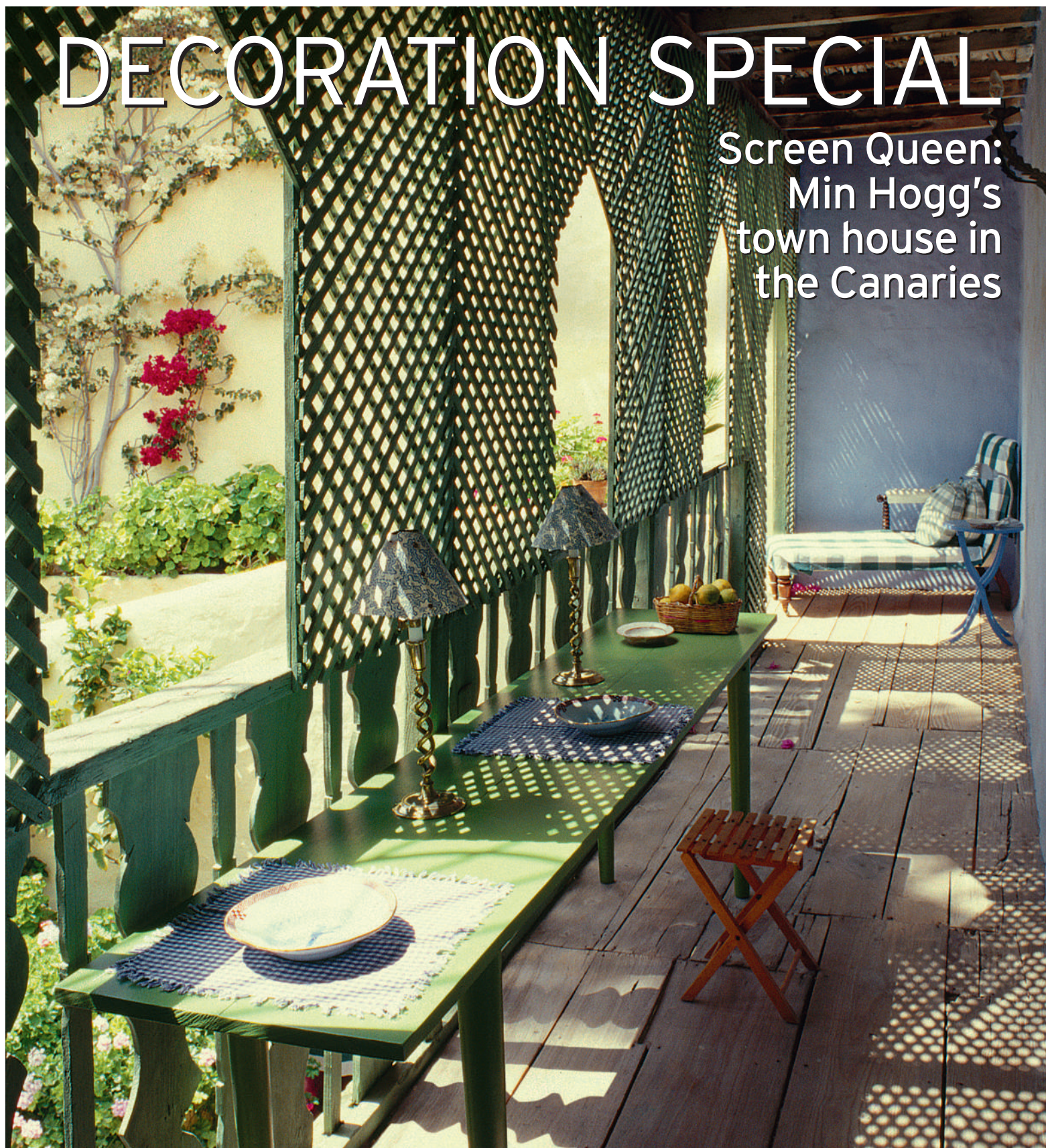


OCTOBER 2019

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

DECORATION SPECIAL

Screen Queen:
Min Hogg's
town house in
the Canaries







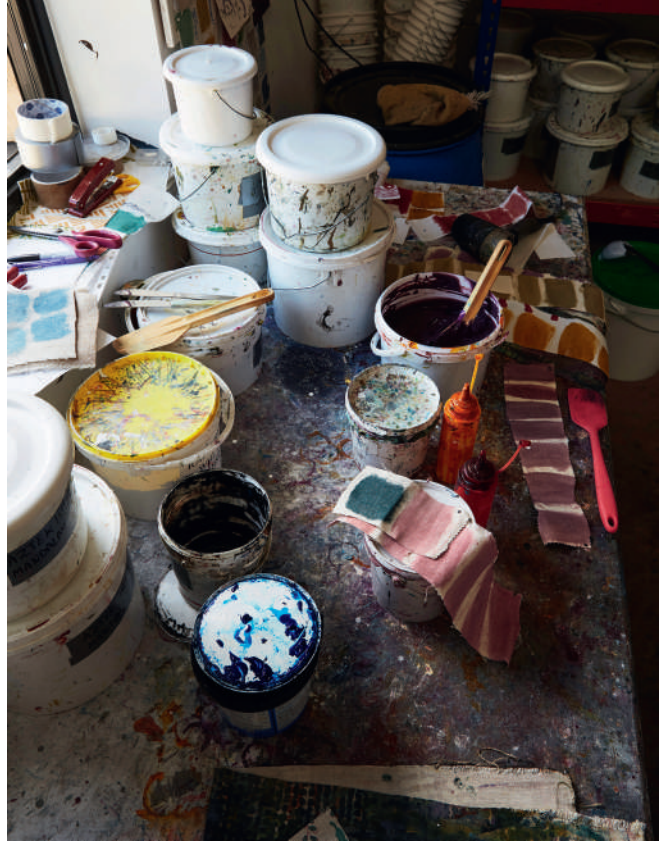
WILD ART HERE

Mother Nature is a pivotal presence at Rapture and Wright's Gloucestershire workshop. Native flora and fauna are a core inspiration for the design duo's hand-printed patterns ('Here, we see the weed as a thing of beauty,' stresses co-founder Peter Thwaites). But the studio also utilises carefully chosen wetland species, a series of ponds and a willow-tree plantation to filter out pollutants from the production process. Jo Leever admires their field of focus. Photography: Jan Baldwin





Previous pages: this pond is thick with plants selected for their ability to break down printing ink, in tandem with oxygen and sunlight; the cedar-clad workshop was once a cowshed. The old silo is a reminder of the farm's past. These pages: the squeegee that spreads ink over the screen must be transferred seamlessly from one pair of hands to the other, deft as a baton pass



This page, clockwise from top left: in the wash room, silk screens are hosed down after printing; inks are mixed by hand and in small quantities so that very little goes to waste; 'Banderole' began life as a far denser criss-cross pattern drawn by Rebecca Aird. It was then refined, acquiring a simpler folk-art beauty; a pinboard fluttering with ideas for future projects hangs above Peter's desk. Opposite: one of their latest patterns, 'Ottoman Anemone', is spread over the cutting table. A pinboard behind provides a snapshot of the company's myriad designs and colourways





IN A QUIET corner of a Gloucestershire farm, nature has been left to run amok. Wild flowers have grown up around a sunken pond, its surface thick with sedge leaves and rushes. Dragonflies zip and, within a dense mass of cornflowers and buttercups, bees bumble.

Mother Nature is doing her thing, but in this case she's been given a generous nurturing nudge by Peter Thwaites and Rebecca Aird, who run their business from the nearby converted cowshed. They are Rapture and Wright, designing and hand-printing exquisite fabrics and wallpapers. In this rural setting, their aim is to draw on the artisan traditions of the past but also to look to the future by minimising the environmental impact that their print studio makes. And that's where the pond comes in. It's part of an off-grid system that filters, treats and disperses waste water from their printing process. A year into the experiment, business – and pond life – is thriving.

Rebecca and her husband, Peter, returned to her Gloucestershire roots 14 years ago, along with their two daughters, shortly after setting up Rapture and Wright. 'No-one was more surprised than me when I ended up back on the family farm,' she says. 'But once we'd launched the company, which always had a strong environmental ethos, it made perfect sense to live and work here.' Rebecca began her career in London as a packaging graphic designer (charged with making fingers of Fudge and Pedigree Chum look equally irresistible). Peter worked as a TV and film-set builder, creating wallcoverings to evoke a palatial library or the peeling paint of a country pile (his top tip: mix crisp autumn leaves into the emulsion). They then joined forces to form Rapt Interiors, painting bespoke murals for discerning clients, before launching Rapture and Wright.

Moving back to the family farm gave them ample space to work (their printing table alone is 15m long), but also brought their environmental concerns to the fore. 'When we came here we made the conscious decision to be as eco-friendly as possible,' explains

Peter. Areas of the land are now being rewilded to counteract years of monoculture farming, with hedgerows left to grow tall to act as natural corridors for wildlife. 'Initially, my father was horrified,' says Rebecca. 'In his eyes, he'd spent his life making a nice and neat farm.'

Their workshop's off-grid drainage system is simple but effective. It was designed by Scottish company Living Water and began with a detailed chemical analysis of their print waste. Water mint, meadowsweet and flowering rush are among 60 native wetland species that were selected for their ability to break down pollutants and transform the waste water into a food source for other forms of pond life. But the process starts with a very low-tech form of filtration – a bale of straw.

After each printing session, silk screens are hosed down in the wash room. From here, water is piped outside, where it drains through the straw bale, trickles into an underground tank and is pumped up into the first of three ponds. The two further ponds continue the process and a plantation of 400 coppiced willows soaks up any remaining water.

It's natural that flora and fauna feature in Rapture and Wright's designs, but they favour the common vetch, the wild carrot and willow leaves over the overblown blooms that traditionally graced British papers and fabrics. 'Here, we see the weed as a thing of beauty,' Peter explains. Their reverence for working by hand echoes the ethos of the Arts and Crafts movement, but a wall of fluttering swatches in their cutting room reveals a far broader range of influences. 'We've drawn on tribal motifs, architecture, Japanese fabrics and 18th-century French decorative style,' says Peter.

Four new designs include 'Ottoman Anemone', which displays a fascination with ikat weavings, while the jaunty stars and dots of 'Banderole' are reminiscent of folk-art stitches. 'Tribal Stripe' began life as a block print, supplemented by hand-drawn hatchings: 'Every design takes a meandering path, refined and adapted until we're happy with it,' Peter adds.

The parallel between Rapture and Wright and the Arts and Crafts tradition has not gone unnoted – three years ago the National Trust asked them to create a set of designs for a project at Standen House – yet Peter is surprisingly lukewarm about William Morris's designs. 'In his time he was revolutionary, but today his work feels rather overblown and fussy,' he says. He prefers Charles Voysey's crisp motifs, the remarkably contemporary embroidery of Ernest Gimson and, from the 20th century, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bayden's mastery of block printing.

Morris's ideas, however, did pave the way for contemporary society's ongoing crush on craft. 'The more I do this job day to day, the more I appreciate what Morris was trying to achieve,' Peter says. Using artisan methods to achieve true quality has earned Rapture and Wright a place on the roster of the Fabric Collective in London and they are exhibiting at Decorex in October.

Aside from the pure pleasure of working by hand, Peter loves how the restricted palette and simple shapes of screen printing constantly stir their creativity. 'Of course we could send everything off to be printed digitally and get every colour under the sun. But all I'd see would be computerised pixels,' Peter says. 'Here, in every paper or fabric we make, you can see the hand of the maker' ■ *Rapture and Wright is exhibiting at Decorex 2019. For more information, ring 01608 652442, or visit raptureandwright.co.uk. Their full collection can be seen at the Fabric Collective, 9 Langton St, London SW10 (020 7384 2975; thefabriccollective.com)*

Top: many of the duo's designs become pared down, but Peter added delicate floral details to 'Serendip', which reveals his love of French 18th-century traditions. Opposite: 'Tribal Stripe' explores the possibilities of two-colour printing. Bespoke colourways can be made up for existing room schemes

