

# Wall coverings

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says, "and when they decide it's not cool to have their friends see it any more you take it down." A set of six is \$35.

Another product that Didier says is finding a place on the walls of area homes is chalkcloth. A form of oilcloth, it can be hung on a wall with hooks or tacks, and then used like a huge chalkboard, Didier says, without the heavy, cumbersome bother of a traditional blackboard. "It's very cool," Didier says. The chalkcloth sells for \$9.95 per yard.

## Expect the unexpected

Those offerings at Essentials are typical of a growing trend in wall coverings — introducing the unexpected. Plaids, stripes and florals? Not so popular any more, says Kathi Mereschuk, the wall-covering specialist at Florence Paint and Decorating Center in Florence. Instead, she says, customers are opting for more unusual designs, especially textured ones. "A lot of people," Mereschuk says, "are going toward the wallpaper that kind of looks like a brushed-on paint."

They're also going — whether they realize it or not — toward papers in a category that the wall-covering industry calls nonwovens — a reference to the gauzy backing, which is a little like the material used to make tea bags. The papers are touted as easy to put up, since they don't stretch or sag, and they stick on the first try. They're also easy to take down; instead of needing to be steamed, soaked and scraped, nonwovens can just be peeled off the wall. The reason? New materials that give the wall covering flexibility and breathability.

Nonwovens are also more forgiving of imperfections in the surface to which they're being applied. Heidi Johnson cautions, though, that that doesn't mean cutting corners on the prep work. A wall-covering job is only as good as the surface beneath it, she says, and she recommends research online and in home-improvement stores to see what sort of substrate, or bottom surface, should first be applied to the wall to make a wall covering look its best.



COURTESY WEATHERED STONE

**Weathered Stone claims to be "the ultimate replica covering." After the wall covering is up, the installer adds grout, giving it the look of actual stonework.**

## New and noteworthy

Here's a look at some of the newest offerings in wall coverings — some available at home improvement stores, others only through a decorator:

**Wood grain wall coverings** in an "incredible array" of designs, according to Keith Woodruff: bird's-eye maple, white birch, Brazilian koa and many more. Made of wood veneers, they are from Sanfoot.

**Torn wall coverings**, faux-finish style papers, in patterns inspired by nature, that are applied in layers. Tear off a piece — the size and shape are

apply that, then another, and another. The result is an overlapping, dimensional and pleasantly random look — "organic beauty," according to the manufacturer, Stoney Brook Wallcoverings Inc.

**Verastone**, from Roos International, faux-finish wall coverings that look like stone, as the name implies, but that aren't run off on a printing press; instead, they're handpainted by artisans.

**Weathered Stone**, another offering along the same line. After the wall covering is up, the installer adds grout, giving it the look of actual stonework.

manufacturer, also known as Weathered Stone.

**Intira**, fabric wall coverings from Kenmark Inc. that come in more than 300 designs. Clean as you would your upholstery — by vacuuming.

**Mural Artscapes**, enormous murals that come as a single piece — up to 53 inches high and 12 feet long — and "tell a story across the walls," according to its supplier, 4walls.com. One stately choice: a panoramic view of New York harbor back in the days of tall ships.

**Photo murals**, made from your own images. Big Apple

# The BIG COVER-UP

*Today's wallpaper is on design's cutting edge. Who knew?*

By MARGOT CLEARY  
Staff Writer

Wallpaper, says professional paper hanger Heidi Johnson of Williamsburg, is like "gift wrap for a room" — dressing it up and making what's inside irresistible.

And just as gift wrap is no longer confined to rolls of ho-hum designs, wall coverings are venturing beyond rolls of plaids and prints.

In fact, at one Northampton home furnishings store, Essentials, customers are buying the specialty papers the store stocks as gift wrap and finding a new use for them.



COURTESY CABA COMPANY  
**Barksin, from Caba Company, is hand-pounded bark in natural shades. Here, rolls of the material.**



"A lot of people use our wrapping paper as wallpaper," says Sydne Didier, the store's owner. By applying a coat of the craft staple Mod Podge to adhere the paper to the wall, and then finishing it off with another coat ("It kind of varnishes it," Didier says), the do-it-yourselfer can install a wall treatment that's quite likely one-of-a-kind.

At Essentials, it isn't only the gift wrap that doubles as wall covering. The store sells what's known as wall graphics, cut-out designs that stick to the wall with self-adhesives. They're especially popular in children's rooms, says Didier, thanks to kid-friendly motifs like alphabet letters, animals, or a set featuring what she calls a "transportation theme" — cute little cars and motorbikes in bright colors.

Adding to the appeal is the fact that it's easy on, and easy off.

"You stick it up," Didier

COURTESY STONEY BROOK WALLCOVERINGS INC.  
**Stoney Brook Wallcoverings manufactures torn wall coverings — faux-finish style papers that are applied in layers. Here, blue "Mirage" paper.**



COURTESY WEATHERED STONE  
**"You will not know it is not real stone," says Weathered Stone, the manufacturer of a product by the same name. The walls of this stairway are covered with "Cashmere."**