

PROPERTY

Banish the beige carpets... add some snakeskin instead

Let your creativity run wild with a splash of colour and a riot of pattern on your floors.

By Emily Brooks

Desert Sand, Wild Honey, Morning Mist... it must be painful being the person who has to come up with names for the endless variants of beige carpets. Visit the average high-street flooring shop and you might be forgiven for thinking that its wares only come in one colour; if you're lucky, the beige will be off-set by an in-your-face primary-coloured stripe aimed at the highly adventurous.

It takes a deeper delve into the sample books to find the gems that sit between the extremes of boring and outrageous, but it's a good time to go looking for something a bit different, whether that's an interesting colour or a graphic pattern. There has been a rise in enthusiasm for carpets: home design website Houzz reported a 15 per cent jump in searching for it during the first half of 2019. Cosy underfoot, insulating and soundproofing, carpets can create the homely sanctuary we all crave.

"People are becoming increasingly bold when it comes to choosing flooring, with practical, neutral carpets no longer necessarily the automatic choice," says Anna Del-Molino, buyer at Carpetright.

"Instead, we're seeing more on-trend patterns and colours being used for a far more aspirational style."

The trend for "maximalism" - layered interiors with lots of colour and 'Maximalism is all about breaking the rules. This fun trend is making a massive comeback'

pattern - plus the increasing influence of the shag pile-loving Seventies, mean that those who might previously have gone for the striped-floorboard look are reappraising their choices.

"Maximalism is all about breaking the rules," says Jodie Hatton, one of carpet retailer Brintons' creative designers. "Let your creativity run wild with this fun trend, which is making a massive comeback."

While it might look great in the showroom, how do you pull off a bold carpet choice at home? Look to projects such as the apartment that Australian designer Greg Natale worked on for New York clients. He balances a truly wild floor (an oversized python-skin print designed by Diane von Furstenberg for The Rug Company) with a black-and-white patterned ceiling. But in between these two planes, the furniture and lighting are glam yet with simple sculptural shapes and, crucially, no pattern.

In London, interior designer Tribbey Gordon gave an opulent look to the lobby of developer Londonewcastle's newest project in Covent Garden, Chapter House. A thick blue carpet is paired with timber wall panelling, a fire and a chocolate-coloured ceiling to "evoke a feeling of drama and of a bygone era", according to Gordon.

Although at Chapter House she opted for a plain, saturated colour, Gordon thinks that "a patterned carpet can be like an incredible piece of art". For great pattern, seek out companies that have hooked up with well-known designers for collaborations: Brintons works with rebellious Glasgow firm Timorous Beasties, while Alternative Flooring has collaborated with, among



CHECK MATE ON HALLWAYS
Columbus Houndstooth carpet, main, £32.99 per sq m, Carpetright

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BOAR ON THE FLOOR
Below left, Button carpet designed by Margo Selby, £11.20 per sq m, Alternative Flooring; below middle, Malibu carpet, £515 per sq m, Jennifer Manners; below right, Golden Effie carpet designed by Timorous Beasties, £89.99 per sq m, Brintons



STEP UP
Far left, an apartment designed by Greg Natale, where a python-skin print floor is balanced by a patterned ceiling; left, New Hadley stair runner, £129 per m, Roger Oates Design; below, Chapter House in Covent Garden

surprisingly soft and fluffy carpet and several high-end brands have started offering a more design-led approach using this material, including Jennifer Manners and Matthew Wales. To complement this, Springbond, an underlay made from recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic bottles, launched this autumn.

This may sound like an excellent eco idea, but it is end-of-life disposal where carpets have a poor reputation. According to recycling company the Potter Group, 400,000 tons of carpet waste are created annually in the UK, with most going straight to landfill where it takes a long time to degrade, especially the synthetic examples.

"While products created from recycled yarns and new manufacturing techniques that will ensure the carpets of the future are fully recyclable are in development, it's fair to say we're not there yet," says Carpetright's Del-Molino. "The industry is very aware of eco issues and it's likely that some of these changes will come into effect before the end of 2020. In the meantime, the best thing customers can do is to treat new flooring as an investment, opting for long-lasting materials such as wool, which is naturally sustainable and will look and feel great."

Deterding suggests that "100 per cent wool, sisal and coir flooring must be the answer" to the sustainability question, since these are renewable materials. You should also buy the best you can for longevity; she claims that "really good Wilton carpets can last for 50 years or more".

Saving carpets from landfill has become the big eco issue, with some local councils offering a recycling service. The Potter Group shreds carpets and turns them into equine surfaces such as maneges, for example. "When you rip out your old carpets, see if you can use them in the garden to suppress weeds or see if anyone else has a use for them," adds Deterding. "You'll be surprised how ingenious people are."



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You could also concentrate all the excitement in one area, such as the staircase, with a bold runner. "As a transient area, the hallway is a great place to be adventurous and experiment with colour, pattern and texture," says Andy Guard, head of design at Roger Oates Design. "A vivid runner adds instant impact, carrying colour right up through the heart of the home. Our brightest designs are proving incredibly popular, especially vibrant multicolour stripes. Our clients are adventurous, often mixing striped runners and rugs with other strong colours, decorative wallpapers and patterned tiles."

When it comes to materials, be guided by where the carpet will be laid, says Alternative Flooring's Lorna Haigh. "Wool is a natural choice for the bedroom as it's hypoallergenic and the deeper piles are luxurious and soft underfoot. Natural fibre floorings are not recommended for damp areas but, as



'Clients are adventurous, often mixing our striped runners and rugs with other strong colours'

these are structured and architectural, they work well in sitting rooms, and the tight-looped versions are fine for stairs too."

Check that carpet for high-traffic areas such as hallways will be hard wearing, and think about your wider lifestyle, too. For example, interior designer Emma Deterding of Kelling Designs says that "bamboo is really fantastic but there's the warning that a drop of water can really mess up your carpet. They are certainly not easy to clean." Choose a thick underlay to make a relatively inexpensive product feel plush, especially in the bedroom where you are likely to be barefoot. Recycled plastic makes a



PROPERTY OF THE WEEK

Jill Balcon's Hampshire cottage, bought after her husband Cecil Day-Lewis died



I like attractive people," said Jill Balcon in an interview a couple of years before she died, writes Melissa Langford. "Not just sexually attractive, but attractive. But if you do, other people are going to find them so too." Balcon was an acclaimed actress, but her career was somewhat eclipsed by her personal life. Aged 23, while recording for BBC Radio, she met the poet Cecil Day-Lewis, who was 21 years her senior and had not only a wife but a long-standing mistress. He left both to marry her. Balcon's father was horrified. He paid for their reception at The Ivy but refused to attend. From then on, Balcon met her mother in secret: "We used to sit in her car in Hyde Park," she recalled.

Day-Lewis, who became Poet Laureate, had charm, charisma and the good looks that he passed on to their son, Daniel, who in turn became the only man to date to win three Best Actor Oscars. The family had strong creative genes all round: their daughter, Tamsin, is a chef and food critic. Day-Lewis continued to have affairs, the most painful of which for Balcon was with her best friend, the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard. But their marriage endured. So, too, did Balcon's friendship with Howard. After Day-Lewis's death, Balcon worked to keep his literary memory alive. She moved to a cottage near Petersfield in Hampshire, where she lived with the historian Antony Brett-James and hosted neighbours, including Alec Guinness. It seems Balcon liked her houses as she liked her people: the property has a thatched roof and inimitable charm.

It's on the market with Hamptons International for £895,000 (01428 260271; hamptons.co.uk).

CHRISTMAS AS IT SHOULD BE - TIME FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND RELAXATION.

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others, textile artist Margo Selby and interior designer Ben Pentreath. Alternative Flooring's creative and marketing director Lorna Haigh wants people to start thinking about carpet as a creative starting point, not an afterthought. "We push the mantra: 'think of the floor first and plan your interior around it'. It's an investment, so if you get your flooring right, everything else follows... Our patterned carpets allow people to explore and to express their personality."

If this all sounds a bit too much for your home, don't panic. Pattern needn't be loud, according to Carpetright's Del-Molino: "A subtle stripe or a geometric print, in a muted hue, can have just as much impact on a scheme as a bold, bright design."

A good example of a subtler print is Adam Carpets' Flare design, featuring small chevrons in bright colours such as teal, contrasted with white.

Pattern can also be introduced as part of the weave. FlockLiving's Perendale, for example, has a cable-knit motif, like a cosy jumper, that's perfect for a modern Scandi look.