



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
Atlanta artist Clay McLaurin  
explores negative and positive  
space in *Elena*. • *Tula*, de-  
signed by Los Angeles-based  
Alexis Hartman, is inspired by  
the baskets her grandmother  
used to weave with California  
tule marsh. • Virginia designer  
Lauren Liess pays homage to  
one of her favorite wildflowers  
in *Queen Anne's Bouquet*.  
OPPOSITE: Liess asked fellow  
artist and friend Kat Wright to  
paint the large-scale blossoms  
for *Magnolia*.





# Nature's Imprint

*We've gathered three textile designers who are making their marks on the long-standing tradition of botanical fabrics, using regional plants and flowers for inspiration and printing their wares not too far from their own backyards*

*By* COURTNEY BARNES

## Lauren Liess

Great Falls, Virginia

“When I was little I was allowed to play with the weeds and wildflowers but other areas of the garden were off-limits to me, so the uncultivated parts became my domain,” says Virginia-based decorator, author, and textile designer Lauren Liess. Later, as she recounts in her recently published book, *Habitat: The Field Guide to Decorating* (Abrams, 2015), the discovery at age 11 of an herbal encyclopedia roused a real passion for wild plants and botanical illustrations. Through her teens and beyond, the attraction never waned, and eventually Liess’s love of botany serendipitously led to her own collection of fabrics.

“I’m self-taught. A doodler, really. But one day I glanced over at a rough sketch for my decorating business logo that I’d put aside on a chair, and inspiration hit. I thought the drawing might look great translated into a fabric,” she explains. A rendering of humble wild chicory (a flowering plant Liess often saw from the car window during childhood road trips to her grandmother’s cottage in Illinois) became her first textile design.

Other printed linens feature more of nature’s unpretentious offerings such as Queen Anne’s lace, thistle, buttercups, and ferns. Each design seems to create its own story, and many evoke memories, whether it’s of the scent of magnolia, or a pierced-porcelain ginger jar like the one that belonged to Liess’s grandmother. Several are offered in sepia tones and mottled black-and-natural colorways reminiscent of the antique botanicals that line the designer’s walls at home. But what about her print, *Squid Flower*? Liess replies with a laugh, “That’s one that simply comes from the jungle of my own imagination!”

“I’m always storing up ideas for new designs, mostly based on plants, flowers, and other bits of nature that are meaningful to me.”

Lauren Liess has always had a bit of a “wild streak,” at least when it comes to flowers. Above, the designer is wrapped in her *Wild Chicory* linen; at right, her first field guide from childhood is opened to a page on the dandelion.







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
 The imaginative *Squid Flower* • *Pierced Porcelain*,  
 resembling an abstract floral  
 procession • Liess's first  
 fabric design, *Wild Chicory*  
 • *Fern Star*, hand-drawn  
 fronds choreographed into  
 overscaled stars • *Magnolia*,  
 a favorite blossom





## Alexis Hartman

Los Angeles, California

If Alexis Hartman always pulled her colors from the design industry's book of standardized options, life might be a bit simpler for her (not to mention her printer), but the founder of Lake August, the Los Angeles-based textile line, can't resist getting her hands messy custom-mixing myriad shades. "Color is totally challenging but at the same time most rewarding," says Hartman. "Searching for the right pink, for example, I encounter seemingly endless possibilities found in nature."

The daughter of an artist, this California native grew up painting while surrounded by the earthy beauty of Laurel Canyon and Silver Lake (think flowering succulents and nasturtiums growing wild near manicured gardens). After studying fashion in college, she worked for a company reinterpreting vintage prints and on one occasion had an opportunity to do an especially lush hand-painted floral. It sparked Hartman's desire to create her own.

Today she produces fabrics and wallpapers printed on recycled denim, jute fibers, and clay-coated papers as well as organic linens. The patterns may begin with a sketch of plant life spotted on a stroll around her neighborhood or a trek through the moors of Scotland. Hartman's paintings and hand-carved wood blocks are then translated into silk screens from which the materials are hand printed.

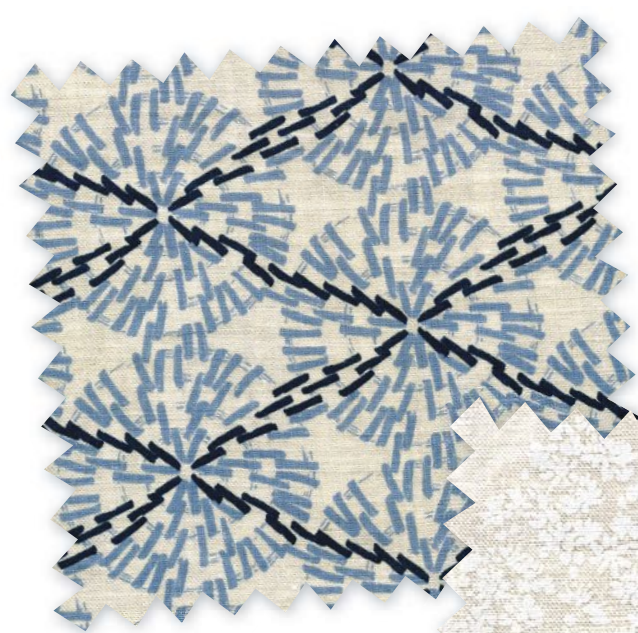
The newest print, *Caerulea*, was inspired by a species of passion flower, a native of South America that climbs abundantly in L.A. "My deep affinity for nature goes back to childhood," says Hartman, "but as I swipe through my Instagram photographs [[@lakeaugust](#)], I'm becoming more conscious of this never-ending predilection for documenting flowers."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Alexis Hartman tests out shades of pink for her new *Caerulea* print by painting directly onto fabric. • The artist poses in front of her *Flock in Flight* wallpaper. • Hartman's painting of nasturtiums is part of the design process for *Agave Americana*.

“I have so much admiration for historic textiles, but my designs ultimately come from my inner world and own observations of nature.”





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The graphic and organic *Tula • Brink of Summer*, shown in two colorways, featuring the cone-shaped flowers of the aeonium plant • *Agave Americana*'s tangle of nasturtiums and agave that represents the horticultural mash-up of Los Angeles







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
*Bleeding Heart*, a contemporary  
 take on the perennial with heart-  
 shaped pendant petals • While  
 McLaurin often pairs a single  
 color with a neutral, *Hollyhock*  
 softly combines multiple hues.  
 • *Weeping Willow*, evidence of  
 the designer's penchant for long  
 dripping foliage • *Elena*, com-  
 prised of numerous dots, takes  
 inspiration from the Japanese  
 printing technique *shibori*.





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# Clay McLaurin

Atlanta, Georgia

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He thought he might become a graphic designer but when Clay McLaurin took an undergrad fabric-printing course, the tactile material he worked with was so alluring that he opted instead for a career in textiles, ultimately earning a masters degree in the field. Now he has an eponymous collection filled with abstracted vines, ferns, bleeding hearts, and hollyhocks, all rendered in subtle tones.

Inspiration comes from the plant life he sees growing in the southeastern United States, including the thicket of vines dripping down the courtyard walls of his studio in Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward, as well as travels to far-flung locales such as Japan. "There are remarkable parallels between the South and Asia in not only the flowers, trees, and kudzu that grow in both regions, but also in the shared reverence for nature. In Japanese art, especially, there's a long tradition of simplifying forms—distilling the essence of a plant—and I aim to do the same with my printed textiles," he says.

McLaurin's affinity for flowers runs in his family. As a boy he was wowed by his grandmother's ribbon-earning roses and ikebana arrangements. But as a designer he usually gravitates toward linear plants that hang. "I love to pare down the forms as much as possible, keeping the look clean yet never sterile," he says. "Allowing subtle brushstrokes in my paintings still to be visible after the art is computer-scanned for printing, and using textured linens and mellower off-white backgrounds, helps the end result feel soft and natural." ❀

“Given that textiles are functional, it makes them a particularly rewarding medium for an artist.”



In his Atlanta studio, artist-turned-textile designer Clay McLaurin surrounds himself with the necessary tools of his trade: brushes, paints, and fabric samples. *Weeping Willow*, one of his signature linear designs, takes shape on his desk.