

## HISTORY LESSONS GUIDE THE TEXTURE TRENDS OF 2011

by Simon Orrell

“WELL MADE CUSTOM BUILT FURNITURE makes all the difference in any interior design scheme. In total harmony with the area inhabited, a bespoke piece allows a designer to fill up space much more stylishly but also, very importantly, to introduce many more interesting materials and colours, patterns and textures into a room.

However, now that colour is being used with so much enthusiasm, it is essential to add neutrals or monochromes to balance this trend out and ensure that the interior isn't faddy, for there's nothing worse than being able to date a room by the colour of the upholstery. This can be done highly effectively with a few well thought-out pieces of furniture and it's here that pattern and texture are most likely to come into play.

The pieces with more tactile surfaces are going to be the ones that cleverly complement the single chair or sideboard in that shocking colour. The majority of furniture pieces being commissioned are therefore still going to be in various shades of white, cream, grey, silver, brown and black... and not in the brights palette at all.

There's been a lot of interest in exploring new materials, though, inevitably, 'new' materials are often based on techniques that have been revived from the past, but perhaps given a fresh, contemporary spin. If you go back to some of the popular veneers used in the Deco period, especially lacquer, and even further back in history to the gilded gesso of the 18th century and earlier still to the gilt leaf of Ancient Egypt, then you begin to understand the level of glamour and craftsmanship involved.

With its lustrous surface, lacquer furniture is finding favour again for its sleek and sophisticated look. In fact, lacquer is an imprecise term used to describe almost any glossy protective finish – perhaps even modern materials such as the celluloses and melamines.

Some finishes referred to as lacquer are in reality only brushed-on varnish with little or no refinishing. With its origins in the Orient and the Middle East, a true lacquered finish requires careful preparation of the ground, most commonly wood, with intermediate layers of hard-set paste followed by extra layers of very thin varnish.



Cracked eggshell – broken up shell that's been set into resin and lacquered – is going to be really big for 2011, fuelling the trend for fun and witty geometrics. When created in black and white, cracked eggshell looks particularly special and suits all furniture and accessories with simple lines.

With the trend for metallics still going strong, gold is being commissioned for luxurious pieces from consoles and coffee tables to bedside cabinets and chests. Reviving the ancient craft of gesso, one of the most sought after finishes is a cracked gilded gesso.

For this technique, chalk dust and glue are mixed together to form a paint and applied onto a canvas that is then cracked and glued to furniture, which is then gilded or coloured. This highly specialist surface looks stunning and shouts opulence, but for those who want something a bit more understated, a cracked gesso veneer in a creamy white may prove to be more flexible in a design scheme and is very elegant.

Of course, a skilled design workshop can work with most materials – even where the request is a little impractical. Felt has the quality of being a bit homespun, but in skilled hands it can be formed into all kinds of fantastic shapes and thus a modest fabric immediately becomes much more interesting and funky. Take a plain black felt, embellish it with metal studs and fashion it into a witty Louis XV shape and furniture becomes a work of art.

It is, however, the finishing touches that really transform furniture no matter what it's made from. Handles and feet in hammered metal and shimmering bronze are very popular at the moment and being added to parchment, lacquer and cracked gesso with impressive results.”

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