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DESIGN



Scene Makers

Panoramic wallpapers can transform even a kitchen into an art gallery.

by Jen Renzi



A canvas panoramic from Pierre Frey's Mille Fleurs collection by Montreuil, France-based artist Gaël Davrinche; pierrefrey.com.

IF WALLS COULD TALK, then surfaces swathed in scenic wallpaper would speak volumes of poetry. “They tell a story about the house and the homeowner, about craftsmanship and permanence,” says Bay Area designer Alison Pickart, who often commissions bespoke installations for clients’ residences. She recently worked with venerable brand de Gournay to envision a forest of hand-painted redwoods—with trees extending up to 28 feet high—for the spiral staircase of a Fortune 500 CEO’s residence near San Francisco. The panels and installation alone cost more than \$500,000. “Such wallcoverings are works of art unto themselves. You sense their magic,” says Pickart.

Unlike smaller-scale motifs that repeat across the wall, scenic designs—typically sold as a suite of panels rather than by the roll—are a continuous, mural-like image. Popular mostly in the first half of the 19th century, they have now returned to fashionable homes in a variety of traditional and contemporary motifs.

They make an ideal accent wall or can span an entire room for an immersive *mise-en-scène*. “Every wall becomes its own pictorial composition,” says architect India Mahdavi, who has created two such designs for de Gournay, including a modernized riff on 16th-century Persian miniatures. (Pricing starts at about \$2,000 per panel.)

De Gournay and Gracie are among the labels that make panoramics hand-painted on silk or paper that can be



Left: A hand-painted dyed-silk wallpaper by India Mahdavi called Abbâsi in the Sky from de Gournay; degournay.com.
Below: Embossed vinyl panels make up La Casa Azul from Élitis; elitis.fr.

completely customized to a room's dimensions—hence the four-month-plus production time. Many recent designs, however, come digitally printed and in standard sizes, making them more accessible. The Natural Mood collection by French atelier Élitis, for instance, includes three designs sold as interlocking panels printed on sturdy embossed vinyl; lead times are up to ten weeks.

Chinoiserie patterns and Japanese ink drawings like Pierre Frey's new *Magie Japonaise* are perhaps most emblematic of the genre, although geometrics and architectural details are equally iconic. This breadth of offerings and the suitability for any style of decor has also spurred the revival. "I love and use both historic iconography and more contemporary takes," says New York designer Kati Curtis, who has recently ordered classic de Gournay patterns as well as stylish options from British label Fromental. "Whether representational or abstract, panoramics open up a space and add interest and, above all, fantasy."

