



Processes and Techniques to Apply Surface Decoration to Traditional and Digital Wallpaper



Rebecca Bulcraig

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**ISS Institute**

Suite 101
685 Burke Road
Camberwell Vic
AUSTRALIA 3124

Telephone

03 9882 0055

Facsimile

03 9882 9866

Email

issi.ceo@pacific.net.au

Web

www.issinstitute.org.au

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ISS Institute
101/685 Burke Road
Camberwell 3124
AUSTRALIA

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Executive Summary

Open any Australian interior magazine and you will see a feature on wallpaper. It is extremely fashionable again; it has never lost its popularity overseas, but for some reason it fell from favour in Australia sometime in the eighties. Now it is back and being used in different ways such as a one-wall feature or as a single panel as one would use a painting. It is unfortunate that such a saleable commodity is not produced here in Australia. Therein, there are businesses opportunities for the design and production of such wallpapers and training to underpin the skills and knowledge required.

Following the collapse of the industry throughout the late 1980's, many skills associated with wallpaper preservation and production have been lost. It is very unfortunate that what was once a thriving industry has, in the main, disappeared.

To the best of the Fellow's knowledge there is only one printer of wallpaper in Australia – Signature Prints in Sydney. This company obtained the archives of the deceased Florence Broadhurst. Signature Prints will contract print, but the costs are so high that it is not a viable option for a designer to have their range printed by them and expect to sell at a profit. Unfortunately, Signature Prints are not willing to share their knowledge and, in addition, there is not a specific publication on the subject.

The aim of this Fellowship was to obtain first hand practical experience of printing wallpaper. The knowledge and skills obtained overseas can now be shared with others who have an interest in the practical application of these processes. Key areas of investigation included:

- Determining various techniques used in the printing of wallpaper.
- Determining what sort of equipment is needed, the cost, and whether it can be exported.
- Identifying the type of inks and papers used with each method of printing and the suppliers of inks and other materials.
- Determining what the costs are for contract printing of wallpaper design.
- Determining strategies for marketing printed wallpaper product.
- Determining the viability and options of the printed wallpaper Supply Chain from concept to production – designer-based studio production or outsourced to a manufacturer.
- Investigating the pros and cons of digital printing versus traditional methodologies.

Given the aims of the Fellowship, Bulcraig visited two companies which would cover the spectrum of wallpaper production. These were Allyson McDermott's studio and The Surface Print Company. Bulcraig also timed her visit so that she could attend the 'International Wallpaper Conference'.

Allyson McDermott's studio specialises in the conservation and reproduction of traditionally produced wallpapers for organisations such as The National Trust, English Heritage and private clients. Bulcraig's week as an intern at McDermott's studio involved learning about how wallpapers were produced by hand. Bulcraig also observed current projects that ranged from the conservation of a 17th century Chinese hand-painted panel, preparation for a job for the National Trust, to a digitally printed wood grain effect paper which was being reproduced digitally.

The 'International Wallpaper Conference' was held over two days with a further two day visit as part of the conference to Halsingland to study 18th century wallpapers perfectly preserved in farmhouses. This was an ideal opportunity to meet the 'who's who' of the wallpaper world. The knowledge gained from talking to industry leaders, manufacturers, designers, authors, paper makers and historians answered many questions. It provided the Fellow with an insight into the wallpaper market in a very short time.

Executive Summary

Bulcraig believes that knowledge transfer is essential to ensuring future growth of the wallpaper industry in Australia. With regard to skills and knowledge acquired as a result of the Fellowship experience, Bulcraig believes that the most effective way to share the information would be via a practical workshop program. Bulcraig believes that a practical, hands on, workshop would allow for a comprehensive screen printing demonstration that would ensure participants could optimise the learning experience. Practical demonstrations provide opportunities for participants to raise questions as they are engaging with processes and techniques. It is anticipated that workshops would be, in the first instance, most useful for people who already have an established print studio, and to TAFE and University lecturers who run textile/graphics courses. Bulcraig believes that such workshops could be run in 2009 at a suitably equipped print studio or appropriate educational facility.

The Fellow will be available to speak directly with Industry Skills Councils to assist in the development/review of a training package for wallpaper design and production.

The following is a report of the Fellowship experience and detailed accounts of processes and practices. In addition, the report concludes with a series of recommendations for Government, industry, the business sector, professional associations, education and training providers and the wider community.