

A hands-on founder at Third Drawer Down [hh2](#)



house & home



Grandmother's skills in crocheting, lacemaking, macramé and knitting are being adapted in unexpected ways [hh3](#)

past perfect

Quality is always in style. And investing in top-notch products that stand the test of time, such as the RAR Rocking Chair, designed by Charles and Ray Eames in 1950 and still manufactured by Vitra, makes more sense than chasing fads. Find it at www.vitra.com



The new feminine

Just when you thought minimalist austerity would be forever cool, designers are coming over all textured and feminine – as if our interiors need to be cherished rather than confronted, discovers **Yvonne Courtney**

As if in reaction to our techno-info-saturated age, handcraft looks – such as crochet, lace, macramé and knitting – are increasingly appearing in the form of furniture, home-wear products and even buildings.

Granny's skills and granny's values, maybe, but forget granny-style doilies and net curtains: this is fresh, new and edgy, while being playful and poetic. Chairs treated as jewellery ... tactile, textured wallpapers ... beautiful objects that are a sign of the times.

Traditional handcraft techniques are being applied in graphic ways to utilitarian materials and furnishings, giving the finished product a sense of freshness and humour that their matronly predecessors lacked. And besides, who said the future can't be pretty and feminine? Why not chuck an oversized lace tablecloth over a white Saarinen table? It's all in the mismatch, rather than being controlling and regimented. And the new feminine is never, ever fussy.

Breaking down the barriers between craft and design, designers are moving away from the clean lines that have, for so long, dominated contemporary style to give old-fashioned skills a coolly conceptual edge, combining handcrafted patterns and textures with experimental techniques to create innovative surfaces and forms.

Hints of knit-one-purl-one have been around for a while – in 2002 Ross Lovegrove designed the fluid-shaped Lovenet lounge for Moooi, its intricate weave a dead ringer for loose, oversized knitting – but suddenly there's a lot more of it.

Knitted pillows and pouffes are making a strong showing – notably Sweet 40 by the Argentinian fashion designer Martin Churba, who seems to have an additional talent for dressing furniture pieces: the pouffe was chosen by Paola Navone for her 2009 collection for the Italian label Gervasoni. In similar vein is the chunky Urchin by Christien Meindertsma of the Dutch knitwear studio, Flocks, while Claudia Barbari – formerly a fashion knit-

wear designer – has taken hand-knitting to a new extreme with her rustic-deluxe cashmere cushions and throws. Multiple threads of fine cashmere are first knitted into long strips, which are then rolled into thick "cords" that are hand-knitted on giant needles.

Crochet is also showing up as light fittings and furnishings: examples range from CB2's Link side table – rendered in iron and wire, making it both delicate and tough – to the brightly coloured crochet "ball" floor lamps by Cai Light, the Beirut-based company co-owned by the architect and designer, Annabel Kassar (available from O'de Rose in Dubai).

We're seeing macramé, too, in the form of chairs and lamp shades – such as Macramé Lamp by Sweden's Pernilla Jansson and Fishnet chair by Marcel Wanders.

Indeed, Wanders, the Dutch design maverick, was one of the pioneers of this "feminine" trend.

"Functional things, with all due respect, are predictable," he says. "If you can surprise people with something beautiful, it makes sense."

His Knotted Chair, designed in the 1996 and made by Cappellini, is considered iconic. Wanders took the staid old craft of macramé (its last moment in the sun having been a hippie incarnation in the 1970s) and, with the benefit of technology, turned it into something utterly modern: aramid braid with a carbon centre was hand-knotted then coated with epoxy to create a rigid form.

Wanders has also created a new application for traditional craft with his Crochet collection – made under his own label, MW Studio – which challenges all preconceptions of fabric characteristics, holding weight just as well as stone. Constructed from hand-crocheted flowers, it is stitched together over a mould and stiffened with resin. His Hexagon wallpaper pushes the doily further still, with its large-scale multilayered abstraction of radial patterns.

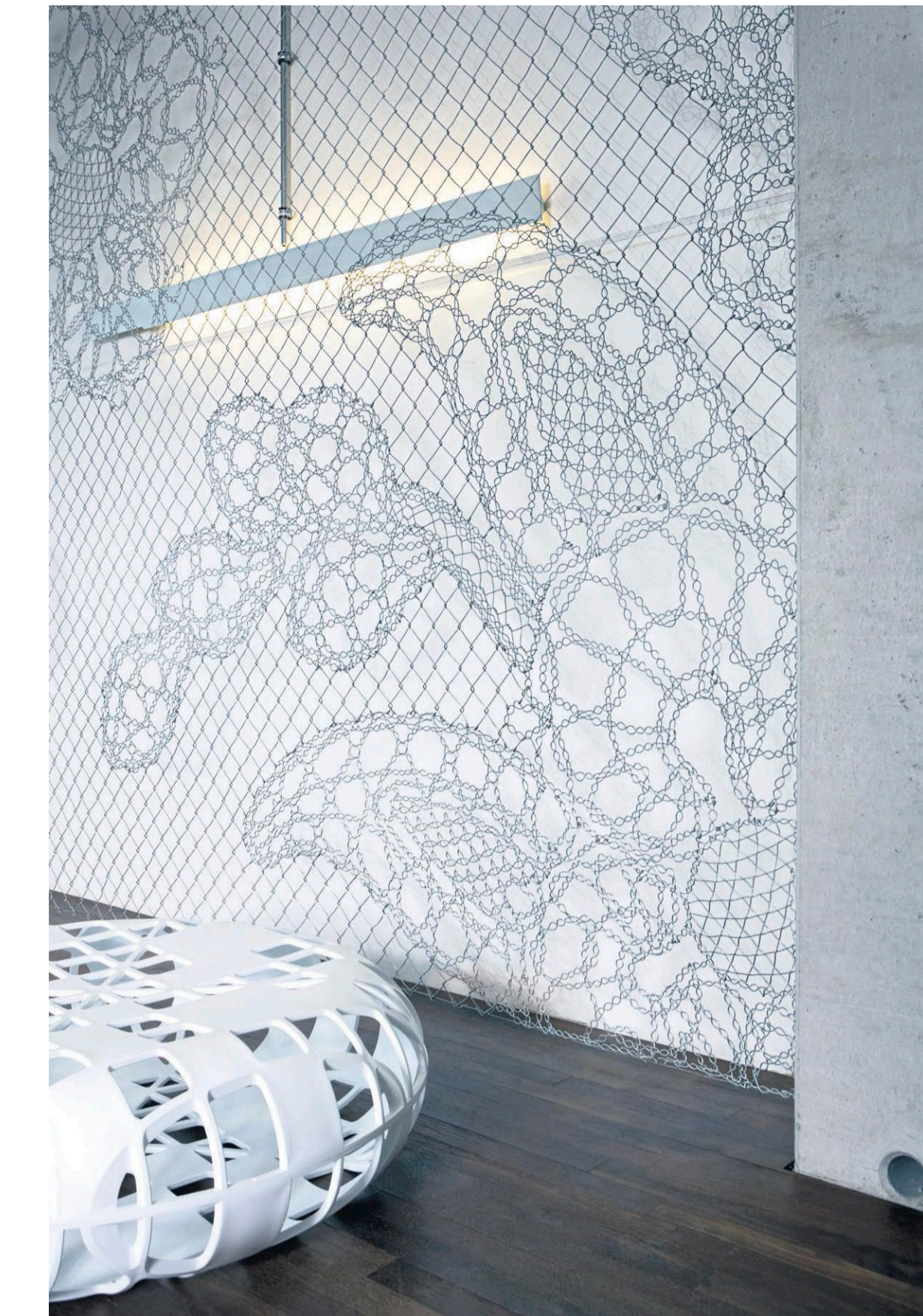
The Netherlands is home to a strong lace-making tradition, giving today's designers a rich legacy from which to draw inspiration. Tord

Boontje's Midsummer Light plays on the delicate and holey qualities of lace, but the end result is a deceptively rigid hanging light made from a super resistant paper material draped over a heat-blocking cone. His Come Rain Come Shine chandelier weaves ribbons and organza through a delicate fishnet of silk, while his Dondola and Revolution chairs for Moroso (2004) feature integral "throws" of wool felt cut into a lacy floral motif.

On the other hand, Joep Verhoeven – who, with his twin brother, Jeroen, and Judith de Graauw makes up the design team Demakersvan – aims to "beautify the mundane" (or downright ugly) with How to Plant a Fence, his graduate project at Design Academy Eindhoven. Now known as Lace Fence and made by Droog, the industrial chain-link fence is deconstructed and rewoven into a classic bobbin-lace motif, showing how traditional lace patterns can change an industrial object into an element of personal, home-made beauty.

What these designers have in common – apart from an eye for the delicate and poetic – is that they recognise the opportunity provided by technology. While the ancient craft of lace is often associated with rich textiles and regal interiors, today's lace-inspired products use advanced not only in materials but also in techniques – laser cutwork in particular – to enable a precise repeat pattern to be used on forward-thinking materials such as metals, plastics, rubbers and concrete.

Thus Joris Laarman has transformed the dull radiator with his award-winning Heat Wave (by Droog). Its ornate swirls of fibre-reinforced concrete – which he dubs "wall lingerie" – captures the romantic mood while conducting heat far more efficiently than a conventionally shaped radiator. The British designer Jethro Macey infuses texture into his furniture and concrete tiles to create "charming alternatives to the ordinary". His lace-embossed tiles reveal a decorative rose pattern when laid in multiples (as seen at Huxley's Wine Bar at Heathrow's Terminal 5). Traditional lace patterns are being manipulated to create ironic, gothic-style interpretations – witness the Lace wallpaper from the Scottish design studio Timorous Beasties and the white filigree wall at Hong Kong's Isola restaurant, by the architect Hugh Zimmerman: it looks like lace but is in fact steel. In a similar vein, Studiobility, the Icelandic graphics and product design company, has infused lace-like patterns into its Flatpack An-



Above, Lace fence by Demakersvan and made by Droog is based on Joep Verhoeven's graduate project at Design Academy Eindhoven. Joost van Brug Cover, Sweet 40 by the Argentinian designer Martin Churba for Gervasoni's 2009 collection.

tiques furniture range, as well as crocheted-steel shelves which project a decorative shadow on to the wall.

Taking things even further, the English architecture firm Caruso St John designed a new arts venue in Nottingham's old Lace Market district that is clad in a series of undulating concrete panels, indented with a lace pattern borrowed from a sample uncovered in a 19th-century time capsule nearby.

Taking the lacy craze to an extreme of delicacy, Copenhagen-based Louise Campbell designed Very Round Chair for Zanotta (a one-off version of which, in gold, is available at Boutique 1 in Dubai) and Prince Chair for Sweden's Crown Prince Frederik. Using the qualities of lace as a metaphor for its regal inspiration, its motif represents the prince's traditional side, as well as his difficulty in hiding from the public eye, while the chair's technologically advanced construction methods reflect his youth and ability to connect with his generation.

UK-based Susan Bradley is known for her whimsical designs that take interiors homewares outside. Her lace-inspired Outdoor Wallpaper is an innovative concept that livens up exterior walls. Used as a trellis, screen, or simply as a focal point, the designs are available in acrylic or stainless steel (mirror-polished or powder-coated) and various colours. Bradley recently added crochet-in-

spired outdoor carpets to her range.

The Dutch designer Hella Jongerius works on the cusp of design, craft and technology, fusing high and low tech with the industrial and artisanal. "I'm trying to find ways to make unique pieces," she explains, "there's more celebration of the materials, more decoration ..." as witnessed with her groundbreaking embroidered ceramic vases, which combine two media – textiles and ceramics – that are traditionally perceived as feminine.

"I design in the medium which tells my stories the best. Sometimes the combination of materials is sensitive and seductive. The concept is smart, well thought out and very disciplined. Which of those qualities are male or female?"

Making her work seem personal and meaningful has long been an objective for Jongerius, even as a student. "I didn't put it into words at the time; it was instinctive," she says, "and now there's this whole marketing story of 'emotional design,' but no one was interested in it then."

Considered by many to be the queen of the new femininity, Patricia Urquiola plays with smocking, as well as crochet, macramé and weaving. Despite its atypical shape and uniquely textured material, her Smock sofa is utterly practical (a full-length zip makes for easy cover removal) – a signature touch from

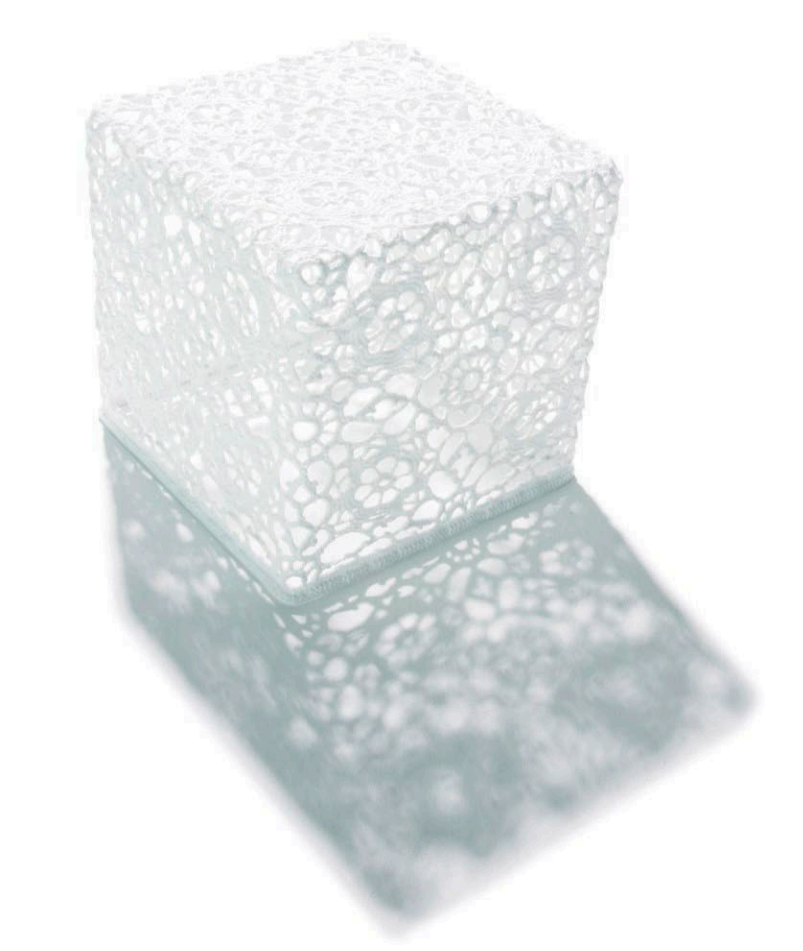
the Milan-based Spanish designer. Urquiola produces designs for many of the industry's heavyweights and is renowned for her imaginative and supremely comfortable furnishings. Greatest hits include the amplified "basket weave" of Canasta and the lace-like Crinoline, both for B&B Italia's outdoor seating collection, and the crocheted rope wool rug for Paola Lenti.

But why is this all happening now? Clearly a key factor behind the new-rrococo surge of feminine touches and crafts-inspired textures is that contemporary manufacturing methods are making it possible to achieve a degree of complexity and intricacy with relatively little effort, enabling hugely complex forms to transcend the world of craft and enter into one of mass production.

But there's more to it than the purely technical: when the economy is down and the news is gloomy, we tend to cling to the classics. These handcrafts are timeless, despite being flagged as a current trend with a modern twist. Lace in particular, is a feminine, comforting and honest look. And we need genuine right now; we need the real deal. And thus, with a mix of craftsmanship, decoration and nostalgia, cutting-edge design has come a long way from the premise of pure function.

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Above, Crochet Table by Marcel Wanders. Right, Prince Chair by Louise Campbell.



* where to find it

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