



The Metropolis Observed

Paper Architects surfaces

Artists, architects, and industrial designers bring concept wall-coverings to Wolf-Gordon.

In 1999 commercial wall-covering manufacturer Wolf-Gordon debuted its first “concept collection,” designed by architect Laurinda Spear. Called Linework, after the term for plans drawn with nib and ink, it derived its appearance from architectural graphics: patterns like Wave and Rain abstracted the symbols for heating insulation and property lines. Three months after its launch the *New York Times Magazine* included Linework on its “A-List of Design.”

Under the creative direction of Marybeth Shaw, Wolf-Gordon has begun to spearhead the mass manufacture of concept-based wall-coverings. A number of less well known designers had already ignited a wallpaper revival, but Shaw has brought these efforts into the limelight by recruiting high-profile international designers whose first discipline is not wall-covering design. Shaw seeks to remedy industry ills: mediocre anonymous designs

and overly conservative manufacturers only interested in copying each other’s top-selling items. In these new collections she emphasizes the primacy of the idea. “I’m not looking to recreate a pattern that’s already been done,” Shaw says. “I’m looking for work that speaks of our time.” Her approach is curatorial. Following the success of Spear’s line, Shaw drafted industrial designer Karim Rashid to create computer-generated patterns that refer to nature. The line, Digital Nature, launched last year. Touch, designed by Amsterdam-based landscape and textile designer Petra Blaisse, arrived in May. Blaisse photographed fibers, fur, and stitching and then enlarged the images to exaggerate their scale. “She’s playing with the limitations of walls by creating these soft-looking surfaces,” Shaw says, “and playing with our perception of how deep the wall is, how big the room is.”

Artist Christine Tarkowski created three patterns

that will arrive later this year—and show off the company’s digital printing techniques, as they cannot be printed by the traditional rotogravure process. Tarkowski took digital photographs of scale models of French towns and landscapes found at the military museum Les Invalides. Commissioned between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the models—which resemble today’s aerial surveillance images—were used to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the country’s fortifications. Repeated and interpreted by Tarkowski, the pixel patterns are boldly graphical, colorful, and evocative—a modern tapestry. “Wall-coverings date back to the 1500s,” Shaw says. “The last thirty years have seen a lull in the boldness of patterning and color. These collections are a critique of what’s out there and what’s come before.” —Shonquis Moreno

Wall-coverings by Christine Tarkowski and Petra Blaisse.

Courtesy Wolf-Gordon

