



GEOMETRICS

Creative Combinations

In the sixth of our series exploring the evolution of colour and pattern in British interiors, we look at how trends and historical influences have shaped British interiors, this time turning the spotlight to geometrics

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE

Prized for their familiar repeat and pleasingly angular silhouettes, geometrics have been a recurring motif in both architecture and interiors for centuries, across several cultures and civilisations, from Ancient Egypt to Greece. Their form appears in art and design movements including Cubism, Bauhaus and Art Deco, bringing symmetry,

balance and rhythm. Versatile and dynamic, geometrics are a staple of the fashion world too, with their simple, striking shapes and bright colours populating catwalks from the 1960s onwards. “Geometric patterns are a visual language all humans understand,” thinks A Rum Fellow’s Dylan O’Shea. “They are the building blocks of design. ▶

THIS PAGE In this Georgian townhouse by interior designer Angel O’Donnell, zig-zags, chevrons and stripes have been layered onto a neutral base to add verve. **OPPOSITE** In this scheme by interior designer Kate Guinness, striking curtain edging from Jennifer Shorto complements a striped chair a Kantha velvet bedspread.





ABOVE A Waver hand-spun hemp flatweave rug by Adam Bray for Vanderhurd and an ottoman top in Lost and Found fabric by Christopher Farr Cloth adds a softly geometric note to this scheme by Louise Robinson.

LEFT In a riff on traditional encaustic flooring, K Space's Krystyna Martin-Dominguez has added contemporary geometric tiling to a hallway, for a fresh, 3D effect.

This is especially true in cultures with strong weaving traditions, as the shapes achievable within the warp and weft are geometric, leading to a natural affinity with these forms."

Right angles

Geometry has long existed in architecture: panelled walls, parquet flooring, moulded ceiling patterns and tessellated floor tiles are all examples of geometrics in action. Part of their enduring appeal is that a repeating shape or pattern can feel soothing and reassuring, creating a sense of balance. "Using different shapes, lines and angles produces a dynamic result," says Jeffreys Interiors' Georgina Frazer. "Geometrics add just the right amount of interest to a pared-back Scandi scheme, or can be thrown into the mix of a maximalist design to shake up florals and curves. David Hicks, one of my favourite designers, used these patterns on carpets, creating bold and timeless interiors."

This is a design that can also add colour and vitality in a structured, less frilly way than a traditional chintz. On tiled flooring and walls, the effect can be achieved either through the shape and design of the tile itself, or via configuration of different coloured tiles to form a repeating pattern. In fabrics and papers, geometrics ▶

Mardi Gras 576 Estrella Vinyl flooring by Carpetright creates a classic anchor for this traditional utility room. Joinery and architraves are finished in teal and biscuit tones to complement its colourway.

Barney beds by Studio Peake in collaboration with Christopher Clark feature headboards whose fluid shape echoes the pattern of the geometric rug by Amy Kent.



‘Geometric patterns are a visual language all humans understand. They are the building blocks of design.’

Dylan O’Shea, A Rum Fellow

are often softer and more organic in form, including stripes, dots and ikats.

Black-and-white geometrics are perhaps the most classic of all, because they are both impactful and timeless. “Pair a high-contrast monochrome chequerboard pattern with more delicate shades, like sage green, dusty rose, or pale turquoise, to soften the feel of a room,” advises interior designer Naomi Astley Clarke. “For a modern look, I also like using geometric and non-geometric repeats together within a scheme. For example, in the living room, ticking stripe cushions pair well with a kilim rug. And in the kitchen, parquet flooring sits beautifully alongside a scalloped, ‘fish scale’-style, splashback.”

Though their design can be bold, geometrics are refreshingly enduring. “Rooted in tradition, I am always surprised how modern these classical designs

can be,” says architect Ben Pentreath, whose recent collaboration with Alternative Flooring includes a striking cube geometric. “They create complex, three-dimensional patterns that trick the eye and play with space, resulting in a deeply contemporary English interior.”

Fine lines

As we tend to build homes in square, rectangular or occasionally octagonal shapes, most spaces already bear a sense of geometry. In older buildings, these lines have often been softened by curvaceous elements, such as decorative corncicing, skirting and pargeting. Contrast is key. “A bold geometric can easily sit in an older building, complementing its slightly softer form,” says interior designer Kate Guinness. “Conversely, contemporary buildings are often clean-lined, with ▶

ABOVE LEFT In this pretty children’s bedroom scheme by interior designer Lara Clarke, Happy People wallpaper by Ottoline provides a pretty pink and red geometric backdrop.

ABOVE RIGHT A richly detailed Balineum bathroom designed by Henri Fitzwilliam-Lay features chevron wall tiles and honeycomb mosaic flooring for a modern take on Art Deco style.



Bold shapes and strong silhouettes define this scheme by Henry Prideaux, who chose geometrics in order to visually widen a narrow space.

‘Rooted in tradition, these designs can create complex, three-dimensional patterns that trick the eye and play with space, resulting in a deeply contemporary English interior’

Ben Pentreath, architect and interior designer

fewer softening architectural elements, so it makes sense to look to softer geometrics – perhaps mixing in a beautiful old Kente cloth as a wall hanging or installing plain curtains with a geometric patterned border or panel.” Opting for the unexpected is a good approach. “Tiling a whole floor with a geometric or installing a Mondrian-style glazed dividing wall adds instant impact. Equally, a pared-back drawing room layered with different tones of the same colour can look wonderfully striking with a bold, geometric artwork above the fireplace.”

Geometric patterns can be a good way to create visual illusions, manipulate perceptions of space or accentuate the focal point of a room, but use them judiciously by avoiding overload, balancing them out with alternative patterns and textures to allow for breathing room. The key to fresh appeal, rather than an overly retro look, is to use some solid colour pieces to ground the patterns and keep a scheme from feeling too busy. “Be sure to incorporate different-sized repeats and use similar colours to create a visual balance,” advises interior designer Nicky

Dobree. “Although geometric wallpaper is often associated with a mid-century feel for example, it doesn’t have to conjure that feeling in a room. Some geometrics are easier to work with than others, such as hexagons and stripes.”

Think of plains as the perfect canvas for bolder additions. “Different geometric patterns should connect in colour,” says Studio Raymond’s Carina Raymond. “I like to use a plain trim with a geometric pattern in order for the forms to pop. Patterned rugs, cushions or window treatments are all good ways to introduce this motif.”

Paving the way

The beauty of geometrics is that they can stand out or blend in, depending on the treatment. Bathroom and hallway flooring are natural partners to geometrics because of their grounding appeal. “They are surprisingly easy on the eye and can blend into the background,” says Studio K Space’s Krystyna Martin-Dominguez, whose own entrance hall features a contemporary alternative to classic encaustic

ABOVE LEFT Song of the Nightingale wallpaper by Ottoline, a blind in Selendi fabric by Vaughan Designs and side chairs in Damascus Stripe by Soane Britain combine for a fresh take on geometrics in this study by Kate Guinness.

ABOVE RIGHT Hexagonal tiles in a monochrome colourway lend depth and elegance to this period bathroom designed by Lolita Colenso.



‘Different geometric patterns should connect in colour. I like to use a plain trim with a geometric pattern in order for the forms to pop’

Carina Raymond, Studio Raymond

ABOVE In this elegant scheme by Kit Kemp for Firdale’s The Soho Hotel, playful geometric patterned frames nod to the design of the curtain edging for a cohesive yet colourful look.

tiling. “I love the 3D effect it produces, which both statement making and anchoring.”

There are also plenty of possibilities to be playful. “I encourage a daring ‘jewel box’ powder room,” says interior designer Naomi Astley Clarke. “Glossy floor-to-ceiling geometric tiles catch the light beautifully, creating a sense of space and added intrigue. I’m a big believer that even the tiniest of downstairs loos should thrill as much as they function.”

Softer designs are also a good opportunity to add depth and edge to classic schemes. Upholstering furniture in geometrically-patterned fabrics is a relatively simple way to customise or upcycle key pieces in the home. “In a recent Georgian townhouse project, we layered colourful zig-zags, chevrons and stripes onto a neutral base palette,” says Ed O’Donnell, co-founder of design firm Angel O’Donnell. “The dynamic shapes, colours and textures of these fabrics gave striking appeal to traditional bobbin dining chairs and

contemporary angular lounge chairs.” Other exciting ways with geometrics include faceted wallpapers featuring a repeat pattern of polygonal shapes, bespoke wood panelling comprising a jigsaw of diagonals and book-matched angles, or an upholstered wall inspired by a classic chevron design.

Sometimes just one deft touch is enough to create impact. Hotelier and designer Kit Kemp regularly turns to geometrics to add scale and depth. “They work because they are both tailored and striking,” she says. “I love a monochrome, such as a diamond print upholstered headboard, framed by smart piping, complemented by cushions in a smaller repeat for contrast.”

As with all patterns, the key is harmony. A combination of geometrics and soft, curvaceous elements will look considered and lived-in, resulting in layered schemes that feel authentic, comfortable and infused with a sense of natural accumulation. ■