



Interior artist Sian Zeng, happily based at Cockpit Art Studios in Deptford, is renowned for the dream-like narratives of her imaginative wallpapers and murals. Her latest collection, entitled *Hua Trees*, is inspired by her European and Chinese cultural heritage. 'As an artist, I think you are always influenced by the artwork surrounding you,' she says of her work. 'It feeds into your subconscious.'

'In China, very early on, you are taught Chinese calligraphy. That gave me an understanding of how things are composed, because when you write Chinese characters, you have to think about the way things are placed, and how different elements come together to look good. The characters are made up of two or three different parts, and if you draw one too big, the others will be out of proportion.'

As well as her early education in China, Zeng – who recently moved to Kidbrooke Village – is a graduate of Central St Martins, and also takes inspiration from time spent living in Hungary. 'Hungarian art and design is very strong in a graphic sense,' she reflects. 'They have lots of fairytales and beautiful, well-illustrated story books that can often be quite surreal. I used to copy them a lot as a child.'

It's an influence that's clear to see in her latest designs. 'Most of the time I try to tell a story,' she agrees. 'With the latest collection, it's more about the feeling – a calm sense of walking in the woods. It gives a slow, meditative impression.' Painted with Chinese inks in a non-traditional style, the soft, muted grey and warm light pinks make for a gorgeous feature wall in children's bedrooms and living areas.

'In children's rooms, you can be quite playful,' says Zeng. For a recent photo shoot, she paired her designs with doll's houses and a little tepee. 'We try to bring a little bit of the outdoors indoors,' she explains. 'In the living room I think they give a sense of calmness and space. With the varying degrees of intensity of the trees, there's also a sense of distance.'

The murals are immersive and mesmerising, and for Zeng,

The art of IMAGINATION

Enter the magical world of south east Londoner Sian Zeng, who is bringing a playful nature to interiors

Words MADELEINE HOWELL



The exquisite new collection brings the outdoors into the home in style





Zeng's designs enable you to create your own storyline; below her studio at Cockpit Arts



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that's a big part of their appeal. 'You feel like you're part of it,' she agrees. 'With all my collections, I try to make the repeating pattern as obscure as possible. I try to make every piece more like an artwork than a wallpaper. I don't like to launch collections for the sake of it – I like to take my time, and every time we launch a new one it has to be perfect. I don't like to be pressed by time just because we need something.'

Zeng's creative process is both traditional and contemporary. 'I try to vary my techniques because I get bored very quickly otherwise,' Zeng laughs. 'Every time I launch a new collection I try something different. This time, I experimented with Chinese inks and brushes, and took a couple of lessons in Chinese painting. I start with any mark making tool – inks, gouache, or sometimes even highlighters and sponges. Then I scan all my drawings and collate them on Photoshop to create the final composition.'

Her woodland collection is also a rather fun interiors option, with the added option of a magnetic liner, allowing you to create a fully interactive landscape receptive to magnets. 'I read a lot about shape-shifting in fairytales and I wanted to give people a way to interact on the wall, to move images around and change the storyline,' she explains.

As well as cultural influences, Zeng is in tune with nature, which is reflected in her Seasons collection. Featuring tropical blooms, winter snowdrifts, and autumnal clouds, they're an elegant way to brighten up a room. 'Every season is different and, for spring, I thought of rain, which is why all the paints are dripping down. In summer, things tend to dry out, which is



why I opted for black lines without the colour filled in – but then there are colourful areas as well, and lots of bugs and beetles crawling around.'

There are other inspirations too, as she reveals in her admiration for the fashion photographer Tim Walker. 'I identify with his work a lot,' she confides. 'Some aspects of his work are quite dark and dramatic, but it always tells a story. I like the Whitechapel Gallery and the Royal Academy, and I go to a lot of gardens – Kew Gardens gives me a lot of inspiration.' The 'community feel' of Cockpit Arts and the surrounding area, which Zeng describes as 'vibrant and young', also feeds into her quirky style – and after discussing her work with her, I can't wait to inject a little of her vivid imagination into my own home.

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