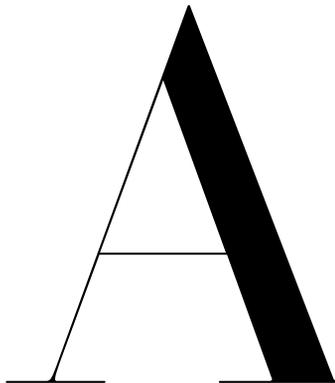


# AN EYE ON PRINTS

*From fashion to furniture, the London home of textile designer **Allegra Hicks** is a kaleidoscope of retro pattern and new creations*

Words by *ELEANOR JOSLIN*  
Photography by *MIGUEL FLORES-VIANNA*



Allegra Hicks is a perpetual ball of energy. Perhaps that's how she maintains an enviable model-like figure in her fifties, a physique she puts down to good genes and a fondness for walking – an exercise that helps her think, she says, when times are both good or bad.

This year certainly falls into the “good” category for Allegra, with exciting new ventures for her business, family and love life. Last year, the mum-of-two married landowner and entrepreneur Roberto Mottola di Amato at his family's villa in Naples. While she jokes that they “live mid-air” between Italy and London, the couple have since redecorated their three-bedroom Neapolitan penthouse with her signature eclectic flair. Under anyone else's direction, the mix of pattern, colour, material and texture could be mismatched rather than exuding cool boho-chic, however, Allegra's use of nature as a key point of inspiration for her work winds itself through her textiles to create a subtle cohesion under the layers of print.

“When I finished school, one of the most important things for me to do was to create my own design vocabulary and signature style, and I think I have done it,” says the Turin-born designer, who studied

life drawing at Parsons School of Design in New York, focussed on fresco in Belgium, followed by art history at Sotheby's Institute of Art in London. It was fresco work that first brought her to the Middle East, painting in a house in Kuwait. While she hasn't worked on a project in the Gulf recently, her textiles are enduringly popular here, and her collection at The Rug Company picked up a commendation for Best Textile Brand at this year's Harper's Bazaar Interiors Awards.

“My design vocabulary is very organic and inspired by nature,” she continues. “This doesn't have to be something literal like a flower, but it could be under the microscope; microcosm and macrocosm. Somewhere, somehow, nature is always behind my work and I think everyone can relate to that, as organic shapes can be very simple and naturally inviting to the eye.”

Some of her new pieces have made a home in her five-storey London house near Sloane Square, which she bought 23 years ago with ex-husband Ashley Hicks, architect, furniture designer and the son of famed designer, David Hicks. They

have two daughters, Ambrosia, 18, and Angelica, 23. The new designs share common shapes of eyes and petals, seen in the bright blue geometric Eye wallpaper that recently went up in a spare room, the faun and teal Atlantis crewelwork rug in the dining room, already a collectible at The Rug Company, and a brass and glass Eye Leaf table.

“Being a textile designer, I can apply my creativity to clothes and furniture. Right now I am designing a lot more interior textiles and working on a lot of private residential projects,” she says. “I absolutely adore my new Eye Leaf nest table, with three eye-shaped ▶





Allegra reads a book on  
Marc Rothko in her library.  
Duro Olowu skirt





Above: Family illustrations on a table in the stairwell  
Right: A cosy breakfast snug



tabletops that pivot to open up into leaves.” The prototype rests in the first-floor sitting room, by the marble fireplace, and on top of a handmade brown and teal statement Hearts rug that she designed 15 years ago. “Even though the patterns in the sitting room are quite bold – and some I’ve had for a long time – they all go and work together to create a sentiment.

“The house does have an eclectic style. I believe in making furniture and decoration work as if they are meant to be together. After all, you might have a table inherited from your granny or be given something that becomes sentimental to you. Of course you can start again from scratch but there’s a lot to be said about being able to put things that you buy, receive and inherit all together.”

She was bequeathed the two retro-modern armchairs in the sitting room and upholstered them in a fabric called Pearl Beige. “I think I have designed everything here, more or less,” she admits. “My favourite piece changes all the time, but right now I love the bespoke curtains I designed for my bedroom recently, in an embroidered fabric called Landscape.

“We have lived here for over two decades, and it changes and grows all the time. Every time I design something I put it in the house so it evolves in slow motion. My youngest daughter Ambrosia freaks out after I change something, and always says it looked nice in the first place. She likes the new look but it’s the idea of change that she doesn’t seem to like,” laughs the mother-of-two.

She and Ashley first moved into the

home when they returned from New York expecting their first child. “We met in London in 1988 – it feels like a lifetime ago. I adored his father David Hicks and thought he was a genius; he really raised design to a whole different level of modernity, and he was great fun to be around. Because we met when we were so young, Ashley and I grew together, in our talent, taste and aesthetic.”

After 19 years of marriage, their separation coincided with a difficult period for her business, which went into administration during the recession in 2010. Since then, however, she’s undergone a creative rebirth, successfully reviving both her fashion and interior lines. “This was a hard time and I had to rethink my life as well as my work. Back then I thought, How can I exist anymore? But if you have an ounce of talent then nothing can take that away from you, not administration or heartache; talent and passion is something that stays with you and it certainly helped me rescue my business. I regrouped and realised I didn’t need to work on three collections a year and fashion shows.” >

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*Allegra Hicks, textile designer*

Vintage jewellery and collectibles on Allegra’s Eye Leaf nesting table





Allegra upholsters most of her furniture in her own fabrics; chairs in Calypso Natural and footstool in Diamonds Cornflour



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Regularly praised as one of the best dressed women in the world, she's known for her elegant, seasonal kaftan collections, but she now prefers to create clothing lines when she "feels like designing something beautiful".

"Quite recently I worked on a wardrobe for an artist who was showcasing a conceptual installation in Italy and needed a wardrobe that weighed less than five kilos and could fit inside a small suitcase. I created a coat out of embroidered fabric and designed it to resemble skin on the back, to represent protection. This was a one-off piece but so many of my friends wanted it, too. This was lovely for me, designing one project and inspiring other people. As a creative person you are only as good as your last project, and we have an urge to be better and to learn more and more. This is really true for all the designers I know; working and being creative makes us feel alive; we are always yearning to get out there and show what we can do, so there is always something in motion."

While her studio is just a 15-minute drive away in Chelsea Harbour, she loves designing in her home office. Tucked away in the basement she can stay hidden downstairs for ages. "I will pop down in the morning and work for hours and hours, painting and stitching and designing. It's quite lovely, really," she says, wistfully. And with that, she springs downstairs, to immerse herself amongst a rainbow of wool spools, cotton reels, swatches and sketches. ■

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Left: An eclectic selection of Allegra's collectibles. Below: Ganesh figurines and delicate coral



Fresh flowers accentuate the violet tones in Allegra's glassware





Allegra's settee is upholstered in her Panarea Aqua fabric, while her Hearts rug covers the floor. Dries Van Noten skirt. Loeffler Randall shoes

