



BLOCK PRINTER MOLLY MAHON

Inspired by nature and the rich colours of India, this designer uses traditional techniques to create exquisite fabrics and papers in her studio in the Ashdown Forest

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THIS PAGE Molly in her workshop, wearing a Hopscotch scarf in Indigo. **OPPOSITE PAGE** A repeat pattern is hand-blocked onto linen (top right) for a bespoke order; cushions (right) are covered in Wiggle & Leaf in Blush and Rose, and Fern in Turmeric and Indigo; a moodboard (far right) for a range of dhurrie rugs.



FROM TOP In the family sitting room, a pile of fabrics from Molly's current collection sits on an armchair upholstered in Leaf design; a selection of wooden printing blocks that were carved in India lean against a backdrop of Spot & Star wallpaper in a bespoke pink colourway; sheets of hand-printed paper.



Entirely self-taught, Molly Mahon has been creating beautifully patterned artisanal textiles and wallpapers since 2011. Her work bridges the gap between traditional 20th-century British block printing and ethnic designs, resulting in relaxed, colourful and timeless pieces.

“ I started off by printing sheets of paper on my kitchen table. Originally, I made stationery until friends persuaded me to print wallpaper, too. I began making small batches for shepherd's huts and cloakrooms, but when the kitchen became more of a workshop, with mugs and laundry buried under paint pots and fabrics, we converted the garage into a studio. Then I started to meet wallpaper manufacturers with a view to printing commercially.

A couple of years ago, I visited Jaipur because I was so fascinated by its block-printing process. I was transfixed by the whole practice – the colour, the patterns, the movement and the joyfulness have inspired my approach. Now I work with two printing companies who interpret my designs and create blocks out of sisam wood. It's wonderful to see such skills handed from generation to generation.

Block printing is similar to the potato printing children do at school. First comes the design, which needs to be thought about stylistically as well as how it will work as a repeat. I use paper and tracing paper, and play with scale until it is comfortable on the eye. Next, I carve the design into a slab of lino. The block, which can be used for paper or fabric, is pressed firmly and given a good thud with the fist, then lifted briskly to avoid smudging. The finishing process depends on what is being printed – paper can be hung and dried, but fabric needs to be heat set, washed and ironed.

Moving from the city to the countryside has influenced me greatly. We moved from Barnes to a house in the Ashdown Forest in 2009, and I spend a lot of time walking in the woods with our three young children. They often get down on their hands and knees to inspect a beetle or look closely at a bluebell, and that has taught me to do the same. I am also much more aware of the seasons and nature. I love to take a leaf and simplify it into a beautiful repeat design.

I couldn't make or sell anything that I wouldn't use myself. There are always various experiments in progress at home, such as ranges of ceramics, kitchen tiles, oven gloves and aprons. We try them out first, to see how they work and stand up to use, and ask friends and family for their opinions. Last year, I launched my first collection of fabrics and papers at Tissus d'Hélène and I've just designed my first sofa, which can be upholstered in any of my fabrics.

I'm inspired by determined and successful women. The 11th Duchess of Devonshire (“Debo”) was my icon, not just in her personal style, but in the way she handled her interiors, her artistic choices and her garden. Pure perfection. Emma Bridgewater has grown an empire creating beautiful ceramics while keeping the business true to itself and managing four children. And I love Kit Kemp because she has set the tone for fun, stylish and colourful interiors.

There are many benefits to working from home, but it's also all encompassing. My husband has now joined the business, but it means that we talk about work even when we are in bed. Our new collection launches in September, with designs from nature and strong impressions from India using joyful pinks, blues and greens. They make my heart sing and I hope they'll do the same for others, too.”