

# PATTERN DESIGN

A BOOK FOR STUDENTS  
TREATING IN A PRAC  
TICAL WAY OF THE AN  
ATOMY, PLANNING &  
EVOLUTION OF REPEAT  
ED ORNAMENT BY

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## I. WHAT PATTERN IS.

Pattern not understood—The meaning of the word—Comes of repetition, and is closely connected with manufacture—Has always a geometric basis—Use and necessity of system in design—Lines inevitable, and must not be left to chance.

To readers of a book upon the subject, no apology for pattern is necessary. Modest as may be its pretensions to artistic consideration, it covers ground enough to command attention. It is here and there and everywhere about us. There is too much of it by more than half—and more than half of it is of such a kind as to make the discriminating wish they could do without it altogether. Still, there it is; and there is no escape from it.

If folk knew a little more about it, realised what was and what was not within the control of the designer, understood how pattern came to be, and something of its scope and purpose, as well as of the processes through which a design must pass before ever it comes (for their momentary delight or lasting annoyance) to be produced, they would be less at its mercy. For the difficulty of designing is by no means in proportion to the importance of the field of design; and in the case of repeated pattern, with which we have mostly to do—even those of us who are not concerned with trade or manufacture—the invention it requires is in inverse ratio to the free scope afforded. It is easier, as William Morris confessed, to design a big hand-made carpet, in which the artist is free to do very much as he likes, than to plan a small repeating pattern to the width of Wilton pile or common Kidder-

minster. The art of pattern design consists not in spreading yourself over a wide field, but in expressing yourself within given bounds.

The very strictness of such bounds is a challenge to invention. In the realm of applied design manufacture is autocrat, and the machine is taskmaster. Let who *can* rebel against their authority. For those who cannot—and they are the great majority—revolt is futile. We are all of us, artists no less than the rest of the world, dependent upon manufacture; and those of the title who stand aloof from it give ground for the accusation, commonly brought against artists, of being at best unpractical and wrong-headed. Their sense of fairness is at fault, too, in blaming manufacture because it falls short of art, while they stand by and refuse a helping hand to the makers of things which will be made, and must be made, and made by machinery too, whether they like it or whether they do not. It rests with those who have some faculty of design (their name is not legion) to come to the aid of manufacture, which, without help from art, is given over to the ugliness which they deplore.

Pattern, it seems plain, and repeated pattern, conforming to the conditions of manufacture and even to mechanical production, is a consideration of importance, not merely to manufacturers and others engaged in industries into which art may possibly enter, but to all whose comfort and well-being depends in any degree upon the beauty and fitness of their surroundings.

The word "pattern" is here used in a somewhat technical sense—not, as the dictionary has it, to mean "a specimen" nor yet "a shape or model for imitation," but ornament and especially ornament in repetition. Pattern is, in fact, the natural outgrowth of repetition; and in every case the lines of its construction may be traced; they pronounce themselves, indeed, with geometric precision. Geometric pattern grew, of course, out of primitive methods of workmanship.

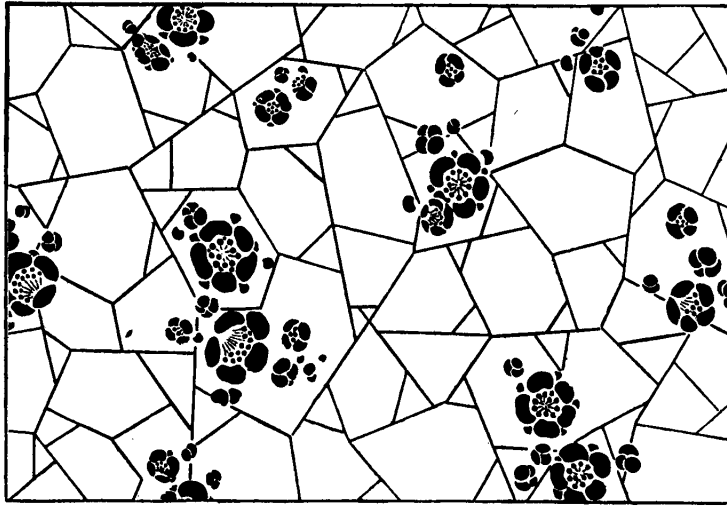
No mechanism so simple but it gives rise to it. To plait, to net, to weave, or in any way mechanically to make, is to produce pattern. The coarser the work, the more plainly is this apparent—as, for example, in the mesh of a coarse canvas; but, though refinement of workmanship may be carried to the point at which, as in the finest satin or the most sumptuous velvet, warp and weft are not perceptible to the naked eye, the web is always there, and forms always a pattern. The pride of the mechanist is to efface such evidence of structure. To the artist it adds an interest; and, far from desiring to obliterate it, he prefers frankly to confess it, and to make the best of the texture or pattern which a process may give. He regards it as a source of inspiration even, which to neglect would seem to him wasteful of artistic opportunity.

It is to his determination to make the best of whatever may naturally come of any way of working that we owe much of the simplest and most satisfactory, if not absolutely the most beautiful, patternwork.

So infallibly does the repetition of simple units, resulting no less from elementary processes of handwork than from mechanical production, end in pattern, that wherever there is ordered repetition there it is. Take any form you please and repeat it at regular intervals, and, as surely as recurrent sounds give rhythm or cadence, whether you want it or not, you have pattern. It is so in nature, even in the case of forms neither identical nor yet recurring at set intervals. The daisies make a pattern on the lawn, the pebbles on the path, the dead leaves in the lane; the branches of the trees above, the naked twigs against the sky, the clouds that mottle the blue heavens by day, the stars that diaper their depths by night, all make perpetual pattern. The grain of wood, the veining of marble, the speckling of granite, fall so obviously into pattern that they have been accepted in place of intelligent design. The surface of the sea is rippled,

as the sandy shore is ribbed, with wind-woven device, the rocks are covered with shellfish clustering into pattern. Your footprints, as you walk, make a pattern on the pattern of the dewy grass; your breath upon the window-pane crystallises into pattern.

Technically speaking, however, we understand by pattern not merely the recurrence of similar forms, but their recurrence at regular intervals. The Japanese rendering of



I. PEACH BLOSSOMS ON THE ICE—JAPANESE.

peach-blossoms on the surface of thin ice is undeniably ornamental. It may be regarded as part of a pattern, but, to be complete, it should repeat, which here it does not.

It must not be inferred from the casual occurrence of what is called pattern that there is anything casual about design: the very name denies that it is so.

The artist's hand does not crawl aimlessly over the paper and trail behind it flowers of the imagination. There is scope in ornament for all the fancy of a fertile brain; but

design is no mere overflow of a brimming imagination ; it is cunningly built up on lines necessary to its consistency, laboriously, it might be said, were it not that to the artist such labour is delight. Whoever finds it irksome may be sure his bent is not in the direction of applied design.

The main lines on which repeated ornament is built are so few and simple that they can quite easily be traced. Just as the man of science divides the animal world into families and classes, so may the man of art classify pattern according to its structure. He is able, no less than the scientist, to show the affinity between groups of design to all first appearances dissimilar, and to lay bare the very skeletons upon which all possible pattern is framed.

The idea of setting out to design a pattern without regard to its logical construction is contrary to reason. It is all very well to protest that art is free of laws : they govern it none the less. And the pattern designer is bound to reckon with the dry bones of design. With regard to the unit of his design he is free ; he may, if he will, throw taste to the winds ; but when the pattern comes to be repeated, the very order of its repetition reveals the skeleton ; it was in the cupboard all the while.

This insistence upon the geometric basis of design may seem like dogmatism ; and all dogma cuts two ways, irritating the student into opposition where it does not convince him ; but experience will prove to him that the way to avoid the appearance of formality is not to set to work at haphazard. Suppose one were to begin without any thought of formal distribution and to design, let us say, a scroll, in itself as graceful as might be. A series of such scrolls, side by side, would show lines not in the least contemplated by the draughtsman, and in all probability as inelegant as they were unexpected. Who has not suffered in his time from wallpaper or other patterns in which certain ill-defined but awkward stripes would thrust themselves

upon his attention? And to the designer himself one of his strangest experiences is the trick a seemingly quite innocent pattern will play upon him in repetition. A design, for example, which appears to be quite evenly distributed will run, when hung, into lines which slant in such a way as to give the impression that the walls are not true, or that the paper has been hung askew.

In a pattern in which patches of the ground are left bare, the gaps are by no means accidental. They are most



2. PREDETERMINED GAPS IN A PATTERN.

deliberately planned—and from the very beginning—or there is no knowing what havoc they might play in repetition.

Amateurs will tell you (and a painter is an amateur when first he tries his hand at pattern) that the lines which are so distressing in incompetent pattern are the result of mathematical planning. That is not merely false, but, as every practical designer knows, the very opposite of the truth. There is no more radical mistake than to suppose that the awkward stripes which come out for the first time when a pattern is repeated are the result of the designer's having worked upon the obtrusive lines: they are the natural



3. BALANCE OF ORNAMENT ENOUGH FOR A PANEL BUT NOT FOR A REPEATING PATTERN.



and inevitable result of not working upon any lines at all. If you work without a system the only safety is in insignificance. A pattern may be comparatively featureless; and, so long as there is in it no feature pronounced enough to distinguish itself, lack of order may perhaps pass unnoticed. But it is hardly worth while going out of the way to secure an end so insignificant.

A design of any character has usually in it features which, when it is repeated, stand prominently out from the rest. To these the eye is irresistibly drawn; and, not merely so, but the lines they take in relation one to another insist on being seen. It is barely possible that, in the event of such lines not having been taken into consideration by the designer, they should fall together in the happiest conceivable way. More likely they will look awry.

The balance which in a single composition satisfies the eye is not enough when it comes to repetition. The shoulders of the mantling, for example, on page 7, one rising above the lion's back, the other falling below it, would in repeated scrollwork almost certainly give the impression of being out of the level. The only way to be sure that scrolls in repetition will balance is to begin by disposing them, as in the wall-pattern opposite, quite symmetrically.

The designer of experience runs no unnecessary risk. Accepting some sort of geometric plan as the basis of his design, and appreciating at their worth the severity and strength resulting from it, and the sense of scale it gives, he makes sure of lines deliberately fulfilling the purposes of decoration. He will counteract a tendency to stripes in one direction by features which direct attention otherwards; he will so clothe a doubtful line that there shall be no fear of its asserting itself, as in its nakedness it might. The lines he leaves in his design were chosen for their strength and steadiness. Such lines as reveal themselves are the lines upon which it was built, by no means unforeseen.



4. WALL PATTERN IN WHICH THE LINES OF THE SCROLL ARE  
QUITE EVENLY BALANCED.

If lines left to chance reveal themselves, as they are apt to do, in sequence not to be endured, what else was to be expected? Only by a miracle could they happen to fall precisely as art would have them. The best of players makes sometimes a happy fluke in design ; but he does not reckon upon such luck.

The point is this: it is, practically speaking, inevitable that lines shall in the end assert themselves in repeated pattern ; if the artist does not arrange for them in his design, they fall as may happen ; it is therefore the merest precaution of common-sense on his part to lay them down from the beginning, to make them the framework upon which his pattern is built, the skeleton of his design.

A practical designer has not, as a rule, much difficulty in tracing the bones of a design, amply as they may be wrapped in foliage or other disguising detail. To lay them bare enough, however, to demonstrate the anatomy of pattern recourse must be had to dissection.