



TEXTILE
DESIGNERS
AT THE CUTTING EDGE

BRADLEY QUINN

JOHAN CARPNER

The beauty of Johan Carpner's work lies in the way it moves. Not movement as in coaxing three-dimensional depth out of a flat surface, but movement in terms of how easily his style flows between the intense lucidity of his graphic designs and the haunting expressiveness of his textiles.

After working for almost a decade as a graphic designer, Carpner peeled graphic symbols off the printed page and gave them new life as patterns and motifs. Finally free of fonts, templates and T-squares, he began to express himself in free-flowing organic lines and leafy abstractions. Drawn to serpentine outlines and razor-sharp cut-outs, his textile prints for Swedish luxury retailer Svenskt Tenn stopped onlookers in their tracks. In Winter Oak, which Svenskt Tenn produced in 2004, the harsh reality of the Nordic winter was recreated in a tangle of bare tree branches depicted solemnly against the stark January sky. 'I've always been fascinated by how people try to tame nature despite knowing they'll never actually succeed,' Carpner says. 'It's the wildness in nature that gives it its beauty. I like capturing the inexpressible and the untameable, because to me, that's realism, and that's what tests the boundaries of pattern drawing. I like finding order in chaos, for example, by exploring how something chaotic, like the jumble of tree branches in this case, can be given a gestalt as they grow in nature and not as how they are cultivated by man. Contrasts are also important to me, because they can create an essential edge. Without that, patterns just become decorative and sweet, and that's not what my work is about.'

In Carpner's capable hands, pattern design is treated robustly and imbued with masculine sensibilities. Given that textile design has traditionally been characterized by a feminine aesthetic, Carpner's approach is as directional as it is refreshing. 'Most textile designers begin with an education in textile design and probably continue to repeat what they learned as their career goes on,' Carpner explains. 'Coming from a graphic design background, my references lie more in poster design and graphic art, which is probably what you're describing as a masculine expression. And that's probably why my work is so tightly focused on form rather than on decoration.'



1-2 Johan Carpner finds beauty in nature wherever he looks. Weeds and spring flowers growing by the kerbside inspired this design called Vågren, shown here in horizontal repeats. He believes that capturing the spontaneous aspects of nature tests the boundaries of pattern-drawing, but he finds it satisfying to create order out of chaos.

3 Wild roses are likely to be found in forest glades and overgrown gardens, but Carpner's Wild Rose motif brings them into the interior.



Carpner took paternity leave when his children were born, and during the year-long breaks he found that he wanted to express himself in three-dimensional forms. 'I realized that I'm an inventive person, someone who likes to construct things and solve three-dimensional problems,' Carpner says. 'That's when I became interested in textiles and product design, because they gave me the chance to design things like lamps, carpets and furniture. I wouldn't say that I'll ever leave graphic design altogether; right now, I'm enjoying balancing the two.'

Coming into an aspect of interior design as an outsider, at a time when more and more Swedes were becoming interested in home decoration, enabled Carpner to view the phenomenon with fresh eyes. 'I noticed that the boom was changing what interior design means today,' Carpner says. 'It's not about having good taste or a single style anymore, but combining many different styles in a way that hasn't happened earlier. These days, you can draw a lot of parallels between buying things for the home and shopping for clothes, and I think that textiles have probably made the home fashionable again.'



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- 1-3 The view of the sky through a canopy of birch branches overhead was the inspiration for Carper's Glanta (Forest Glade) motif. Adapted for this pendant lamp, the motif creates the impression of sunlight shining through the trees.
- 4 His Utukki (View) print suggests the view of a vine viewed through a window. Framed and wall-mounted, the print provides a uniquely naturalistic focal point for this interior.

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Vägren (page 216) is a versatile motif that can be appreciated from several perspectives. Here, printed in a dark colourway, the pattern is presented in vertical direction. 1-2

Carpner's Wild Rose motif (page 217) 3

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- 1 Carpner's Winter Oak fabric, designed and produced in 2004, captures the stark beauty of the Nordic winter in this tangle of bare tree branches depicted solemnly against a stark snow-filled sky.
- 2&4 As its name suggests, Storm captures a foreboding canopy of cumulus clouds rolling in, moments before the heavens open. Here, Carpner has transformed the fluffy, free-flowing outlines of cloud formations into a graphic, geometric repeat.
- 3 The designer's graphic approach to motifs means that they can easily peel off the printed page and onto the surfaces of tufted carpets. Swedish manufacturer Kasthall commissioned designs for several carpets, such as the vibrant Brygge motif, shown here.

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