significant in the wallpaper industry. Several examples can be found, however, principally depicting birds such as swans, whose shape lends itself well to the curvilinear style, and insects, particularly butterflies and dragonflies, which generally appealed to the artists of the time.

The Adoption of Art Nouveau for All Types of Wallpaper

Art Nouveau wallpapers took on a variety of different forms in their use as décor. The adoption of the modern style by manufacturers naturally affected some of the more traditional components of wallpaper decoration such as borders and friezes. These could be used in the design of tripartite compositions in the modern style. In addition, a type of décor which was developing at the time was the band frieze, which is wallpaper with a floral or pastoral motif running in a band along the upper part of the wall. The production of décor with multiple bands, favoured in 1900, was in fact an offshoot of the long tradition of panoramic wallpaper.

On a technical level, the Art Nouveau aesthetic was used by industry to print wallpapers of every quality from the least expensive up to the most luxurious. In some cases, techniques such as embossing were used to add depth to the motifs. Some procedures could add reflections or provide a shiny look to the paper, for example using varnish or minerals such as mica. Most of these techniques were not new but suited Art Nouveau's fondness for the three-dimensional look. There could be a considerable number of different versions of the same model, both in terms of the varieties of colour and the technique. Finally, it is worth noting that fabrics to match many of the wallpapers were also available on the market. Used for curtains or upholstery, they contributed to the stylistic unity of the décor extolled by the advocates of Art Nouveau.

The Retail Trade in Art Nouveau Wallpaper

Art Nouveau was as much in evidence among retailers as it was in the manufacturers' collections. It is clear from the methods used that marketing itself was fully immersed in the style of the period. This style appeared in newspaper advertisements, invoice headers, sample books in shops and in advertising leaflets distributed by shops such as Le Mardelé or L. Duchesne in Paris. Such practices tended to influence consumers to choose items in the same style.

The environment in which the customer came into direct contact with the items on offer, i.e. the shop, was also important. Around 1900, the shops which commonly stocked wallpaper were interior decorating shops, hardware shops and paint sellers selling paint, varnish and paint brushes as well as canvases, linoleum, glazery items and picture frames. Often the retailers even showcased Art Nouveau wallpapers in their shop windows. Although most of the frontages were quite sober, some would have been shaped by the fashion of 1900, as we can see from the picture of the specialist shop Dutertre "À l'arc en ciel" in Angers. Photographs of shop interiors are rare except in Britain, which provides several shots of showrooms unveiling various devices for displaying wallpaper.

Crime-scene, Photography and Art Nouveau Wallpaper

Crime-scene photography is one unique area which provides an insight into the use of Art Nouveau wallpaper. Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), who became Director of photography for the police headquarters in Paris in 1888, was at the forefront of new methods for the highly accurate reproduction of crime scenes, suicides and accidents. In particular, he developed the procedure of anthropometry. Apart from its use in producing portraits of suspects and victims, his research allowed locations to be recorded with an accuracy which simple note-taking had previously been unable to provide. Above all, by establishing the actual distances on the image, these metric methods made it easier to put into context the large number of crimes committed indoors. The purpose of these documents, investigative tools permitting the recovery of all types of evidence, such as the position of a body or an upturned piece of furniture, was primarily scientific. Over and above their morbid subject matter, however, they have contributed in no small part to the documentation of a variety of Belle Èpoque interiors, from every social class.

Among the documents preserved at the Musée de la Préfecture de Police in Paris, is the shot taken in 1902, of an interior in Bois-Colombes (Hauts-de-Seine) which shows poppy-patterned wallpaper manufactured by Leroy. Forming part of the manufacturer's 1899-1900 collection and reappearing in its 1902-1903 collection, it may well have been freshly hung in this room which was soon to become the scene of sinister events. Since the Rixheim Museum of Wallpaper holds two samples of this product and since its use is also confirmed by décor shown on several photographic postcards, this model seems to have enjoyed a certain amount of success. The reconstruction of this paper was carried out by the company InCréation in Paris.

Uses of Art Nouveau Wallpaper

Material evidence of the domestic distribution of wallpaper in the style of 1900 is rather rare and not always recognised. Due to its rather short-lived character, this type of décor has often been replaced if not covered up by layers of paint. Although there are places where Art Nouveau wallpaper has, to a greater or lesser extent, been preserved, these are generally no more than remnants and fragments discovered here and there indicating how a home was decorated at a certain period.

The photographic world allows us to establish the use of these products more effectively, whether by way of crime-scene photography or documents derived from photojournalism. Amateur photography was booming at the end of the 19th Century and it was practised by some famous painters. This was true of Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940) whose many interior shots echo the intimist paintings for which he is well known. Thus Vuillard photographed and painted several versions of the sitting room of Thadée Natanson (1868-1951), co-founder of the *Revue blanche*, and his wife Misia, in rue Saint Florentin in Paris, an interior exhibiting the use of an Art Nouveau wallpaper as well as coordinating textiles.

This was the golden age of the postcard and they also seem to provide a particularly rich source of information. Several novelty cards actually show interiors, reconstructed artificially in the photographer's studio, which have Art Nouveau wallpaper. Still more unusually, some novelty cards from the editor Albert Bergeret (1859-1932) in Nancy show friezes which have been diverted from their strictly domestic function and put to use in various arrangements and combinations for strictly ornamental purposes.

Art Nouveau Revival

Art Nouveau has regularly provided inspiration in the wallpaper industry. From the 1920s and 1930s onwards, items in the style of 1900 but with more fashionable colours, featured at regular intervals in the collections. It was not until the 1960s, however, that this style revival took on greater significance, and not by accident since, after several decades of denigration and even destruction, Art Nouveau was being rediscovered. At the same time, with the emergence of Op art and the Pop Art movement, the use of wallpaper became highly popular enjoying success reminiscent of the Belle Époque. In 1966, Zuber even decided to launch a collection entitled *Papiers Peints 1900*, consisting of reprints of a selection of patterns designed at the start of the 20th century. In 1968, one of these reprints appeared in the film *Le Tatoué* by Denys de la Patellière. Up until the end of the 1970s, Pop Art wallpapers were part of a striking resurgence of the style of 1900, with lots of exuberant and vigorous flowers displaying shapes similar to those of Art Nouveau.

This decorative profusion went out of fashion and the 1980s saw the wallpaper industry enter a period of crisis. Patterns tended to become more neutral and discreet. At the start of the 21st Century, having been out of favour for more than twenty years, wallpaper has made an unmistakable comeback, as the pages of design magazines testify. In many cases this has also meant a return of the style and the flora of 1900, albeit through the filter of the 1970s. More than a century after its emergence, Art Nouveau is again in evidence. This aesthetic has finally become an historic style, just like all those, from neo-renaissance to neo-rococo, which met with such resistance at the end of the 19th Century.