

Making Waves

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How seafaring adventures, North Norfolk landscapes and lockdown inspired a wallpaper brand

If it hadn't been for COVID, Zoe Dunford might never have started her wallpaper business.

"It was during that first lockdown," she says. "When I was feeling hemmed in, I just took myself back onto the water, onto the marsh, and got my sketch pad out." Normally a skipper for the Coastal Exploration Company (CEC), based in Wells-next-the-Sea, she wasn't able to sail, and so found herself drawn to sketching boats instead. "I couldn't go and smell the wood or feel those canvas sails beneath my hands. But I could draw them and transport myself back to them in that way."

Zoe also runs a holiday let business and was looking for nautical-themed wallpaper for a renovation. Nothing she found was quite the right fit, therefore she decided to create her own. Inspired by her previous sketches, she came up with elegant, blueprint-like designs – and Collingwood Coastal was born.

A prestigious pedigree

Admiral Lord Collingwood, Collingwood Coastal's namesake, was Nelson's friend and comrade-in-arms. When Nelson was fatally shot at the Battle of Trafalgar, Collingwood took over command of the British fleet. Thanks to his leadership, not a single British ship was lost, either during the battle, or during the violent, week-long storm which followed swift on its heels.

To Zoe, he's not just an historical figure, but someone with great personal significance. A direct relation on her mother's side, Zoe remembers tracing her connection back to the Admiral through family trees brought out at gatherings and special occasions.



In the present day, Collingwood Coastal is also a family matter. While Zoe is the mastermind behind each design, she collaborates with youngest brother Richie to bring them to life. First, Zoe creates the sketches by hand, and comes up with a concept, layout and colour palette, then Richie helps turn them into graphic designs using Illustrator. "We share the screen and work together, which is really nice," Zoe says. "He's an actor in London, and I don't see him very often." It's a way to stay connected with each other.

Boats for treacherous waters

Take a closer look at Zoe's wallpaper designs and you'll notice that the boats featured all have their own distinctive identity, very specific to the North Norfolk coast.



partnership with One Tree Planted. "I'm also really aware," she notes, that "a little tree is no replacement for an old tree, an old rainforest that's already got all that biodiversity." Thus, she's also partnered with the World Land Trust, which helps to protect endangered habitat. "Having suffered from eco anxiety for years, it just feels really good to be doing something positive," she adds.

You can buy Collingwood Coastal wallpapers at collingwoodcoastal.com, or at local stockists Tatty Tides in Holt and The Alder Tree in Wells-next-the-Sea.



"If you look on the charts of the North Norfolk coast," Zoe explains, "It's got lines of sand flats. And over the centuries, there have been many people wrecked and killed. It can be quite treacherous if you don't know what you're doing." The traditional fishing boats depicted in her designs - crab boats, whelk boats, and mussel flats - can sail in water just a few feet high. Flat bottoms and tall masts allow them to glide over sand flats and through marshy creeks.

As a skipper, this landscape can be challenging. Wells' long, flat beach means that tides sweep in swiftly and powerfully. The tides are so strong, in fact, that Zoe had to spend a year weight training in order to build the strength required to scull against them. The creeks shift as the sand moves, meaning that each year their positions need to be re-learned through long, circuitous walks.

But the landscape is also rewarding. North Norfolk and its huge expanse of salt marsh is one of the UK's last great wildernesses, Zoe says: "You can't build on it, because it's flooded by the tide each day. Not everybody explores it, so you can get out and find your own tiny bit of isolation, even on an August day when the harbour is heaving. It just feels like a wild place...there's a bit of jeopardy about it."

Staying sustainable

At the core of Collingwood Coastal is Zoe's deep love of nature, and so sustainability was essential for her. "I worked as a science writer, and I couldn't just ignore that and become another company that contributes to the problems that we've got," she says.

For every 10-metre roll sold, a tree will be planted in Uganda's Albertine Rift in

