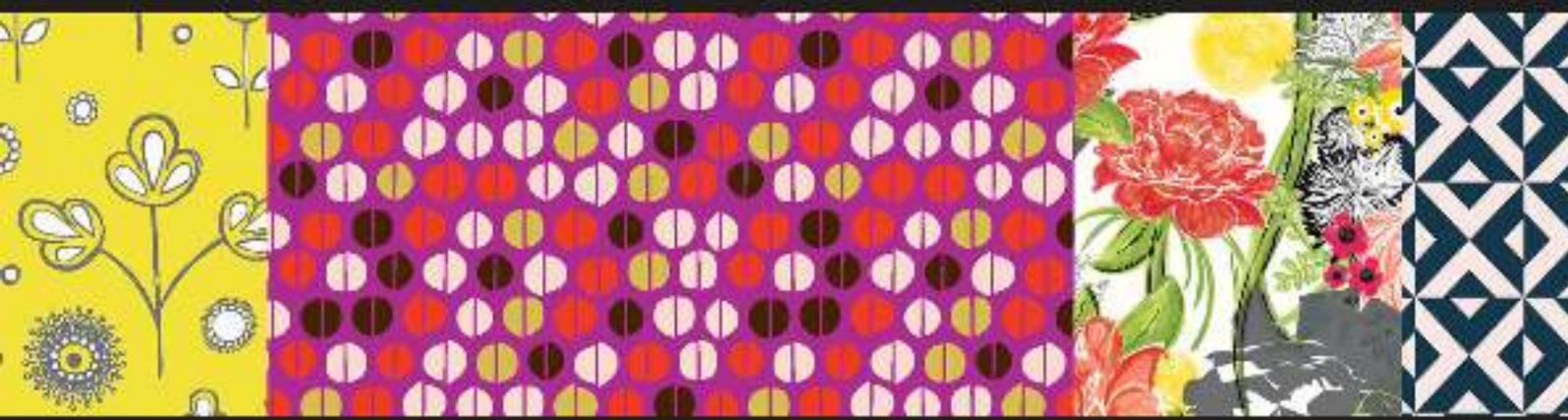




COLOR +

# PATTERN

50 playful exercises for exploring pattern design



Khristian A. Howe





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**COLOR +  
PATTERN**





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50 playful exercises for exploring pattern design

Kristian A. Howell



**Rockport Publishers**

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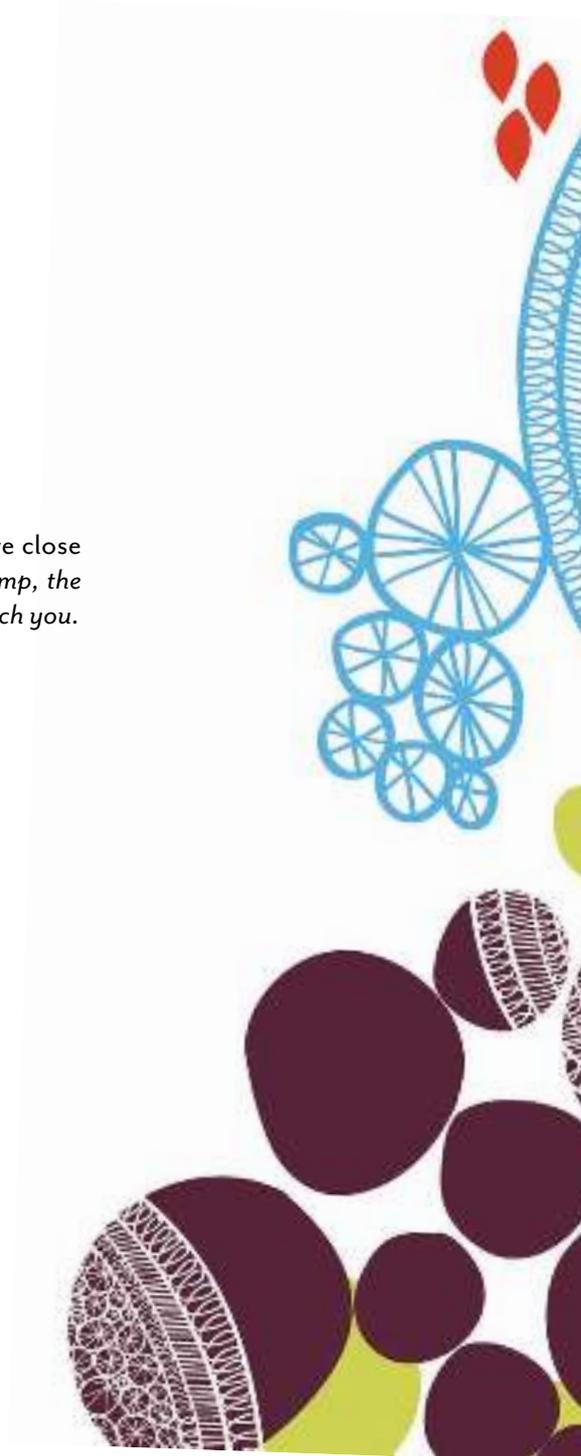
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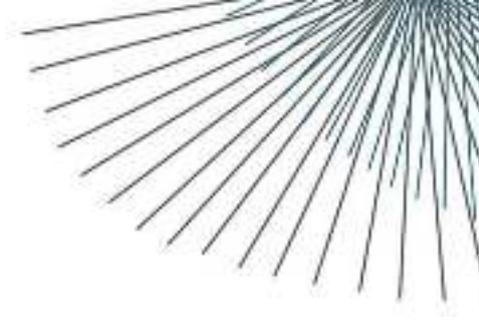
To Keli, who takes my hand as we close our eyes, and then whispers, *jump, the net will appear—and if not, I'll catch you.*



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## CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	8	<b>15</b> Sketch floral motifs
<b>THE IMPACT OF PATTERN DESIGN</b>	10	<b>16</b> Reinvent folk motifs
<b>GLOSSARY OF ESSENTIAL TERMS</b>	12	<b>17</b> Explore ethnic motifs
		<b>18</b> Design a foulard
		<b>19</b> Play with children's motifs <i>Featuring Abi Hall</i>
<b>GATHERING INSPIRATION</b>	14	<b>20</b> Create conversational motifs <i>Featuring Arrolynn Weiderhold</i>
<b>01</b> Start an inspiration journal	16	<b>21</b> Add texture to motifs
<b>02</b> Study a bouquet of flowers	18	<b>22</b> Convert hand-drawn motifs to digital <i>Featuring Jenean Morrison</i>
<b>03</b> Take a walk with your sketchbook or camera	20	
<b>04</b> Shoot or sketch ten patterns in nature	22	<b>DESIGNING REPEATS</b>
<b>05</b> Shoot or sketch ten different types of foliage	25	<b>23</b> Design a straight repeat
<b>06</b> Take a trip just for inspiration <i>Featuring Jessica Swift</i>	26	<b>24</b> Design a half-drop repeat
<b>07</b> Inspiration Hunt: Go "shopping" for samples	32	<b>25</b> Design a brick repeat
<b>08</b> Visit a museum, art gallery, or festival	35	<b>26</b> Design a mirrored repeat
<b>09</b> Shoot or sketch ten architectural patterns	38	<b>27</b> Experiment with directional repeats <i>Featuring Rashida Coleman-Hale</i>
<b>10</b> Create an inspiration board <i>Featuring Mary Beth Freet</i>	40	<b>28</b> Experiment with tossed repeats
<b>11</b> Create a Pinterest account	41	<b>29</b> Design a small-scale print
<b>12</b> Gather color inspiration	44	<b>30</b> Design a large-scale print
		<b>31</b> Create a dense print <i>Featuring Elizabeth Olwen</i>
<b>EXPLORING MOTIFS</b>	46	<b>32</b> Create an open print
<b>13</b> Create geometric motifs	48	
<b>14</b> Play with doodle motifs <i>Featuring Rachael Taylor</i>	52	



<b>33</b>	Add depth and layers to a pattern	108
<b>34</b>	Add texture to a pattern	109
<b>35</b>	Create a repeat by hand <i>Featuring Leah Duncan</i>	110
<b>36</b>	Create a repeat pattern using Adobe Illustrator <i>Featuring Michelle Fifis of Pattern Observer</i>	114
<b>37</b>	Create a repeat with Adobe Photoshop <i>Featuring Stephanie Corfee</i>	120

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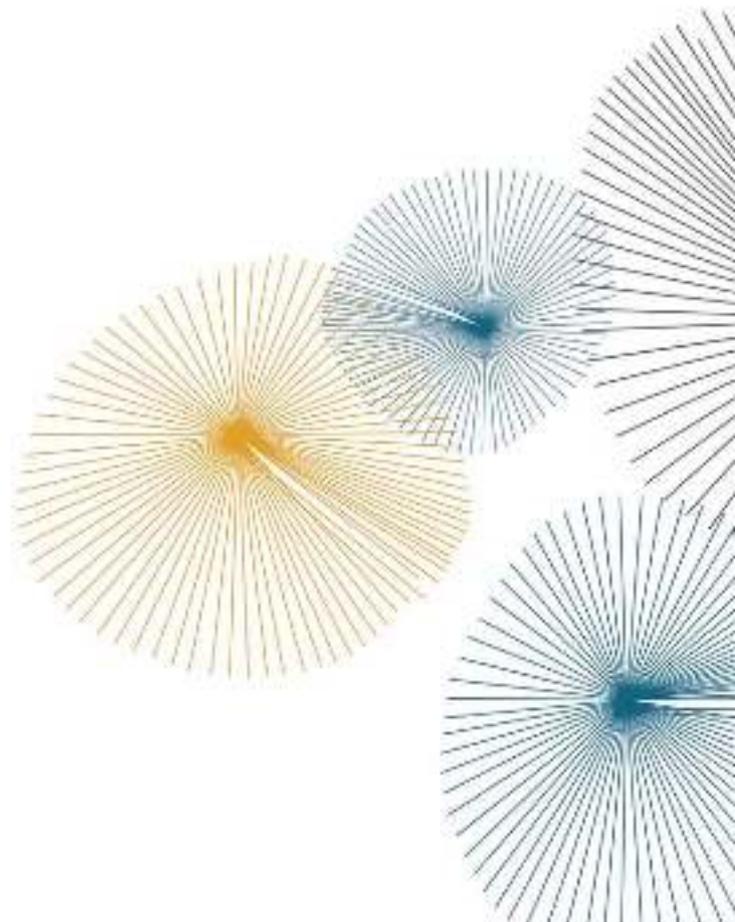
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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

## **INDEX**

## **DEVELOPING A COLLECTION** 128

<b>38</b>	Study successful collections <i>Featuring Sisters Gulassa</i>	130
<b>39</b>	Craft a story for your collection	134
<b>40</b>	Use images to tell the story	135
<b>41</b>	Choose multiple palettes	136
<b>42</b>	Develop the collection	138
<b>43</b>	Explore a multicolor palette	142
<b>44</b>	Explore a simple palette	150
<b>45</b>	Explore a tonal palette	152
<b>46</b>	Explore a high-contrast palette	154
<b>47</b>	Create balance with scale and density	156
<b>48</b>	Create cohesion with style <i>Featuring Ana Davis</i>	160
<b>49</b>	Create cohesion with color	164
<b>50</b>	Create an eclectic collection <i>Featuring Ampersand Design Studio</i>	166



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## PREFACE

Sometimes, I feel like that kid in *The Sixth Sense*. You know the famous line—I know you do. Well, my line is, “I see pattern. I see it *everywhere!*” What’s surprising to me is that few people realize how much they see it too. Pattern is everywhere, on almost everything. Pattern influences countless consumer decisions: Should I buy this floral dress? Do I like the journal with the stripes or the dots? How should we arrange these tiles in the bathroom—in a grid or a herringbone pattern?

The amazing thing about great pattern design is that pattern and product are often one and the same to consumers. They are inseparable. They’re bound together and work together to convey a feeling and message about the product—pretty powerful stuff, right? Pattern is the silent, pervasive piece of design that’s often overlooked. Sometimes, design is so good, it seems as if it were spontaneously born. Great design makes it look like it should be this way, and nothing else would make sense. I think successful pattern design execution falls into this category. There’s a new zest for all things print and pattern.

Curious and ready to play? Great! Let’s do it! Through the next fifty exercises you will discover many techniques about the anatomy of patterns and how to create them. Sounds good, right? However, before you can do that, you have to see the world through new eyes. I will take you through exercises that will help you see things differently, finding patterns in places you never noticed. This is when the magic really starts to happen. Have you ever noticed the pattern of a slice of kiwi? Have you ever stopped to observe the texture of the different trees and foliage you encounter on a walk? I’ve spent years living, breathing, and studying color and pattern, first for a major retailer, and now as an independent artist and designer. By the end of this book, you too will be seeing pattern everywhere you go.

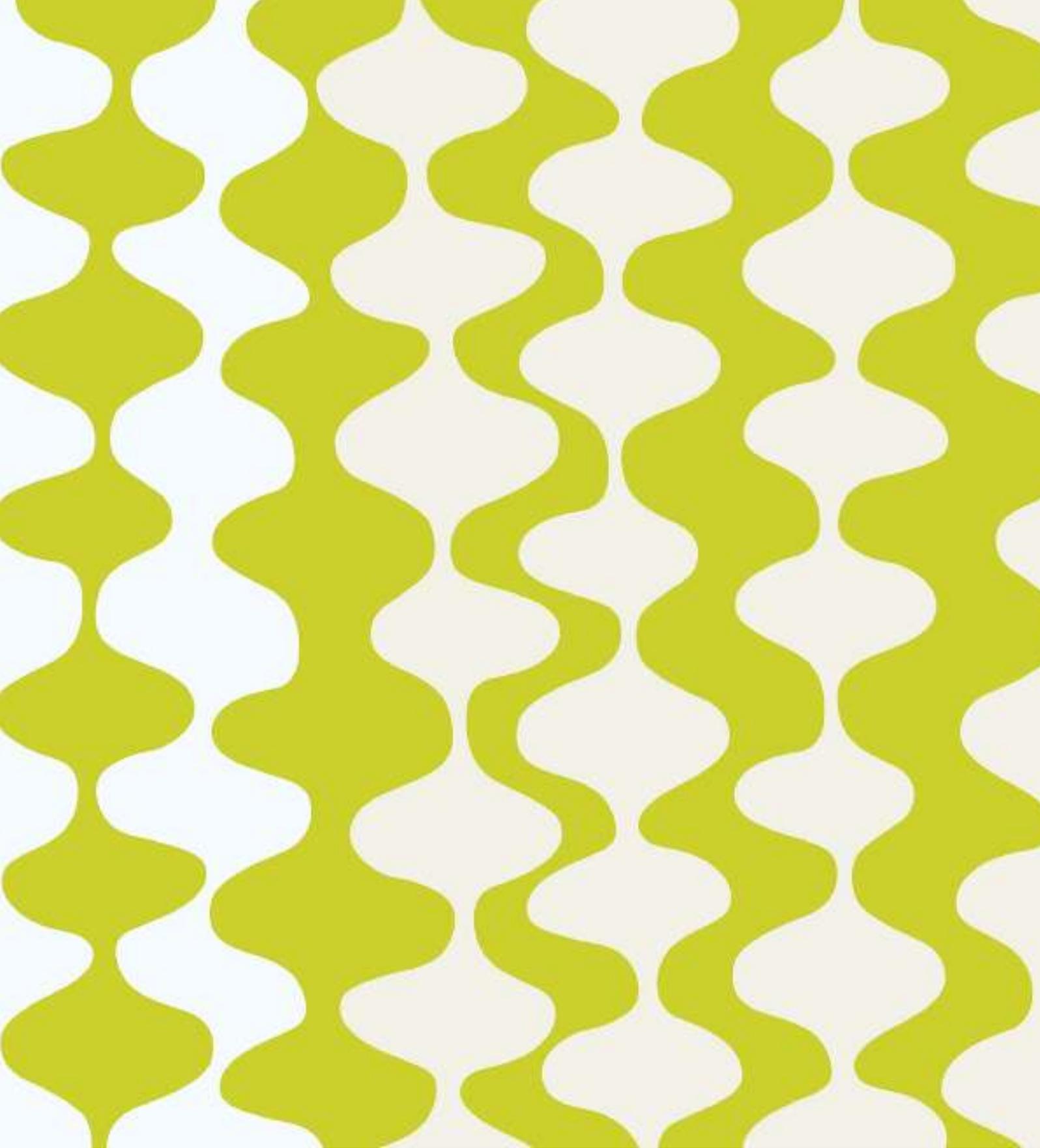


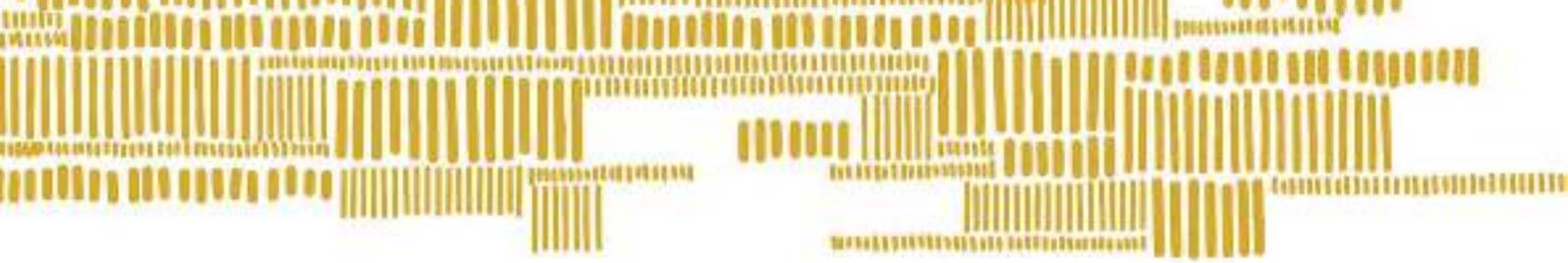
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## THE IMPACT OF PATTERN DESIGN

Imagine you're strolling through your favorite clothing store. There among the sea of racks and pretty displays you instinctively make a choice—a choice about what you will check out first. Broadly speaking, upon first glance you wouldn't be able to see the cut or shape of any of the garments as they hang on the racks. You would, of course, be able to distinguish the basics, like a long or short garment, coats, pants, and so on. However, you wouldn't be able to see the details of the garment design. So what's that first level of attraction that pulls you in one direction or another? Without a doubt it's color. What's a close second? Not surprisingly, it's pattern. These two elements are vital in that split-second first impression that will either attract or repel a consumer from a product. Color and pattern have the power to elicit an instant emotional attachment to an item. Often, this attachment can dictate the consumer's choices in a market full of similar, competing products. This holds true across many different product categories, from textiles and paper goods to home décor and accessories. Stop and consider this the next time you're perusing the marketplace.

This is pretty powerful stuff, and it's part of the reason I find working with color and pattern so intriguing. We all like to own items that feel like an expression of who we are. The resurgence of print and pattern in various facets of design has given the consumer a myriad of ways to specifically assert a fierce sense of identity and personality. In my book, it's a pretty great privilege to be a part of helping others to express that individuality.





## **GLOSSARY OF ESSENTIAL TERMS**

### **CHEVRON**

A zigzag design executed in a stripe layout.

### **COLLECTION**

A group of designs that are linked by a common thread, such as color, subject, or style.

### **CONVERSATIONAL**

A pattern using a recognizable design as a motif, such as umbrellas or dogs.

### **DIRECTIONAL**

A design in which motifs are oriented along one or several directions. Also a design that looks correct when viewed from only one orientation.

### **ETHNIC**

Designs originating from a particular country or culture.

### **FLORAL**

A design using flowers and other nature elements, such as seedpods, leaves, or vines.

### **FOULARD**

A soft, light fabric of plain or twill weave in silk or rayon. Patterns are typically small and in rich, dark, masculine colors—typically used for scarves and neckties. The type of pattern is also referred to as foulard.

### **GEOMETRIC**

Motifs made up of simple shapes like lines, squares, and circles.

### **GINGHAM**

A small, even plaid pattern that is typically woven and executed in one color.

### **GROUND**

The layer of the design that seems to be the farthest away from the viewer on which all other motifs seem to rest. May be a solid color, textured, or patterned.

### **HOUNDSTOOTH**

A duotone textile pattern characterized by broken checks or abstract, four-pointed shapes, often in black and white, although other colors are also used.

---

**IKAT**

A technique originating in Southeast Asia where either the warp or weft yarns are resist dyed before weaving. The look is commonly re-created digitally today.

**MOTIF**

A decorative design.

**OGEE**

An onion-shaped motif.

**PAISLEY**

A stylized, teardrop-shaped design.

**PATTERN**

The regular repeating of a motif.

**PLAID**

A pattern of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines that is traditionally woven, but is also executed as a printed design.

**PRINT**

A term that may be used to describe a pattern design.

**REPEAT PATTERN**

A term used to describe a type of artwork in which a motif or set of motifs is duplicated over and over to create a design. Repeat patterns are commonly used on textiles, stationery items, and so on.

**SURFACE DESIGN**

A term used to describe the artwork that adorns the surface of a product or object.

**TILE**

The unit containing the motifs that, when duplicated and combined in a uniform manner, create a repeat pattern design.

**TOSSED**

A design in which the motifs are arranged so that they're rotated in many directions. A tossed design has no right side up.



# GATHERING INSPIRATION

When I'm in the beginning stages of developing new patterns or collections, my studio looks like a war room. I pull out samples I love (both new and archived); countless magazine tears cover my desk, and fresh flowers usually fill the room. I *crave* imagery to get the creative flow going. Those images are amassed from a variety of sources: Fashion, travel, and exploring new sights, cultures, and experiences are the trigger points for me. In the moments when I'm immersed in these experiences, I feel the most creatively free.

Inspiration has become a big topic of discussion in creative fields as of late, mainly because both major retailers and independent creatives have taken strong liberties with the concept. Finding your personal inspiration is *not* copying, slightly altering, or reworking existing work—*especially* if it's not your own. True inspiration is meant to help us tap into the endless well of creativity that's already within all of us. This, for example, is why Paris is my personal go-to place for revisiting this well. Yes, of course it's a beautiful destination and clearly full of visual stimulation. However, inspiration is so much more than that for me. Some of my most creative and

energizing sparks of inspiration have come while simply sitting in a café *feeling* the essence of the place and the moment in time. Finding true inspiration is about an emotion or feeling that's sparked from deep within. In this feeling we're compelled to relay to the world in some form of creative expression.

We spend a good amount of time in this book exploring different ways to tap into this feeling, this well of creativity, this endless resource of inner inspiration. You don't have to go all the way to Paris to find it. You simply have to be willing to see the world around you in new ways.



# 01

## START AN INSPIRATION JOURNAL

We're all very visual beings. That's why you're reading this book—because you love the visual arts, color, pattern, and everything beyond and in between. Although it's true that finding your deep spark of inspiration starts with or creates a feeling, at the end of the day we want to interpret that feeling into something visually beautiful. An inspiration journal will help you keep images you've collected or created safe for when you're ready to reference them.

Your inspiration journal will help you to make sense of all the beautiful images you encounter. For me, it's an unedited space for me to just explore images that make me happy or create that feeling. Some of the pieces are purely for color inspiration. Others inspire the style I'm going for. Still others are for shape concepts. You get the idea. Compiling all of this is what helps make the vision really come together.

First things first: You get to buy a new notebook! Ahhhhh . . . that's the sound of those angels singing! If you're like me, you're obsessed with and extremely particular about your sketchbooks and notebooks. Am I right? So go and pick up a new beauty.

Next, start collecting. All of those images—and maybe some stationery samples, magazine tears, photos you took, and so on—go right into the journal. I change my mind and get over images pretty quickly, so I use paperclips instead of staples to keep them in place. Write notes, sketches, or doodles next to your images if you have ideas about what to do with them.

Don't worry if you fill your journal up fast. Just start another one!



*Treat yourself to a new journal. If you're like me, it will become your little treasure.*

### ● YOUR MISSION

Pick up a new journal that you dedicate to collecting inspiration. Then, fill her up! And be sure to play! play! Do not edit yourself in this process. If an image grabs you, grab it! You'll have plenty of time down the road in your design process to edit.

*Mary Beth Freet of Pink Light Studio sees the whole world as a visual candy store. She is constantly photographing and collecting inspiration from magazines, samples, retail, and travel.*



*I keep and collect anything that spurs my creative flow—scraps of paper, scraps of fabric—whatever it is that sparks the fire.*



*Your inspiration journal is the perfect place to brain dump. Grab every image, tearsheet, and sample you love. You have plenty of time to edit later!*

**TIP**

*Put the date on the inside cover of your new journal. If you're inclined to save all your journals, you'll get a good chuckle a few years down the road. Plus you'll be prepared with true vintage inspiration when that print trend you hoped would die comes circling back into the market!*

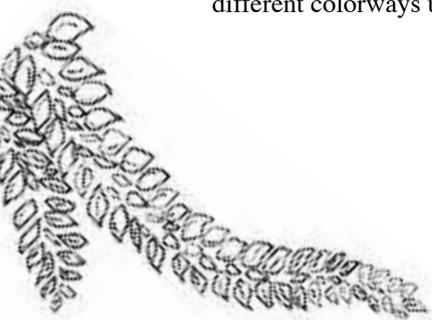
# 02

## STUDY A BOUQUET OF FLOWERS

Nature is always a big source of inspiration for most artists. Even on the gloomiest of winter days, I love having fresh flowers in my space for a shot of life and color. They are great not only for floral inspiration but also for all the abstract nuances you can see when you look closely.

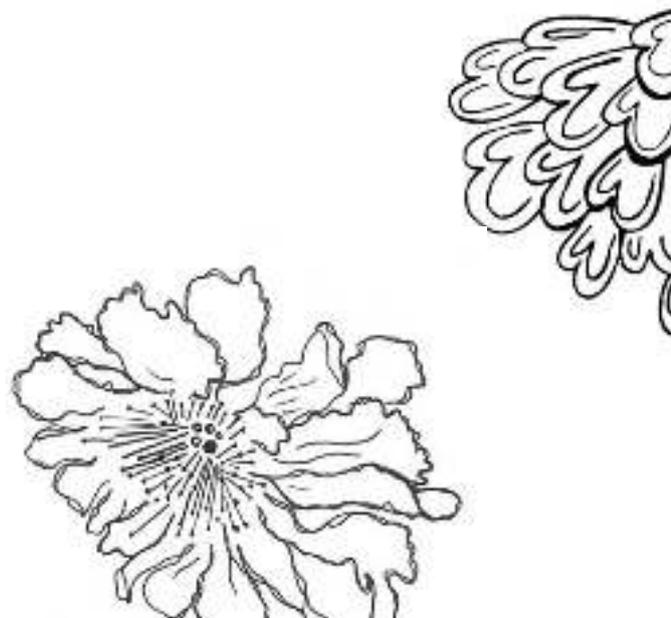
### ● YOUR MISSION

- Your mission for today is to go buy flowers! Then pull inspiration for shape and draw three new motifs.
- Next pull inspiration for color and create two new color palettes.
- Create a new pattern from these new motifs and create two different colorways using your new palettes.

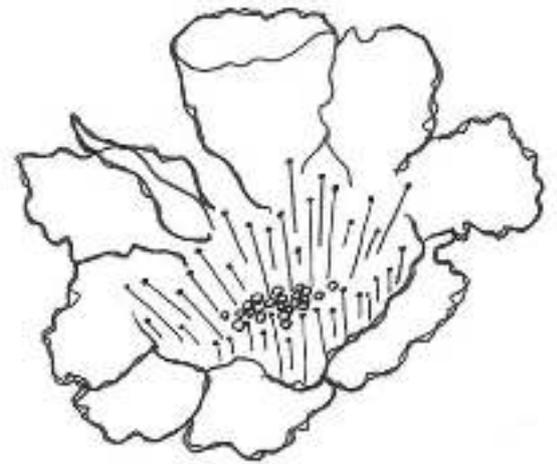


*These sketches are derived from floral inspiration. Sometimes, the flower inspiration is a mere jumping-off point for creating abstract shapes.*

COLOR + PATTERN



Flowers aren't just for a special occasion. I  
them in the studio as often as possible. Gorg  
bouquets provide endless inspiration for sh  
style, mood, and interesting new color pale  
Bonus: They just make you ha



# 03

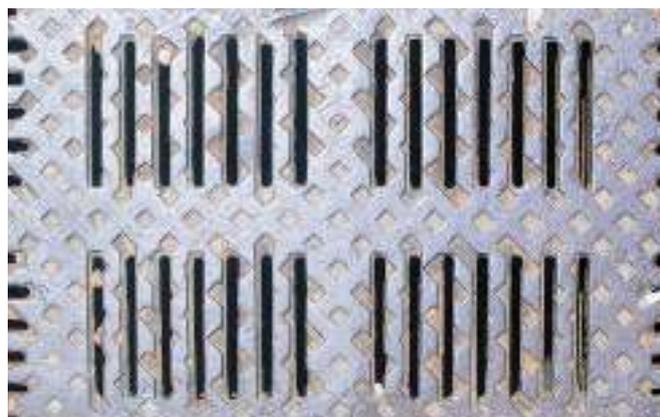
## TAKE A WALK WITH YOUR SKETCHBOOK OR CAMERA

Want to get inspired? Time to vacate the studio! Sometimes, I get so involved in the day-to-day work that I have to remind myself to come up for air. Know the feeling? Luckily, there's an easy solution. Let's go outside! Too simple, you say? How is this going to help, you ask? First, it's really great for creativity to physically get moving. Often stepping away for a moment, taking a walk, and getting some fresh air can make all the difference. This time to let go a bit can actually clear the space in your mind for that next aha moment to happen.

When you head out, don't forget to take your sketchbook or camera, or both! Caution: Don't allow this to pressure you! Just because you have these things with you, doesn't mean you must use them. You just want to make sure you're prepared if something strikes your fancy along the way. Remember to go with your gut, not your mind. Snap anything that grabs you—color, shape, texture, and so on. If the walk is purely a few moments of clearing the mind and getting fresh air, that's perfect, too!

### ● *YOUR MISSION*

Get outside and explore! Collect images you love along the way.



---

*Things that seem mundane in everyday life will soon become little bits that will spark a whole new pattern design or collection. New ideas for color, shape, and juxtaposition of different styles can come out of the simplest beginnings if we observe a bit more closely.*



---

# 04 SHOOT OR SKETCH TEN PATTERNS IN NATURE

I hope you're enjoying this time outside the studio. Are you starting to see the world with new eyes? I'll bet you're beginning to notice pattern in your world and life more and more.

## ● YOUR MISSION

Today, your mission is to find examples of pattern in nature. Capture ten images you see while exploring with either your camera or sketchbook or both!



*In certain industries like home décor and contract design, the search is always on for the next “new neutral.” Neutrals are important for many categories, and drawing fresh combinations from nature helps to keep them exciting.*

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