



SurfacePattern Design

Cate Ruth

Spoonflower contest winner Lamai McCarten's collection

Surface pattern design can be described as the printed element of a product or the applied design to the surface of a product. It is the pattern, texture, imagery and colour, which has been applied to, surfaces within the man made environment.

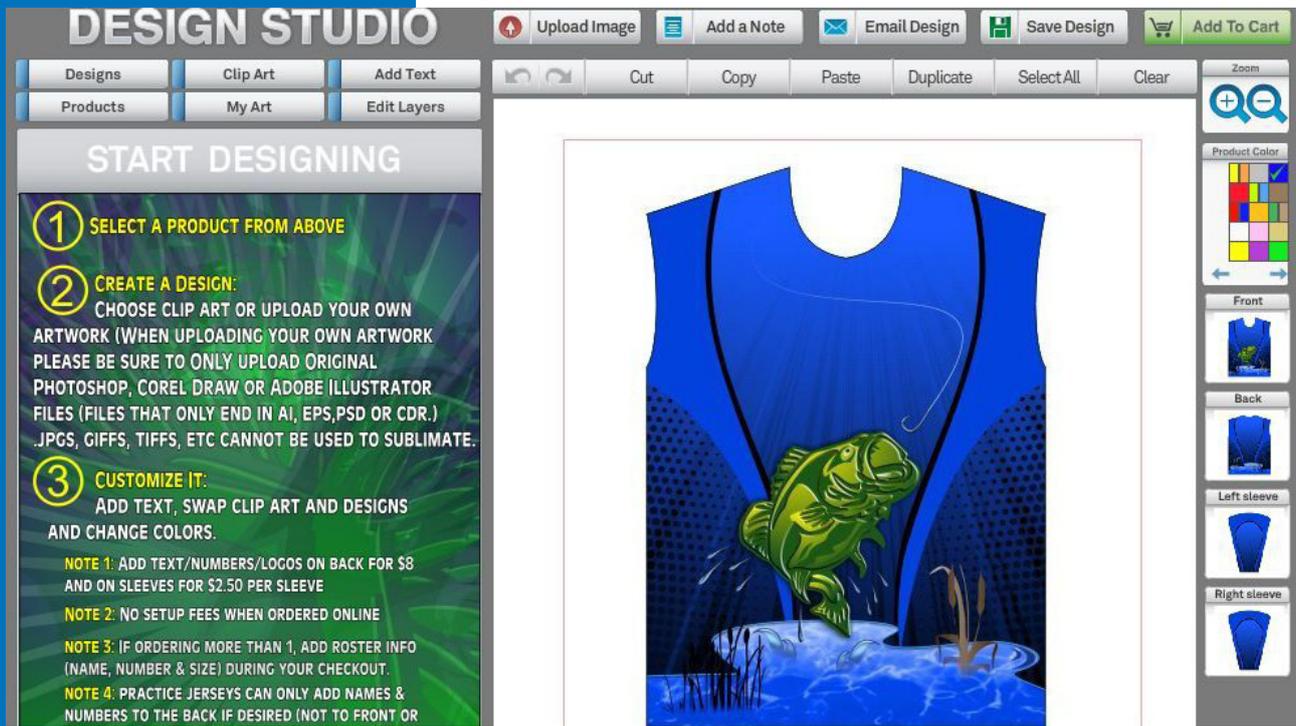
Surfaces that surface pattern designers often work with include textiles, wallpaper, gift-wrap and ceramics. There is an extensive range of products which textiles can be made into before or after the application of design including furnishings, bedding, clothing and accessories.

Surface Pattern Design may be a new title conceived recently to describe designers creating surface decoration for various products, but it is not a new idea, the concept has been around for centuries. Throughout history, designs have been applied to surfaces such as pots, walls and textiles in one way or another. As with many things, with the advancement in technologies the range of process and products that could be achieved has grown and changed substantially and has changed the way we perceive certain qualities within a product. With new attitudes towards products and some of the contributing trends, the area of surface pattern design, as we know it is strong and growing. Look around and the majority of the products we see have had a surface design treatment of some description, for aesthetic and practical reasons.

The trends within Surface Pattern Design can be seen in the manufacturing processes, advancements in technology and how society interacts with their

surroundings. Technologies are changing the way both designer and consumer interacts with the design and manufacturing process. Barriers that once existed between the design process and the consumer are now much smaller and easier to overcome and they will continue to be minimized into the future. The consumer is more environmentally conscious and is looking for sustainable products. There is also another resurgence of the handmade.

As the consumer becomes more aware of their environment and the impacts we have on it, they are looking towards more environmentally sustainable products. This has urged designers to rethink their process and look for more sustainable ways of processing and distributing their product. Advancements in inks and printing processes, as well as materials have left us with options that have fewer chemicals, use less water, or produce less waste. However, with these there are often challenges within the design process to combat little quirks. For example, knowing how an ink will react to a material during the manufacturing process could mean the difference between something washout looking and something bright and vibrant. This is something a designer needs to be aware of and work within the constraints of the products and manufacturing processes. It has become just as important for surface



Animal Customs offers an easy online design service for consumers to customize their own sporting jerseys and apparel.

pattern designers as any other designer, to thoroughly research the manufacturing process of having their designs made into a deliverable product that will appeal to the consumer in all aspects, not just based on the aesthetics of their surface design, but environmental factors as well.

Print on demand and a trend towards customized prints has seen a new breed of surface pattern designers born. It has allowed for easy access to manufacturing process that was once kept for big commercial companies, and introduced new technologies such as digital printing which has minimum set up times and expenses. Online sites such as Spoonflower have encouraged the average person to try their hand at designing for the surface. They are encouraging anybody and everybody to design and print their own fabric, wallpaper, gift-wrap and decals. It has also been a breeding ground for designers, offering weekly contests and a market place to sell designs. On occasion, they team up with commercial fabric printing companies and offer the prize of designing a line for commercial print. Long gone are the days where you were limited to what you could buy in store. Now you can be as unique as your imagination lets you. This does not just apply to textiles. Sites such as Zazzle offer an extensive range of print on demand products that can be delivered to your doorstep.

Print on demand has also seen consumers team up with designers directly to produce a product specific for their needs. An example of this is designing sporting jerseys, where a sporting team will approach a designer to put together a jersey design that can then be sent to the printers and manufactured. In the past the teams would realistically pick an off the shelf garment and have names and numbers vinyl cut and heat pressed onto those. Animal Customs is a great example of bringing the manufacturing process of items like these to their customer base. They offer an online design system, and more advanced templates for the serious designers.

This easy access to customization has created an environment of being



Leah Goren has both a digital range and an artisan range of surface design.

unique, being different to the person sitting next to you and gives the consumer a feeling of having a hand in the process.

Just as consumers are looking for a more customized experience with a product, there is also a trend towards DIY and buying handmade. They are opting to DIY instead of buy everything off the shelf. This is as much as getting away from technology as it is for relaxation purposes, but we are still seeing many products designed for this area. Surface pattern designers are busy putting their ideas into fabrics and papers ready for them to be made into something else. We are also seeing a lot of surface pattern designers go back to basics in producing their own wares, using techniques such as screen printing in independent studios and marketing direct to consumers. There is a current trend happening in the world, inviting more and more people to get in touch with their creative side and create something by hand, for pleasure and as a reaction against mass-produced. Here in Canberra it is a large movement with the Handmade Market promoting handmade wares, their very successful spinoff Shop Handmade as well as many other niche markets and stores promoting the handmade and artists. What does this mean for the surface pattern designer? There are many products coming out from surface pattern designers that are being marketed towards this trend, in particular, those consumers who like to DIY at home. When thinking about developing designs, thinking about products and their end use and the trends that are happening,

Leah Goren is one surface pattern designer who both prints digitally and by hand. Utilising hand stamping techniques for some of her own range, and making the most of the simplicity of digital printing on fabrics.

Melanie McNiece has also been known to use Spoonflower to test run her designs and develop samples before they are sent off for mass production. This allows her quicker access to her designs and gives her the ability to formulate sewing patterns with the fabric before it hits the shelves.

As a Surface Pattern Designer, it is essential to continue updating skill sets in design software, as well as consistently researching and watching as new products and techniques make their way into this area of specialisation. Having the ability to analyse and filter the new products and technologies to only accept the ones with potential and relevance to the area you are working within is necessary. To be successful at surface pattern design, skills based around illustration and drawing are essential, a good eye for composition and colour, as well as seeing trends in the market to make sure you are always producing designs that will be relevant to the target market. It is also essential to have good communication skills to correspond with clients, potential clients and to promote yourself. New technologies have opened up the manufacturing process to a whole new clientele, but it has also opened up a whole new range of skills and expectations of a great designer.

Spoonflower contest Top Ten Surf Designs

