

SYMBOLISM *in Bloom*

The centuries-old cross-cultural tradition of creating pattern from allegorical natural imagery is as alive as ever. Here, a new crop of fabrics, with their bold yet delightfully abstracted botanical perspectives, beckons a closer look.

A NEW OLD LEAF

KNOWN TODAY AS PAISLEY, this leaf-like motif is one of the textile world's most enduring designs, with roots stretching back to ancient Persia and India. Miniature paintings from the 17th-century show Moghul royals donning Kashmiri stoles with stylized flowers along the borders. Over time, these delicate stems grew into something resembling a pear-shaped bouquet or flowering plant. By the turn of the 19th century, luxe shawls from the region embellished with *boteh* (Persian for shrub, flower, or cluster of leaves) made their way west, where they became coveted status symbols for European women who sought to emulate the fashions of style icons such as Empress Josephine. Soon, weavers in Paisley, Scotland, began creating less expensive copies of the Indian textiles, and the town's name inspired a new moniker for the pattern. Today, paisley has become so intertwined with Western culture that the motif, which has sprouted anew in contemporary printed textiles, is as associated with Jane Austen heroines and 1960s hippy-chic style as it is the historic Eastern art from which it first emerged.

Paisley



SIMPLE

The original *boteh* is loosely based on a leaf, bush, or tree, suggesting new life.



ORNATE

Over time, they grew more intricate with profuse flora, as seen in wild Victorian examples.

1. *Fariba*; lisafinetextiles.com. 2. *Udaipur*; borderlinefabrics.com. 3. *Kashmir Paisley Large Scale*; quadrillefabrics.com. 4. *Kashmir de Josephine*; clarencehouse.com. 5. GP & J Baker *Bukhara Paisley*; leejofa.com. 6. *Mughal Gardens*; katieleede.com. 7. *Aryan Bara*; namaysamay.com. 8. *Tiger's Eye*; borderlinefabrics.com. 9. *Aryan Chota*; namaysamay.com, trimmed with *Strata cord*; samuelandsons.com. 10. *Paisley Stripe*, \$450/meter; soane.com. 11. *Cordoba* (also shown as border at right); schuylersampertontextiles.com. All fabrics to the trade unless noted otherwise. Bamboo *daybed*, \$595; onekingslane.com. Moroccan *side table*, \$549; wisteria.com. Antique Kutahya *vase* (\$210) and Turkish delight *bowl* (\$350); shop-tamam.com. Antique Tuareg *mat*, to the trade; fjakimian.com.

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WHEN 18TH-CENTURY English celeb couple David and Eva Garrick sought to tent their bedroom in an Indian fabric featuring summi flowering trees, it was initially confiscated by British customs officials. The craze for imported printed cottons was threatening domestically made wove textiles, so the British government imposed a ban on chintz. The now-ionic 'Tree of Life' pattern is a true cross-pollination of Eastern and Western influences. At the request of European customers, Indian artisans interpreted a tree motif from English crewlwork embroidery—that was itself inspired by Chinese and Persian art—with their drawing and hand-printing techniques. The fervor for these 18th-century patterns has now reignited, with contemporary fabric houses revisiting archival documents to inspire 21st-century prints.



1. Braquenié **Le Grand Corail Impression à la Planche de Bois**; pierrefrey.com
2. **Cashew Tree**; cowtan.com
3. **Fleurs de l'Inde** (also shown as border at left); \$156/meter; thetoileman.com
4. Anna French **Kalamkari**; thibaubdesign.com
5. **Banyan**, \$405/yard; bennisonfabrics.com
6. Zoffany **Indienne Print**; stylelibrary.com. All fabrics to the trade unless noted otherwise. **CeCe bench**, to the trade; dennisdandleen.com.



STYLIZED FLOOMS have flourished in Turkey and Central Asia for centuries, beginning with the works of court artists for 16th-century Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. These abstracted depictions of tulips, carnations, hyacinths, flowering branches, and roses—all familiar garden flowers prized by Ottomans for their spiritual significance—continued to talk to the masses of the people as ceramics and manuscripts. Contemporary travelers to Istanbul's Grand Bazaar may also discover floor in fabrics of a different sort: big, round blossoms with thick undulating vines embroidered with silken red, pink, orange, and blue threads onto large cloths made in the tribal regions of Central Asia. Traditionally, these suzani (suzan) are made for use by their dowries, the patterns found in these suzani (*suzan*) is Parsi for "needle" are blossoming in today's fastest textiles as well.

OTTOMAN CARNATION
Believed to represent power and a renewal of life due to its long blooming period

OTTOMAN TULIP
Associated with modesty thanks to the bow of the flower's head

OTTOMAN HYACINTH
In 16th century Ottoman poetry, these flowers represent a beloved's curls.

POMEGRANATE
A symbol of fertility frequently used in Eastern textile design

SERRATED LEAF
Use of the saw-tooth leaf is attributed to 16th-century Ottoman court painter (and Iranian emigre) Shah Quli.

SUZANI
The bold roses and vines likely represent indigenous flora generally associated with good fortune and fertility.

FERTILE GROUNDS

AT KELMSCOTT HOUSE in London, textile designer William Morris hung on his wall a spectacular 17th-century Persian "Vase" carpet, treating it like a painting rather than something on which to stand. This was not the norm in his neck of the woods, where artists traditionally depicted the natural world using paint on canvas. But in Persia, stylized interpretations of walled gardens intending to evoke paradise were rendered with hand-knotted wool and silk and often shown on walls as a display of wealth.

These antique rugs feature myriad motifs inspired by nature—from blousy forms that suggest blossoms to sparer representations of cypress trees, shrubs, and vines—often combined in equally abundant arrangements. Today's textile designers have cultivated a similar profusion of pattern (not to mention rich color and sumptuous texture) in woven, printed, and velvet fabrics that bloom with carpet-inspired imagery in equal bounty to their floor-covering forerunners. One can only imagine how Morris would adorn his walls today. ♦

Carpet-Inspired Patterns



PALMETTE
Profile view of abstracted lotus blossom and leaves. May be stylized in countless ways.



CYPRESS
Abstract conifer thought to represent immortality, mourning, or longing.



LATTICE
All-over pattern formed by curving vines, often with additional botanicals inside the diamond grids.



VASE
Typically used as part of a pattern in which profuse foliage and flowers spring from a pot.



VEGETAL SCROLL
Iconic and ubiquitous Islamic pattern of undulating vines or tendrils.



1. Colefax and Fowler *Perseus* (also shown as border at left); cowtan.com. 2. *Turkana*; leopofa.com. 3. Colefax and Fowler *Floriana*; cowtan.com. 4. *Ankara*; pierrefrey.com. 5. *Bromley Print*; leopofa.com. 6. Morris & Co. *Montreal Velvet*; stylelibrary.com. 7. Gail Lennard *Hoola*; castelmans.com. 8. *Canal Velvet*; lousiefairley.com. Trimmed with *Aquitaine bullion fringe*; samuelandsons.com. All fabrics to the trade. *Chair 1542-01*; leandustries.com. Antique Moroccan *pendant*; \$1,200; katieleeds.com. *Curtains and table*, to the trade; *figuralionnaga*.com. Moroccan metal *vase*; \$125; shahenzadehome.com. Antique Serapi *rug*; \$21,000; mansour.com.