

REAL ESTATE | DESIGN

Think You Can't Afford a Mural? Not Necessarily

New technologies have taken some of the risk, expense and rich-person stuffiness out of covering a wall with a single stunning image



ATTAINABLE MURALS Artaic glass-tile murals, partly made by robots, start at \$30 a square foot. Stern McCafferty Architecture + Interiors

By Catherine Dash

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TALK OF MURALS tends to conjure 18th and 19th century panoramas, hand painted to graphically retell, say, an African safari braved by the gentleman adventurer who commissioned the installation. Adding one to your own space might seem equally egoistic—and involved. But easily achievable new options that exploit robot assembly, large-scale printing and very forgiving adhesives are making believers of even modest commitment-phobes.

Both Tempaper and Minted have recently debuted removable murals that function much like contact paper. Remove the backing, apply the sticky side to your wall—lining up each panel precisely—and smooth out air bubbles as you go. But this isn't the annoying material you used to line spice cabinets. You can adjust the paper as many times as needed during hanging. To remove: Find the corner of a panel and peel away.

Both brands collaborate with artists, blowing up the scale of originally hand-painted works. The typically abstract imagery is more likely to suggest a jungle than depict actual tigers skulking in tall grass. A dreamy aqueous number called “Hawaiian Reef,” by California artist Caryn Owen, starts at \$330 for a roughly 6-foot-by-8-foot mural.

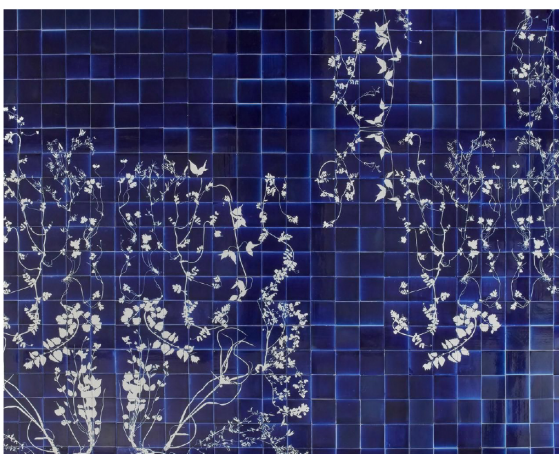
“Large-scale printing technology has been a game changer for much of the décor industry, mainly in fabrics, art and wall coverings,” said Orlando Soria, a Los Angeles interior designer, author and host of a new HGTV series, “Unspouse My House,” premiering June 6. Now that companies are making gorgeous, high-quality, affordable murals, he added, almost anyone can beautify a large expanse of dull wall. San Francisco interior designer Lauren Geremia also sees the economy of murals: “We have always used them to afford ourselves large artwork on a budget and add interest and depth to an otherwise flat space.”

Unlike ordinary, framed art, murals can mask unsightly architectural elements. Mr. Soria installed a Minted mural on a dated 1980s mirrored closet door. “Murals are a great way to update an ugly slider door, too,” he said. Ms. Geremia has subbed them in for headboards.

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Boston-based Artaic employs robotics and computers to manufacture highly customizable mosaic murals that start at \$20 a square foot (not including installation). The company took a homeowner’s black-and-white photograph of her daughter diving in a pool and translated it—artfully pixelated—into a nearly 7-foot-tall vitreous-glass mosaic. Designer Diane McCafferty installed the tiled mural in the family’s otherwise understated breakfast room: white cabinets, marble countertop and oak wall paneling. “The mural ends up being not only the focal point of the room but a fun way of personalizing the space in a less conventional way, which works with the minimal aesthetic,” she said.

Computers also let London design studio Glithero depict a delicate white floral image on its cobalt blue Botanical Tiles mural. Said Ms. Geremia, who installed it in a shower for a client’s two daughters. “We wanted to turn the small bathroom into a jewel box for them to appreciate as they grow. The room needed some heart to feel special...and feel like a thoughtful space.”



Custom mural from Glithero Botanical Tiles. PHOTO: GLITHERO

Glithero’s multi-step process starts with flowers, weeds and seaweed the studio collects and presses. Digital technology turns the preserved specimens into a stencil of sorts that craftspeople use to scribe the imagery into tiles. It’s all based on the centuries-old technique of sgraffito. “Reviving an old technique always means discovering the use of tools that became obsolete,” said Glithero

co-founder Sarah van Gameren, “but also a bit of innovation to make the technique relevant today.”