

object lesson

THE STORY BEHIND AN ICONIC DESIGN



Top Banana

How tropical foliage became a staple of postwar American design

ACTRESS POPPY DELEVINGNE'S LONDON POWDER ROOM IS WRAPPED, FLOOR TO CEILING, IN CW STOCKWELL'S MARTINIQUE WALLPAPER.

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Back from the Bahamas in 1941, Lucile and Remy Chatain Sr. of CW Stockwell textiles asked illustrator Albert Stockdale: Could he distill the island’s jungly landscapes into a wallpaper? He could: The banana-leaf pattern *Martinique*, launched the next year, would soon be installed in CW Stockwell’s showroom—and featured in *AD*.

Decorator Don Loper set eyes on CW Stockwell’s striking install—cut around the top to give the surreal sense that plants were sprouting from the floor—and thought it might work in his redo of the Beverly Hills Hotel with architect Paul Williams. In 1949, renovation complete, *Martinique* famously forested the hotel’s halls, stairwells, and Fountain Coffee Room.

“It capitalized on the spirit that the war was newly over, and everyone was looking inward to their homes,” explains CW Stockwell’s new CEO, Katy Polsby, who unveiled three fresh hues of *Martinique*, the California firm’s signature, in March. The paper is available through CW Stockwell from \$228 per roll.

Martinique’s major competitor was Schumacher’s *Jungle Leaves*, a 1947 debut that Manhattan designer Dorothy Draper created for Quitandinha, Brazil’s deluxe gambling resort. Brighter than *Martinique*, accented with glistening sea grapes, and today called *Brazilliance*, it is sold through dorothydraperfw.com.

The papers reflected the rage for tropicalia that was sweeping the nation—remember Carmen Miranda’s campy movie sets? Today’s influencers, from Nate Berkus to Nicky Hilton Rothschild, are just as entranced. “I first saw *Martinique* at the Beverly Hills Hotel as a little girl,” recalls the heiress-entrepreneur, who lined her L.A. breakfast room with the pattern. “Then many years later at Bungalow 8.” Proof positive that these leaves show no signs of wilting. —HANNAH MARTIN

1. MARTINIQUE FLOURISHES AT KALEIDOSCOPE HOUSE, A BED-AND-BREAKFAST IN NORFOLK, ENGLAND.
2. DOROTHY DRAPER’S BRAZILLIANCE, A.K.A. JUNGLE LEAVES.
3. MARTINIQUE IN NAVY BY CW STOCKWELL; CWSTOCKWELL.COM.
4. THE BREAKFAST ROOM IN NICKY HILTON ROTHSCHILD’S FORMER L.A. HOME.
5. THE ICONIC FOUNTAIN COFFEE ROOM AT THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL.
6. REMY CHATAIN SR. IN CW STOCKWELL’S SHOWROOM IN 1947.

1. COURTESY OF THEBIGDOMAIN.COM; 2. COURTESY OF 1STDIBS.COM; 3. COURTESY OF STOCKWELL; 4. PAUL COSTELLO/AUGUSTIMMAGE; 5. COURTESY OF THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL; 6. MAYNARD L. PARKER/STOCKWELL/COURTESY OF JOHN F. HABER PUBLISHING CO.