

The Bloomsbury Group: 20th Century Influencers

INSPIRING DESIGN —
100 YEARS IN THE MAKING —
THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP IS
THE FORCE BEHIND THE
CURRENT DECADE'S BIGGEST
INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS.

by **Amity Worrel, Amity Worrel & Co. and
Amity Kett** | Photography by **Andrea Calo**

We like to think that trends, especially in interior design, are all fresh, new and unique, but more often than not, trending interiors hark back to moments throughout design history. The latest style movements of this decade have not been shaped by Instagram influencers but rather by free-thinking cultural and literary icons who were trending in their own right at the turn of the last century.

In the early 1900s, the Bloomsbury Group began making waves in culture, art, politics and design. Made up of acclaimed English writers, intellectuals and “influencers” of the day, the group included notable members like Virginia Woolfe and E. M. Forster. This loose collective of friends lived, worked and studied together in Bloomsbury, London. United by a love of the arts, this set shaped new attitudes and beliefs around literature, aesthetics, feminism and even sexuality. Dorothy Parker famously said, “they lived in squares, painted in circles, and loved in triangles.” As it turns out, hippie culture was alive and well decades before the groovy 70s.

The free-spirited mentality of the Bloomsbury Group spilled over from intellectual conversations onto the walls of their residences. The group occupied a small farmhouse in East Sussex called Charleston, which they used for meetings and parties. Rejecting the Victorian mentality of the day, these creatives



covered the dark and stuffy interior in bright hand-painted murals and stenciling inspired by the English countryside. Virginia Woolfe even styled her own estate, Monk’s House, with brightly painted walls, hand-painted accents, floral print textiles and decorative tiles. At its core, the Bloomsbury style broke away from the stuffy, standardized ideas of what the Victorian home should be and embraced personalization and color to the highest degree.

Our current decade holds many similar cultural ideals in line with the Bloomsbury school of thought that was popular over 100 years ago. Today we see an embrace of free-spirited expression, a reconsideration of values and a fear of global uncertainties. In a time when it becomes intimidating or scary to look to the future, it is comforting to look back to the past

and take note from those who have been there before. The reason trends circle back is simply because we all love a good dose of nostalgia. (And these designs have been tried and true.)

Like the Bloomsbury Group rejecting the imposed stuffy style of the Victorian Era, today’s homeowners are rethinking what it means to live and work in their homes. In interior design, trends are shifting away from the uniformity and standardization that have dominated a cookie-cutter mindset and big box store push over the past few years. Now,



homeowners want to include upcycled items and antiques for sustainable designs rather than rely on mass-produced sofas with two-day shipping. We see a new appreciation of bright colors, patterned wallpapers, Laura Ashley-inspired floral textiles and cozy cottage elements you may have found in grandma’s house. “Grandma Chic” and “Cottagecore” have become popular labels for these looks, but they are all rooted in the Bloomsbury style and ideals.

So, what are the components of Bloomsbury style, and how do you get in on the biggest trend that has been over 100 years in the making? The first step is color. Victorian homes were dark and muted. Similarly, many of today’s homeowners are haunted by beige walls, carpeting and furnishings. Bloomsbury art pieces and interiors embraced bright color palettes of turquoise blue, avocado green, dusty rose, burnt orange and bright yellow. I recently designed a bathroom with old-world-inspired emerald green tilework, a blue vanity and a bright yellow ceiling in our Summit Avenue project for Amity Kett. Similarly, we did an all-yellow bathroom for the Bellvue project by Amity Worrel & Co. that features a coordi-



nating tile in a geometric pattern. These spaces are bright, energized, personalized and delightfully Bloomsburian.



Playing with patterns is another way to inject Bloomsbury style into the home. The Bloomsbury Group was on a budget, so they relied on do-it-yourself hand stenciling inspired by the English countryside to brighten up their spaces. In Holiday Haus, a recent project at Amity Worrel & Co., we commissioned a hand-painted ladybug design for the bathroom walls. This playful surprise is charming and holds a personalized sentimentality for the homeowners. We also brought in even more patterns with cottage-inspired textiles, including red checks and floral prints. The result is an inviting space perfect for laid-back relaxation.

The biggest factor to pay attention to in a Bloomsbury design, however, is personalized comfort. Instead of showpieces, homeowners today are looking for spaces where they can relax and simply enjoy time with their family and friends. In my Summit Avenue project for Amity Kett, we layered in comfortable details like a padded deco headboard, wall-to-wall carpets accented with layered rugs, charming antiques and plush upholstery with floral accents. All of these elements evoke comfort for the homeowners.

While the Bloomsbury trend may feel new to some, it is rooted in a decades-old nostalgia for the simple comforts of home. We will continue to see a rise in the popularity of Bloomsbury-inspired spaces as homeowners embrace individuality and showcase the sentimental items that spark warm feelings of joy. After all, I think comfort is a trend we can all get behind. ♦

Amity Worrel is the owner and principal interior designer of Amity Worrel & Co. and Amity Kett. She works on projects regionally in Austin and San Antonio, as well as nationally and internationally. Passionate about design history, she hosts Design 101 and Design Discovery events online and in her studios, posts weekly design blogs and pontificates on the Design Oracles podcast.