

PAPER TRAIL

From Art Deco architecture to Victorian circuses or British wildlife, many inspirations feed into the designs of Daniel Heath's hand screen-printed wallpapers

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Made in Britain

Opposite: Daniel's Onyx Skyline design, which was inspired by the Art Deco Hoover building
This image: Daniel takes a break in his studio in London's Hackney Wick, surrounded by panels of his wallpaper samples, from left to right: Onyx Skyline, Globe, and Eastern Peacocks designs



The Victorian warehouse that is home to Daniel Heath's studio is a stone's throw from the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Once a depository for goods travelling up the River Lea, the brick building now sits cheek by jowl with the London Stadium and the ArcelorMittel Orbit; the industrial revolution meets 21st-century design and technology. It's the perfect location for Daniel's workshop, where he combines hands-on craft with digital imaging to create stunning bespoke wallpapers – every roll painted and screen-printed by hand on a long bench at the back of the space.

'I'm often asked about drawing and making versus digital artwork and machine production,' Daniel says. 'I can research ideas online or tweak a design on the computer, but I can only get the depth and detail I want when I make the wallpapers myself. You can't match colours on a screen, and the tiny differences that make each roll unique are there only when you've applied the ink yourself.'

Watching him work is to see a design come to life, as each layer of ink brings another dimension of tone or texture to the paper – the delicate etching of a bird's feathers, the graphic lines of an Art Deco building, swirls and curls of calligraphy. 'I'm still working on this one,' he says, indicating a test piece with a muntjac deer peering from behind a screen of bamboo. 'The pelt is looking a bit flat so I'll go back to my original drawing to see what I can add.'

Every design starts with an idea: a topic or an image that fascinates Daniel, nudging away at his consciousness until he feels the urge to get it down on paper. Previous collections have been inspired by architecture, Victorian circuses, evolution and taxidermy. The muntjac deer is there because of his research into invasive species. 'The deer is originally from Asia but since being introduced here, herds have bred across the south of England,' he explains. 'It made me wonder about other invasive species, such as Japanese knotweed or the American crayfish that have colonised our rivers. It's still the early stages of the design and my research may take me off in any direction.'

Each wallpaper takes Daniel between four or five months to complete, from inspiration to production of the first completed rolls. The drawings come first, and then he scans them on to the computer to adjust the composition. The wallpaper design is printed onto tracing paper and laid onto a screen treated with photosensitive emulsion. When the screen is exposed to light, the emulsion binds to the mesh and retains the image, ready for printing. 'If I'm creating a bespoke paper for a client the design process may be quicker, as I need to meet a deadline,' Daniel explains. 'Working to a customer's brief is a different challenge, as they want me to put my stamp on their idea. There's always a difficult point when I don't know what

to do. I'll get stuck into research and then inevitably, there's that "Eureka" moment where it all comes together.'

Born in Eastbourne in 1982, Daniel was always the kid with a pencil or screwdriver in his hand. 'I loved drawing animals and I took bikes to pieces and rebuilt them because I like to know how things work,' he laughs. 'I think that's why the making aspect of my work is so important to me. I enjoy the mechanics of it, and putting materials together in different ways.'

He studied art and design at Eastbourne College before moving on to a textile design degree at Loughborough University. In 2007, he went to the Royal College of Art to learn traditional screen-printing. 'It was there I met fashion designer Christopher Raeburn, who helped me get my first studio,' Daniel says. 'Chris asked me to design textiles for his fashion collection and said I could set up on the top floor of his dad's cleaning-cloth factory in Luton. We had so much free space; it was amazing! I would go to college in the week then spend every weekend printing.'

After completing his training, Daniel combined lecturing at universities with developing his own business. 'Chris and I moved to a live/work unit in London, and then it got really hard,' he says. 'I remember having to screen-print 500 T-shirts for a guy in a day, but doing that taught me my craft.'

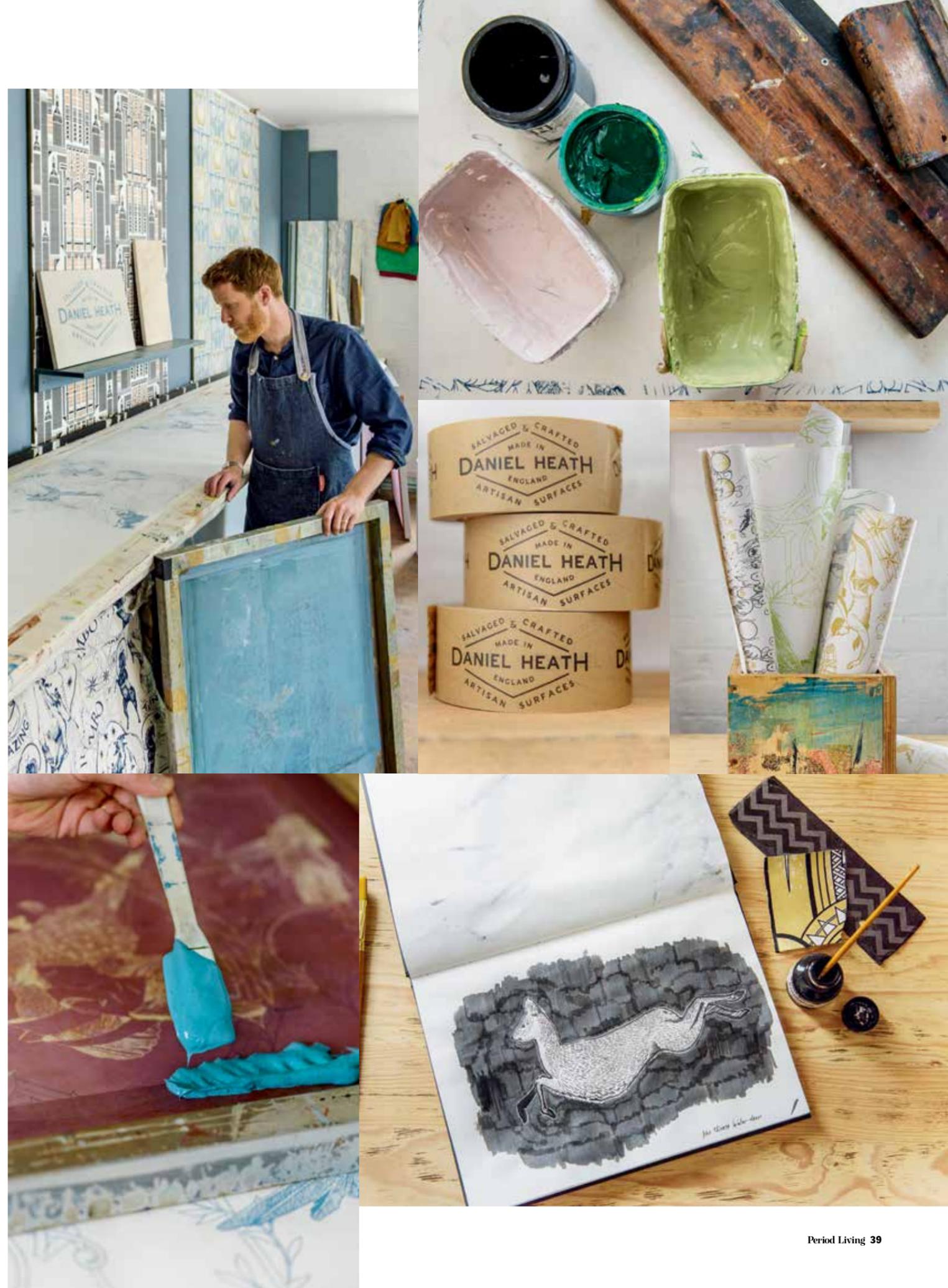
Ten years on, Daniel is producing award-winning designs and counts Heal's, Anthropologie and Farrow & Ball among his clients. Life is easier now he can devote himself full-time to his design work. 'I'm loving the extra time to explore ideas and get out to exhibitions, like David Hockney at the Tate. His sense of colour and embrace of technology is an inspiration,' he says.

Alongside wallpaper, Daniel produces surface designs for his range of velvet and corduroy fabrics, woven in a traditional mill in Lancashire, as well as etching intricate patterns onto vintage mirrors and reclaimed slate roof tiles. 'Every slate is hand-cut so it can be engineered around existing fixtures,' he says, gleefully wielding a huge pair of tile snippers. 'I love it when people send me pictures of my work in their homes. It's always an eye-opener, as I have an idea of what a collection will sit with and then I see it used in a completely different way.'

There is a sense that every day is an adventure for Daniel, who at only 35 is looking ahead to a lifetime of creativity. 'I want to be working when I'm an old man, tackling different techniques and projects – theatre design, ecclesiastical glass, it could be anything,' he says. Until then, he has a wallpaper to design for his new son. 'He's due in June and my wife is desperate for me to finish decorating his bedroom,' he admits. 'Better get back to work...'

For details, visit danielheath.co.uk; 07913 948005

Clockwise from top left: Daniel prints alternate screens so as not to pick up colour and mark the paper, then goes back and prints spaces in between; the squeegees draw ink across the screen; samples of wallpaper, ready to be sent out to clients – 'as every roll is made to order, I can print the design in an infinite number of colourways,' Daniel says; he begins every design with a pen and ink drawing – this Chinese Water Deer is for a new collection; Daniel uses a spatula to apply the ink to the edge of the screen; all the materials for his products are salvaged or responsibly sourced





Clockwise from left: Daniel has created a range of velvet and corduroy upholstery fabrics that feature his designs, while the linen cushion on the stool is printed with his High Wire design; he stores screens on racks ready for reuse – the muntjac deer screens show how the design is created in layers of colour and pattern; the image that has been transferred onto the screen with photo-emulsion is the reverse of the final design – on the unmasked areas, the ink is pushed through the fine mesh on to the paper beneath; his Taxidermy Birds design in Pantone's colour of the year, Greenery; Daniel creates wood and slate surfaces to order – this image of a jay is etched onto a salvaged Welsh slate tile; a test piece, trying out his muntjac deer with bamboo; the screens are washed after use

