

DECORATING + RENOVATION

Beloved Decorator Madeleine Castaing's Designs Take the Spotlight Once Again

The romantic work of the French decorating legend is captivating a new generation

TEXT BY [EMILY EVANS EERDMANS](#) · Posted March 18, 2016 · [Magazine](#)



Brunschwig & Fils is once again stocking Edmond Petit's Madeleine Castaing collection, including, from left, Rayure Castiglione and Rayure Fleurie fabrics, Feuillage wallpaper (shown in two colorways), and Lola Montez wallpaper border.

Nearly a quarter-century after her death, Madeleine Castaing, France's grande dame of decoration, still beguiles and seduces. Setting out to please her eye alone, the cult tastemaker crafted a haunting signature aesthetic that quixotically paired picturesque romance with tailored neoclassicism—a cocktail that made her an instant success in war-bruised 1940s Paris and ultimately placed her in the pantheon of 20th-century style legends.

“I expressed myself in what touched me all my life; in houses, gardens, furniture, ornamentation, and interior design, where imagination, emotion plays,” recalled Castaing, who died in 1992 at age 98, after an eventful life that included starring in a silent film and becoming one of painter Chaim Soutine’s most important patrons. Her work—often inspired by the novels of Marcel Proust and Honoré de Balzac—has influenced everyone from decorator Jacques Grange to fashion designer Anna Sui. And though her atmospheric interiors have been described as dreamy, her vision was crystal clear.



The salon at the interior decorator’s country house, featuring her signature shades of blue and green, plus wall-to-wall leopard-spot carpeting.

Photo: Courtesy of Sotheby’s/Art Digital Studio

Strict adherence to a color and pattern vocabulary made Castaing’s rooms instantly recognizable. It also established her as a pioneer in the world of branding. Integral to her eminence—she counted Renaissance man Jean Cocteau and New Wave filmmaker Roger Vadim among her clients—were the patterns the decorator developed with

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French textile house Hamot. Whether jungle foliage or faux moiré, the motifs' pigments reflected Castaing's hallmark palette. "I use three colors: red, sky-blue, and the green of the gardens," she explained.

The American manufacturer Brunschwig & Fils, which distributed select Castaing fabrics during her lifetime but stopped for a while, has put the line—now encompassing matching wallpapers—back into its showrooms, confident that the patterns' bravado will connect with a new audience. "Madeleine Castaing brought a unique sense of color and whimsy to her rooms," observes Stephen Elrod, the firm's executive vice president and creative director. "The iconic fabrics she created possess a bold graphic quality that plays into today's bohemian and individualistic trend in interior design."

Some of the patterns Castaing devised with textile scion François Hamot were sparked by antique samples found in his company's archives. Others, notably the lacy Coppelina, were derived from timeworn originals she discovered while scavenging flea markets. "My braids, fabrics, and carpets are the colors of my palette," the decorator said, "but I can take inspiration from a scene in Chekhov as from a dress by Goya." Rayure Fleurie's climbing vines, for one, encapsulate Castaing's philosophy of bringing the outdoors in. She conjured up the design while planning the enchanting winter bedroom at her family's country house near Chartres, deciding she needed a fabric that would echo the allée of sycamores seen from the windows.



When Hamot went out of business in the late '90s, the French company Edmond Petit acquired its archives and began producing the Castaing collection. New colorways have freshened the line without undermining its magic for the designer's younger admirers, among them Manhattan decorator Nick Olsen.

"I just used Rayure Cachemire to make pillows for a client's study, and it captures the exotic yet erudite vibe of the room," Olsen says. "Castaing's fabrics have a sophisticated fancifulness that endures and endears." brunschwig.com

Castaing's winter bedroom in Lèves, France.

Photo: Courtesy of Sotheby's/Art Digital Studio