



Kate Miller (left) designs artful fabrics and wallpapers for her company, Elworthy Studio, from her studio in the Design District. Watercolors, brushes and her sketchbook (below) fill her worktable. Miller uses rusted objects (bottom) to produce the patterns in her Decay collection (opposite).



Material *girl*

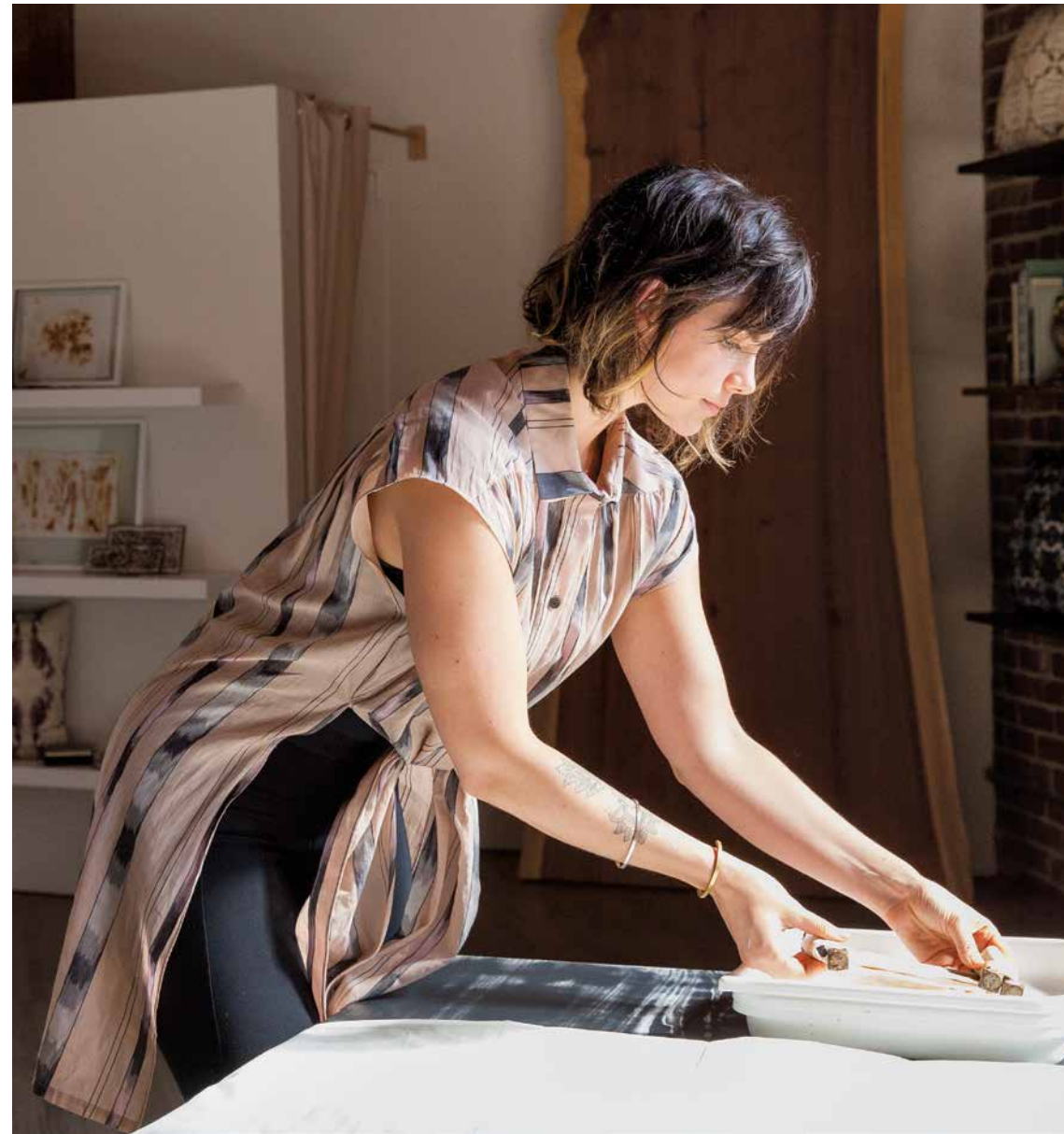
KATE MILLER'S EXPERIMENTS WITH UNORTHODOX MATERIALS—INCLUDING RUSTED BOLTS AND EXPIRED PHOTO PAPER—HAVE LED TO A DESIGN STYLE THAT'S BOTH ROMANTIC AND RAW.

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Some people meditate to start the day. But Kate Miller, the artist/designer behind textile and wallpaper company Elworthy Studio, sits down to a creative exercise—whether it's sketching, painting or just writing in her journal. "Every day is so different, and that's why I like to start with a ritual," says Miller, who works from a studio in the Design District. "It creates a bit of a routine and helps me feel grounded." Miller's patterns, however, possess an otherworldly quality: perhaps because each design expresses inexplicably juxtaposed concepts—familiar yet foreign, earthy yet glamorous and simple yet complex. "I've always been drawn to finding opposing forces and bringing them into harmony," says Miller, who worked in



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visual merchandising at Bloomingdale’s and with a men’s fashion start-up in Shanghai before switching gears and returning to school to study textile design. For example, the unexpected inspiration behind her premiere Decay collection was a corroded drainpipe. Drawn to the almost romantic patina and texture variation of the oxidized metal, Miller started experimenting with rust dyeing.

To begin her process, Miller scouts out unique rusted objects, ranging from doorknobs to bolts, which she finds from architectural salvage suppliers such as Building Resources—a favorite haunt, where she has come to be known as “Rust Girl.” She then sprays linen-cotton or silk with a water-vinegar solution and wraps the object, or sometimes several, in different manipulations of the fabric. She leaves it to oxidize for about two days before unwrapping it. “The rust-dyeing process is unpredictable and creates these beautiful organic shapes,” says Miller. In dealing with the inconstant nature of her method, the designer has adopted, as she calls it, an “experimentation with no expectations” ethos. “I have perfectionist tendencies, and this is why I like these processes,” she adds. “They force me to let go of set ideas and tap into true creativity.”

Once an assortment of rust-dyed fabrics appeals to Miller, she scans them into her computer to manipulate the colors, adds and combines elements together, and turns them into repeating patterns before sending them out for samples. Waiting to see how the visuals translate onto yardage fills Miller with nervous excitement. “Seeing the actual product in full repeat on fabric is completely different from anything on the screen,” she says. While the dyeing process creates fabric studies with an almost wabi-sabi-like aesthetic, the finished designs tend to reflect the familiar classic motifs found in damask, lattice and ikat.

In the beginning stages of developing a new collection, Miller can experiment with novel techniques for up to four weeks with months of refining thereafter. Currently, she is captivated by the reflective interactions of light and dark on photo paper. Instead of making traditional black-and-white prints, she is investigating alternative camera-less processes such as lumen prints, chemigrams

Miller creates textile studies by allowing fabric-wrapped rusted objects to oxidize in a water-vinegar solution (top, center). The rusted objects leave a pattern on the fabric (above), which Miller later scans and manipulates on the computer.

To demonstrate one of the many applications for Miller's textiles, she makes pillows, crafted from the Decay collection and filled with domestic alpaca fiber, displayed in her studio. For her next collection, Miller is working with alternative photographic methods (bottom) as part of her process.



and cyanotypes. Through her experiments, using these techniques with vintage and expired photo paper, she is discovering design elements reflective of Rorschach tests and painterly textures that will make their way onto fabric and wallpaper.

While the designs in her collections continue to evolve, one thing that won't change for Miller is the allure of natural elements. "Everything I do is inspired by nature in some way," she says, noting sacred geometry and the golden ratio as specific examples. Her designs explore those notions in subtle and textural ways. "Throughout history, so much great design has drawn from geometric principles," she says. "The amount of geometry that exists in the natural world is awe-inspiring." **L**

