

Studio Visit

SURFACES by **DAVID BONK**

Rolls of exquisite hand-gilded and decorated wallcoverings emerge from this 30-year old wallpaper workshop.

Behind an unassuming storefront in southern San Francisco, a three-man team turns out yard after yard of hand-embellished wall coverings for the high-end design trade. Some patterns are hand screened, some are hand-gilded, others require the application and hand-cutting of masks. Many painting and pattern applications are done by eye. The manufacturing process calls for multiple layers: first the ground color (often striated or texturized), then metallics, whatever pattern is called for, and finally a sealing topcoat that protects the papers from the inevitable wear of the home and hospitality environments that they are destined for. Carefully selected grounds ranging from grass cloth to vinyl act as a textural backdrop for the designs.

The company began in 1988 as an extension of the architectural painting and faux finishing business of founder David Bonk. Today, studio manager Chris Buchan wears many hats, taking the lead on production, customer service, marketing and sales. Additionally, Chris collaborates on design and works up











custom colors for clients.

The creative process involves collecting concepts and inspirations over time, and slotting these gestational patterns into one of the company's two yearly introductions. "Design can't be forced; it has to just live and breathe" observes Chris. Inspiration for the patterns falls into three major categories: process-driven experimentation, original art sketched by David, and pared-down graphics inspired by classic pattern language.

The process-driven component happens through explorations on the printing tables and happy accidents, which are collected as digital images and stored for later introduction. Often the techniques needed to recreate these one-off effects in production can take many seasons of testing and innovation to perfect.

For color inspiration, nature is the biggest influence, followed by a keen attention to "what is missing from the collection and what the most popular custom colors are." The recent trend toward more color in designs is welcome here: "Printing grey on a grey foggy day; making grey paper... it can affect the creative mood." More yellow and gold, seen in recent orders, seem to be infusing a bit of warmth into the studio.

Clients have plenty of choice; colors from soft to blingy and patterns from subtle to bold are on offer, and the team is always ready to take on a bespoke challenge. But it is the layers of painstaking hand-painted effects, from striés to stipples, gold-leafing to burnishing, that create such depth and interest at Surfaces by David Bonk.

