

TEXTILE TALK

A Q&A WITH DESIGNER SAANA BAKER



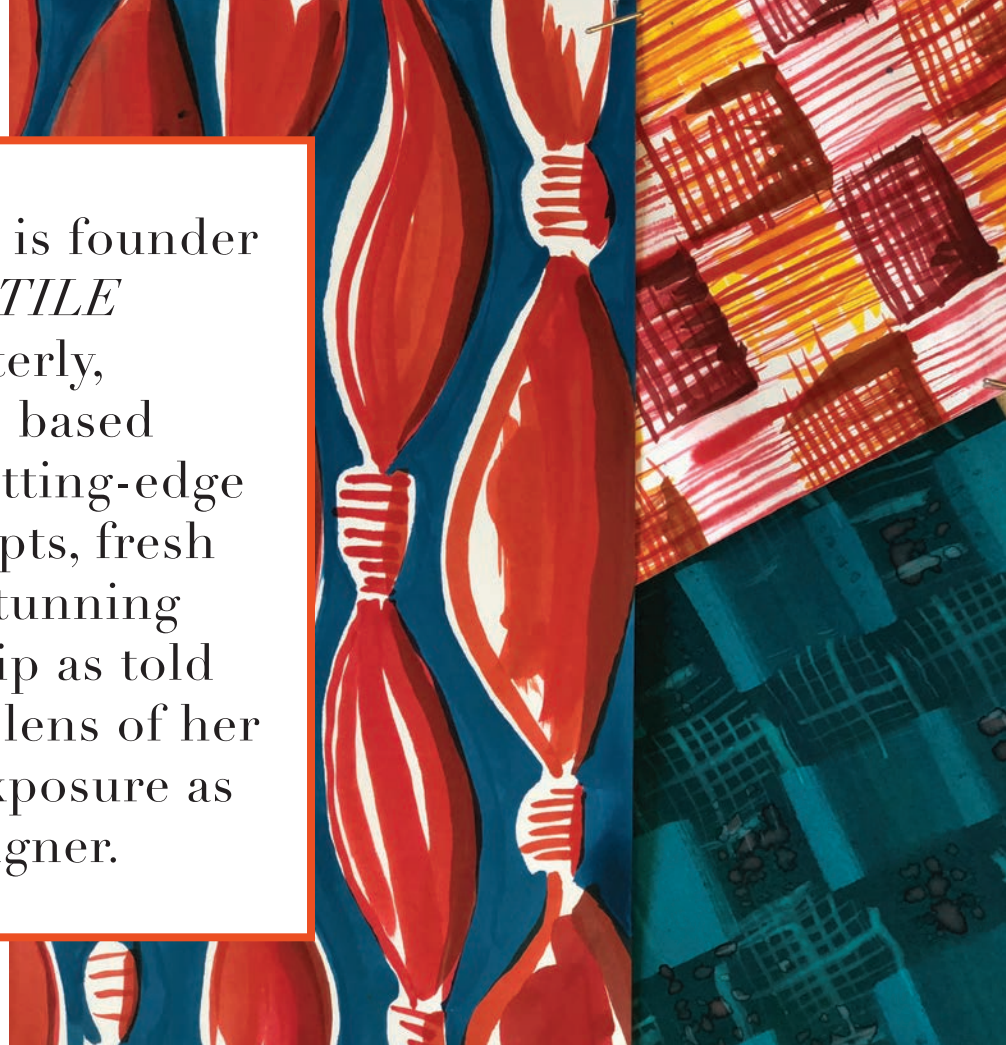
BY TRACY BULLA

Growing up in Berkeley, California

as the self-described child of hippies, acclaimed textile designer Saana Baker's roots in design go deep. Spending time in her maternal grandmother's (her "kindred spirit" in design terms) exquisitely collected home as a child inspired an enduring love of design--eventually leading her to study textile design with an emphasis on weaving at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology. After stints at various fabric houses and mills, she returned to the West Coast to work with Barbara Barry for more than a decade. Today, the San Francisco-based designer creates beautifully executed collections of textiles, wallpaper, bedding and more for private clients that have included Clodagh, Frank Ponterio and Jiun Ho. We sat down with Saana to chat about her personal design process, what's trending and the future of surface design.



Saana Baker is founder of *THE TEXTILE EYE*, a quarterly, subscription based report on cutting-edge fabric concepts, fresh colors and stunning craftsmanship as told through the lens of her travel and exposure as a textile designer.



What sparked your passion for textile design?

In high school, I took an aptitude test that suggested I should be a mortician. I was horrified! A few weeks later, I was sitting in the back of my French class, doodling on the margin of my paper (which is how I spent most of my time in high school). The kid sitting next to me said, “Ooh, that’s cool! You should put that on a T-shirt!”. In that moment it occurred to me that someone must have the job of coming up with all the patterns—from womenswear to tissue boxes—and if I could figure out how to do that I wouldn’t have to be a mortician.



As a freelancer, how do you work with clients?

Many clients come through consultants that specialize in licensing. I often act as a “ghost designer” for clients looking to get licensed collections. In some cases, I help with just the initial presentation, and in others with product development as well. I also work directly with clients on their own collections.

Describe your design process.

The first step is to understand the client and embody their aesthetic as much as possible. I see myself as a sort of “conduit” for their vision. I ask them to start stockpiling products and colors they use most often in their own design projects, and also request pieces collected during travel or flea-market jaunts. Travel photos are also a great source of inspiration. We collect tons of visual images on secret Pinterest boards. We narrow down favorite concepts and then start developing artwork.

Average size of collection?

A small collection might be 25 SKUs and a large one over 100.

What are you currently working on?

Jiun Ho is based here in San Francisco, and he calls me his “textile expert”. I’m involved with everything from concepts to mill selections, art and color development, as well as photo shoots and showroom set-up. He has a great, fearless color sense, so it’s incredibly fun to work with him. All of his design is inspired by travel—now we are creating a collection influenced by Japan. Additionally, I’m working on a few licensed collections for designers.

What colors and prints are catching your eye?

I’m loving the dark ground, night-blooming botanicals we are seeing. Anything natural fiber is up my alley, so heavy, drapery linens in great textures and colors always make me happy. As for color, for the first time I am having a bit of a love affair with purple, especially red-cast, low chroma colors and radicchio shades.

What’s on your trend radar?

It’s all in The Textile Eye! With COVID-19, cleanability will become more important. But I also believe that a yearning for a natural, cozy and special environment will lead to more unique and one-of-a kind textiles.



ON THE DESIGN PROCESS

"We collect tons of visual images on secret Pinterest boards. We narrow down favorite concepts and then start developing artwork."

Are small, designer lines the future for textile design? If so, why?

At the high end, this will be the case. Folks are looking for something unique, whether it is an aesthetic point of view or a compelling story about the maker or about sustainability. They also love to have a relationship with the designer or feel connected to the individuals making the goods. Diversity is going to become more important, and as we pivot away from very Eurocentric design there will be a need for a wide variety of perspectives.

Will the market reach oversaturation with these designer collections?

This is happening to some degree, but the tradeoff of smaller, more personal collections will be worth it. Also, as simple digital print lines become ubiquitous, designers will be looking for collections that are more special, so the least interesting lines will need to adapt or they won't have a future.

What's in your crystal ball for surface design?

As we're able to get smaller runs (both digitally printed and hand-done), we'll have access to a much broader range of looks. Trends will be less important than finding exactly what YOU love.



Globetrotting designer Saana Baker travels the world to bring her unique vision and perspective and trends to *The Textile Eye*

BY TRACY BULLA

LIKE SOME OF THE BEST DESIGN POLYMATHS, Saana Baker has added a few more skills to her already prodigious talents — that of editor, publisher, writer and photographer. With the launch of *The Textile Eye* at the beginning of 2019, she plunged headlong into the world of journalism. While she had long been creating show and trend reports for private clients, she wanted to make the reports available to a wider audience.

The result? A quarterly publication (available in both digital and print) packed with 150-200 pages of the latest trends and themes in the world of high-end home textiles and surface design. Each report, gorgeously presented, promises plenty of comprehensive coverage for textile enthusiasts.

“The focus is always on new themes so I stress new introductions, but I do add in existing product that feels timely,” Baker said. “I also know that it’s fun for designers to see a big range — many colors and multiple aesthetics really get your creativity going — so I include plenty of interesting and unique products.”

Until COVID-19, Baker covered all the shows herself, snapped product photos on her iPhone and wrote the majority of the material, along with the help of her managing editor and design assistant, Robyn Willson. In 2019, *The Textile Eye* reported on Maison & Objet, Paris Deco-Off, Salone del Mobile, Neocon and Decorex, among other shows, and also created special reports on Heimtextil and Proposte.

With trade shows now at a standstill, she shifted her reporting style to adjust to the times by reaching out directly to her contacts for new designs, spending hours pouring over the new introductions to curate themes and color reports. “I definitely

missed the boots-on-the-ground experience of being at the shows,” she noted. “The upside was being able to do some wonderful profiles and spend time getting to know brands and makers more deeply than I would in a rushed showroom visit. For example, hearing about Venice through the eyes of Nicolò Favaretto Rubelli was a real treat!”



Maximalist / 19th Century



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Baker also treats her readers to a food section in each issue, showcasing a few restaurants and bars that she enjoyed during her travels. “Luckily, I love to cook, so for my Milan report (Summer 2020) I created a ‘pesto a casa’ version and did a risotto and spritz for my home-bound readers.”



HOW TO GET IT

Choose from one of the following subscription options online at thetextileeye.com:

- Single-Access, *digital only*
- Single-Access, *digital + print*
- Small Business, *Includes digital access for up to four team members and one print copy.*

HOW WILL
COVID-19
 AFFECT DESIGN
 AESTHETICS?

Saana Baker, founder of *The Textile Eye*, presents two forthcoming contrasting themes—*BIOFILIA* and *PREPPIE*—from her spring and summer global gatherings.

BIOFILIA

Organic looking pattern and patina have been important for many seasons. This summer's intros push this look even farther, with motifs reminiscent of cell structures. Will this look survive Covid?



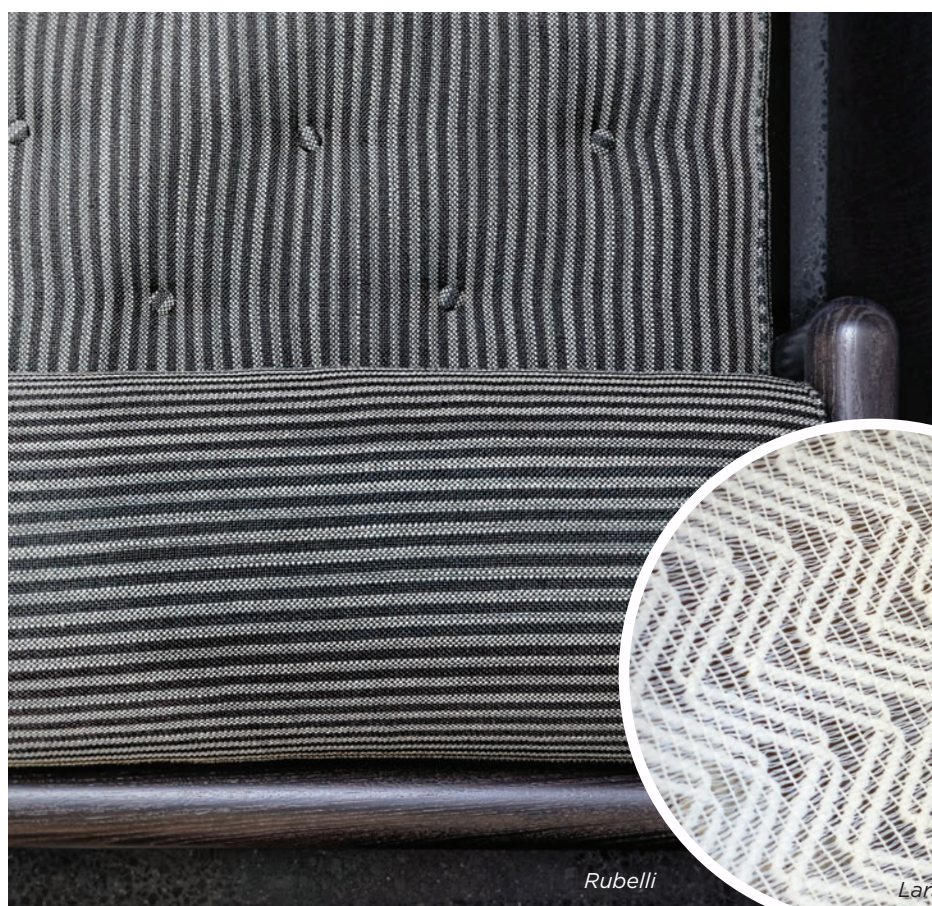
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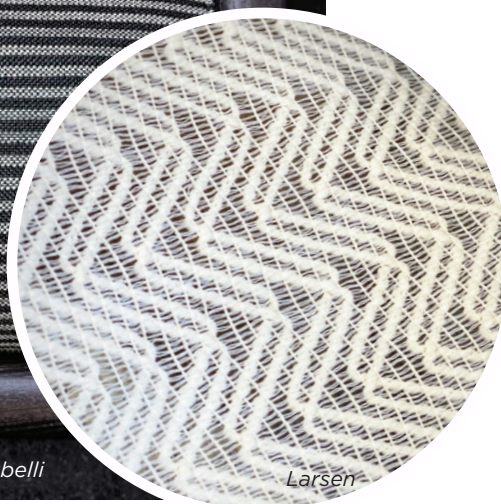
Spalvieri & Del Ciotto
 for Poltrona Frau



Élitis



Rubelli



Larsen

PREPPIE

Or will we be more comfortable with the clean and nostalgic feeling of the preppie look, with snappy stripes and contrasting trims?



Dooq

IN CONCLUSION:

While many clients will gravitate toward the latter, I believe we will continue to be fascinated by the complexity of the organic look, especially when the color palette steers clear of dingy colors in favor of the richer or fresher palettes. ●

All images courtesy of "The Textile Eye"