

# Affordable wallpaper in the industry design essay



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My aim for my final project is to have a professionally finished wallpaper design. Along with this idea I would like my wallpaper to be displayed in a house, perhaps in a show home, so people can see my work and see what it looks like in a room. This is because many aspects can affect the appearance of the wallpaper, for example, the lighting. If the light is very harsh and bright it can cause the colours to appear different and not look as effective. However if there is a soft glow it can appear warm and inviting. Within a show home everything is new and the home is developed to a high standard in order that it will appeal to prospective buyers, therefore presenting wallpaper within this environment would be an excellent promotion medium.

I am also going to look into interior architecture and aim to master new skills within this subject so I can transfer them into my project. Once I have my wallpaper design and found a space in which to display it, I then plan to create the space using interior architectural programmes such as Auto CAD in order to create a virtual room. I will also introduce furniture, fabrics and colour alongside my wallpaper design. This virtual room will provide a prototype of how the finished room should look.

In order to create a wallpaper design I need to look into the history of wallpaper; Where do they come from? How are they made? Do people still buy wallpaper? What are the consumer demands? Current styles and trends, are they cost effective? Is the economic climate affecting the wallpaper industry? I also need to find companies that will print out my design and at what cost?

## **What is Wallpaper & the History behind it?**

When looked up in the Oxford Dictionary the term wallpaper, means “ paper for covering the interior walls of rooms”.

Wallpaper is a kind of material used to cover and decorate the interior walls of either homes, offices or other buildings. It is not essential, however it has become a very popular method in which to style, create a mood or inject colour into a room.

Wallpaper can be used for either residential or businesses purposes. These differ from each other for instance; they differ in weight, serviceability and quality standards. Residential wallpapers are commonly made from various materials and can be bought either pasted or pre-pasted. However when it comes to the commercial grade wallpapers they are divided into categories based on weight, backing composition and laminate thickness. All commercial wallpapers must have a vinyl surface and successfully undergo rigorous physical and visual tests as mandated by the Chemical Fabrics and Film Association. According to the ‘ Made How’ website, “ there are four popular methods used to print wallpapers and designers have chosen the

printing technique based on the cost and aesthetics". This suggests that cost is a major issue when it comes to making wallpaper.

The progression of wallpaper can be found going as far back into 200BC, in China where paper was originally invented. However the earliest wallpapers used within Europe was as early as the 13th century. Designs involved painted images of popular religious icons and were commonly used within the homes of those which were religious however they were also used to liven up the bleak, dull homes of the poor. Religious prints only remained popular with the poor over the following centuries.

By the 16th century more expensive wall coverings such as depicting tapestries began to hang in the homes of the elite. Tapestries included repeated images which were block printed in various colours spread over multiple sheets of fabric. They added colour to the room as well as providing an insulating layer. Tapestries however were very expensive therefore implying only the rich could afford them. Due to the cost of these the less well off members of society turned to wallpaper in order to lighten up their homes.

Wallpaper designs featured scenes which were similar to those in the tapestries, however printed onto large sheets of paper; these were either hung loose on the walls, or pasted instead of being framed.

By the mid 18th century Britain was the leading wallpaper manufacturer in Europe, exporting large quantities to Europe but also selling within the middle class market, subsequently this trade was greatly interrupted due to the seven year war. Yet, slightly previously before the war, in 1748 the

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English Ambassador to Paris decorated his office with blue flock wallpaper, this in turn then became greatly fashionable. Within the 1760's designers began to work with silk and tapestry to produce subtle, luxurious wallpapers. Near the end of the century the fashion for scenic wallpaper revived in Britain once again and led to vast panoramic views of antique architecture, exotic landscapes and pastoral subjects as well as repeating patterns of stylized flowers, people and animals.

During this period of time two problems arose, one problem was producing long sheets of paper for printing, the other was printing attractive wallpaper inexpensively. Until the mid 1700's their techniques included making rag-based paper which was individually printed in sheets, these were then applied to the walls. However in 1785, Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf invented a machine for printing coloured tints on sheets of wallpaper. Then in 1799 Louis-Nicolas Robert created a machine to produce long and continuous lengths of paper. This ability to produce long lengths of paper therefore allowed the wallpaper industry to flourish.

By the 19th century printing costs had finally been reduced, this occurred by discarding manual block printing and replaced with cylinder printing. Wood block printing was a technique which involved applying a colour to each separate block by hand, then pressed down onto the paper, tapped in order to ensure the quality imprint, the block was then lifted up and re-inked and the process would be repeated, this was a very expensive and time consuming process.

However with the cylinder printing technique, the paper was mechanically fed between cylinders until the paper had been fully printed, therefore no hand printing was involved. This therefore led to the successful reduction of cost, consequently resulting in it being cheaper to wallpaper a house than it was to paint it.

The development of the steam powered printing presses also had a great impact on the wallpaper industry as this allowed manufacturers to mass produce wallpaper, again cutting the costs and making it affordable to the working class. Wallpaper benefited from a high boom in popularity in the 19th century and it had established itself as one of the most popular household items across the western world.

## **Today's Styles & Trends**

Wallpaper has changed greatly since it was first developed, in today's industry it comes in multiple patterns, designs and textures. Wallpaper manufacturers like Cole & Son have realised the consumer's needs for bold attractive wallpapers. As hubpages.com has pointed out, "today's homeowner's today want their walls to be more than simply covered they want them to make a statement". Arguably a wall covering is a piece of art and an expression of one's personality.

By just browsing through the internet for 'popular wallpaper designs' there are numerous different styles and textures available. However hubpages.com provides some of the industry's offerings:

Hubpages.com suggests that metallic wallpaper is one of the popular modern styles today. It is produced in a variety of colours and patterns. Due <https://assignbuster.com/affordable-wallpaper-in-the-industry-design-essay/>

to its rich visual texture it instantly creates a focal point for a room therefore grabbing attention. Although this style of wallpaper is a modern technique, the patterns which are used are quite traditional, often with a floral repeat print. The colours used within today's market are bright and bold which have a modern feel to them. This therefore suggests to me that the current market trends are a mixture of traditional designs with modern bright colours. However it can be argued that in the 1970s bright orange was injected into the world of interiors. As Lesley Hoskins (1994 p. 226) points out, " The first few years of the 1970s were bright in every respect", Also according to " hubpages. com", " The most popular colour palettes in the seventies were based in nature - dark woods, mossy greens, bright pumpkin orange, daffodil yellow and the ubiquitous harvest gold dominated the interiors of suburban seventies homes". Therefore questionably are bright colours a modern trend? Or have they just remained popular since the 1970s?

Metallic wallpaper varies in price depending where you purchase it from it can range between £10 a role in stores such as Focus and up to £50 a role from Cole & Son. Therefore showing that this type of wallpaper is affordable for everyone and it is also a popular style due to the wide range of stores selling it.

Flock is a traditional style of wallpaper and has been around for countless years, it became very popular in the mid 17th century. It has a slightly raised textural pattern that has a soft velvety feel to it. This can be supported by hubpages. com as they state, " it is rich in both visual and tactile texture". This style is elegant and luxurious. In the 1760's it was greatly respected  
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within the industry as noted by Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton (1982 p. 21) “ The flock papers of this period on the other hand, are, almost without exception, the work of very capable designers”. “ Their decorative qualities were such that their suppression by other types of wallpaper later in the century was clearly due to a change in taste, rather than to the growth of greater artistic appreciation”. Although Flock is a traditional wall covering it has remained to this day a fashionable choice of wallpaper, as it is sold by manufactures such as B&Q, Cole & Son, Osborne & little and Zoffanny.

Flock wallpaper is very expensive compared to other wall coverings. My research has identified that prices start from £44. 98 in lower end stores such as B&Q and can range up to £150 by Cole & Son, increasing in price to £253. 95 by designers such as Antonina Vella. This style is very highly priced and therefore suggests only the greater cliental would be able to afford it. However it can be argued that a fashionable trend within the industry today is the ‘ feature wall’, being the decoration of one wall only. This would subsequently cut costs and allow more homeowners to buy luxurious styles of wallpaper. As in a article published by the Guardian, Review of the Decade, Humi Qureshi makes the point that, “ with some designers saying feature walls offer “ recession-proof” style (buying one roll of wallpaper or one pot of paint, to cover a single wall is more affordable than decorating a whole room)”, therefore supporting the feature wall current trend.

An interesting design of wallpaper I have researched is glass bead wallpaper, after looking into this I have discovered that it is a moderately new product, it is very rich in texture as it is built up of thousands of miniature glass beads stuck onto the paper backing. The three dimensional surface makes this

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wallpaper strikingly unique. A positive to this wallpaper is that it can be developed in a variety of colours however when it comes to cost this product is very expensive compared to the others as it can be up to three times the price of regular wallpaper. This again makes me think this style of design would be more suited for the more affluent buyer.

I love this technique I think its very eye catching and unusual, it would look great in a grand, luxurious bathroom. I can also see this design being used within upper class hotels and perhaps restaurants. However, although this is a very luxurious wallpaper, if too much was introduced into a room it would become tacky and unattractive therefore I would keep it to a minimum and use small amounts to add accents and create a unique look to the room. By adding only small sections of the beaded paper it would reduce costs therefore making it affordable to more people.

## **Today's Economic Market**

According to keynote. co. uk in 2009 outgoings on wallpapers amounted to £315 million. However total market value has dropped by 6. 4% from the previous year. Is this due to the economic climate? Or is the consumer spending elsewhere? Keynote. co. uk states that “ wall coverings and ceramic tiles account for 10. 3% of total expenditure on materials for maintenance and repair of dwellings in the UK, trailing other home décor and improvement products such as paint”, this statement shows home owners are opting to use other methods for decorating instead of buying wallpaper. Arguably the cost cuts for the wallpaper industry may be due to the ‘ feature wall trend’ implying that the consumer is still buying wallpaper albeit not in large quantities as they did before, thus explaining the cost cuts.

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Although the market value has dropped keynote. co. uk also points out “ it remains popular with the C1 and E socio-demographic groups, as well as consumers based in particular regions such as the West Midlands, the North, the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside”. This statement is interesting as to quote from “ Wikipedia”, Socio groups C1 and E are; “ lower middle class” and “ Those at lowest level of substance”, suggesting, home owners of all classes are able to afford wallpaper and signifies, wallpaper is not just for the affluent buyer.

According to keynote. co. uk “ Recovery within the UK retail market for wall coverings is not expected to start until 2011” “ By 2014 market value is expected to have risen by 7. 3%” Thus implying there is still going to be a demand for wallpaper in the UK for the fore coming years. “ marketresearch. com” points out “ A key market influences”, “ construction sector- historical trends and current performance of housing and commercial construction markets, house moving” this statement shows the possibilities for wallpaper and its future.

Through my own primary research, using surveys and asking a variety of consumers, their opinions based around wallpapers about their profession, thoughts on cost, design, colours and techniques, along with their outlook on the feature wall trend. Has allowed me to find out the current consumer demands; along with assisting me to answer the questions: do people still buy wallpaper in today’s economic climate? Are they cost effective? What are the consumer demands/what do they look for in wallpaper? What styles do they like?