

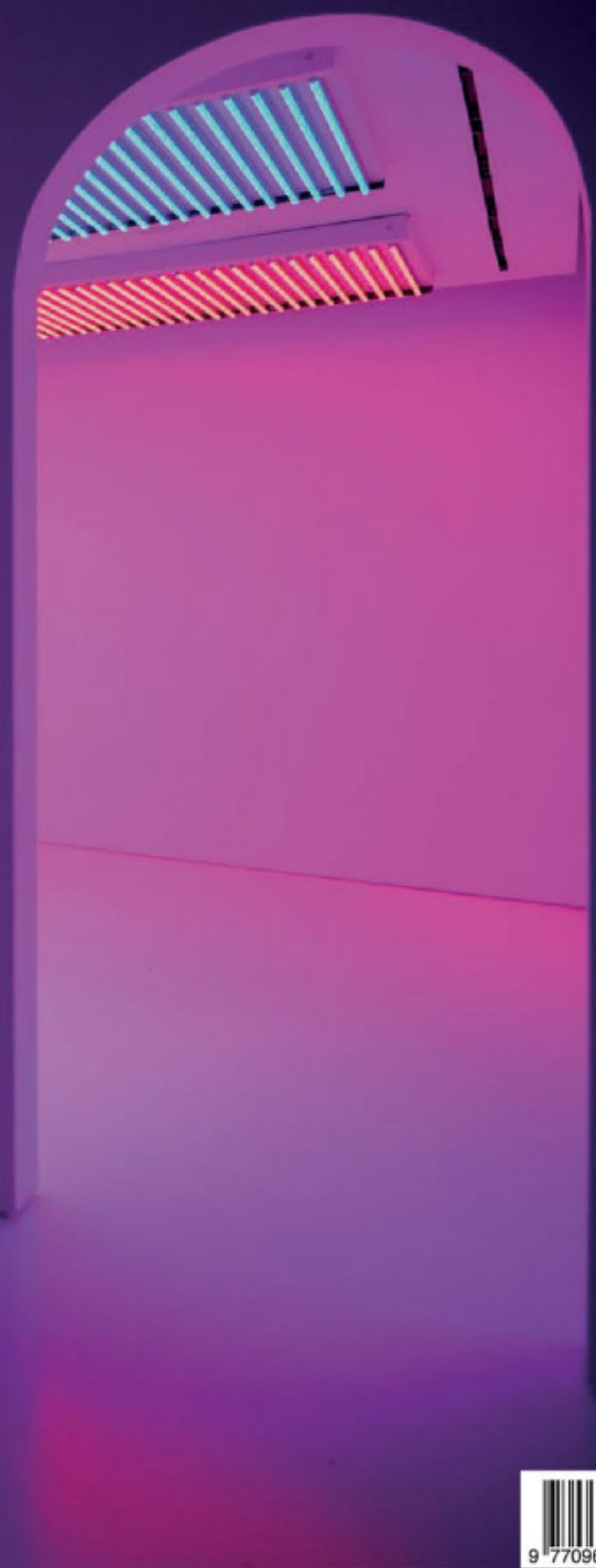
FX 328

ESTHER DUGDALE
PATTERN
VIRGIN ATLANTIC
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FX AWARDS

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DESIGN SEMINAR

PATTERN BEHAVIOUR

FX invited a panel of experts from across architecture and design to reflect on patterns and the role they play in shaping our interior landscape. From historical and locational reference points, to bold and innovative new visions, how can the power of the pattern be best harnessed? Report by Toby Maxwell. Photography by Gareth Gardner



THE APPEAL OF PATTERNS is an enduring presence across a vast swathe of the design world. From fabrics to fashion, from residential to the public realm, patterns are everywhere. But while some patterns are designed to grab the attention and make an impression, others are specifically intended to offer a subtle backdrop, with a repeating pattern that somehow puts our minds at ease with its uniformity.

So where are we now with pattern? And how does this decorative technique sit within the design process in terms of ideas and production? Tim Gledstone, partner at Squire & Partners, believes technology has opened up its potential: 'The digital revolution means that we can generate patterns without having to rely on mass manufacture. We can create an idea or production that is unique to a project and not dependent on an entire rollout. Micro production represents a big change perhaps over the past 10 years or so in terms of printing your own plywood or wallpaper for a specific project – it has become accessible throughout a multitude of price ranges and scales.'

He added that, prior to this, such individual design would only have been possible through handcrafted printing block techniques which would have a higher price point and would therefore be considerably more limited in its application. 'If you can make a project special to your client with more and more "layers" to it that make it considered, sensitive and unique, then the client is very happy with that.'

'The question of "what is a pattern" for me is that it has to repeat – otherwise it is just a design – but it can repeat at all sorts of different scales. Today, we can probably repeat patterns on a much bigger scale than ever before because it's possible to scale things up in all kinds of ways.'

Tim Gledstone

Above left Tim Gledstone, partner at Squire & Partners

Above right Julie Gaultier of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios and Alex Franklin, director of architecture, Basha-Franklin



Alex Franklin, director of architecture at Basha-Franklin, added: 'Contextualisation works in lots of different ways and pattern can be great for that. The building blocks that we are working with might be brick or Portland stone, but pattern can be used effectively to add further to this process.'

'It's interesting that the word "pattern" is often associated with software design and algorithmic problems rather than the kind of design those of us around this table are involved with, but often I think pattern can be thought of as a commodity, something that you're buying as seen, or alternatively, as Tim

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describes, it can be defined as something really unique.'

Sam Boyd, commercial project specialist at Amtico – whose London offices provided the setting for the discussion – noted that clients often take inspiration from their surroundings. 'It can be the case that a client has seen a floor that they want us to replicate using our Signature range. The pattern is linked to something they have seen in their area which they would like to incorporate in the design of their office. We can reproduce this and create something that is bespoke just for that project, and it can be done on that

kind of limited scale – the designer is not necessarily going to be rolling it out in their next six or seven projects for example.'

Her Amtico colleague, Sarah Escott, design manager, explained: 'Digital technology offers the chance to create whatever vision the designer might have. You might think that compared to the hand-made flooring in a cathedral, for example, that producing flooring through mass manufacture and using calibrated machinery might be simple, but it comes with its own challenges and some things are only really possible when created by hand. That's part of the magic of

pattern that keeps things interesting – yes, we have to tailor it for production or mass manufacturing, but when it all finally gets put together, it comes down to hand assembly.

'There's something pure about this craftsmanship element, and the interplay between the colour and geometry of the pieces that make up the pattern. So, although mass manufacturing is quicker to produce, in many projects there is just as much complexity as there would be for hand-made pieces.'

Striving for longevity

So do these new techniques mean that we are



Left Jing Li, A&D commercial project specialist, Amtico, and Macaila Vorster

Below Darren Lewis, head of 2D, MET Studio

using patterns more today than ever before? Evidence suggests that the design process can still show a degree of reluctance to embrace it. Kathryn Larivva, associate for urban design at Bradley Studios (FCB), said: 'We use patterns to make something quite bespoke and give it a point of difference, but we use it quite sparingly because it is a bolder choice. It may not prove to be "timeless" if you use a certain pattern that is fashionable this week but in ten years' time may not be seen as such and could look quite dated. When we look around at pattern today and see things that look great on Pinterest, are we going to be looking back on some of it and seeing it in a different light, and wanting to cover it over?'

'There really is a lot of scope to make something with patterns but you have to be bold and brave to do it. That's why I think in

general, people tend to look to the past at the things that are tried and tested, and which have clearly stood the test of time. It can feel more comfortable sometimes to go with something you might have seen and resurrect that.'

Knowing how new patterns created today will be viewed in the future is the great unknown, and perhaps explains why there is a degree of nervousness surrounding their use. Darren Lewis, head of 2D at MET Studio, said: 'Patterns from different eras are really interesting. During the Festival of Britain, the carpet at the Royal Festival Hall was designed by Peter Moro and Leslie Martin and features the "net and ball" design which is synonymous with the 1950s and that location. You can't take it out of that context without knowing that it relates to that era, but it's interesting

that we can only look back at the past and identify it in that way. We just won't know how the patterns that are created today will be viewed in 20 or 30 years' time.'

Gledstone added: 'It can be an equal benefit if something is timeless and also "of that place". If you get tired of a pattern from the 70s or 80s and cover it up, perhaps one day it gets uncovered and people are really happy that it is still there and preserved.'

'It is a particularly British issue,' suggested Franklin. 'We work in historical context and that can be a freedom or a vacuum depending on your perspective. Working against this contextual background is almost something you have to do.'

The 1951 Festival of Britain remains an important reference point for pattern inspiration. Julie Gaulter, associate at Feilden

Clegg, brought to the discussion a copy of the seminal book 'From Atoms to Patterns: Crystal Structure Designs' from the 1951 festival, detailing the work of the Festival Pattern Group, a unique undertaking involving x-ray crystallographers, designers and manufacturers. Their complex, intriguing and challenging patterns were inspired by studying x-ray diffraction photographs of crystals which scientists used to calculate the arrangement of atoms within molecules. Some of these striking patterns were then used on curtains, wallpapers, carpets, lace and dress fabrics among other items. Creating such visuals is perhaps a product of a time in which science was a prominent driver of modern ideas.

Alice Munday, associate design director at Curious, said: 'Sometimes it's possible to use a pattern to anchor a design within a certain time. For example, the Old War Office in London is reopening this year as the UK's first Raffles hotel and features morse code pattern as a nod to the building's previous use, referencing its legacy and indicating its authentic history through graphical identity.'

The time and the place

Macaila Vorster, design director at Interbrand, said: 'There's a really interesting difference between pattern that is used in architecture - which is rooted in a certain period and can be traced to a specific era - and modern-day interior patterns which, thanks to technology, can be churned out so quickly, through apps and shared on social media.'

'Today, everybody is able to create DIY patterns, so it may become less simple to pinpoint the moment in time they originate from because of the eclectic diversity of different creations, including modern takes on historic patterns which somewhat blur the boundaries. For example, there are magnified geometric designs which can create arches and circles on the walls, and wonderfully bright spaces such as the work of artist Morag Myerscough. They are popular because they bring joy and they are such an amalgamation of different things.'

'Being able to look back and identify some of this to a particular moment will be difficult, not because the patterns are less precious to us as designers, but in the mainstream they may be seen more as "fun" and just as a way of exploring new visual ideas.'

'Brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton have in some respects brought back the pattern in a branding sense, looking at how they can reinvent it and re-visualise it for each season. But it has become an identifier again. In the metaverse or digital world, where you don't have a physical product, pattern itself has become the identifier.'

Chairing the discussion, Theresa Dowling, editorial director of FX magazine, said: 'It's interesting that you mention Morag

'Brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton have in some respects brought back the pattern in a branding sense, looking at how they can reinvent it and re-visualise it for each season. But it has become an identifier again.'

Macaila Vorster

Myerscough, because she's a million miles away from heritage design. She's an agitator, an outsider, and the complete antidote to the predictable.'

MET Studio's Lewis replied: 'We are very much in the age of the screen in which things have to look great on Instagram. I love Morag's work, but there are a lot of artists now who create these bold, colourful pieces. Are they designing for what they feel is right, or are they designing for what will be most impactful on screen to get those clicks, likes and shares? That's not to downplay their success and their huge creativity, but it would be interesting to know if they would have made such a breakthrough if we didn't have camera phones and Instagram for example. Would it have resonated in quite the same way?'

'It's interesting to consider how pattern lives online,' suggested Munday, 'because it can be a really useful tool for website design for instance. A repeating motif in vector can be

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built in code which can help to create a lightweight website which makes it more accessible. Then you can add detail such as animating it or making it react to the user's cursor and enhance the user experience. So, there is this digital way of tailoring a pattern to work really effectively as part of a brand identity.'

Does the provenance of a pattern affect how it is used and categorised? For example, said Franklin: 'If an artist makes a pattern, is it de facto "art"? Would it be considered in a different light if that pattern had been made by a non-artist? It seems there are different categories to how patterns are viewed.'

Interbrand's Vorster added: 'It's an interesting point. And the same could be said of the difference between a designer making a pattern or it being produced using AI and churning out patterns automatically. I think you need the human eye to know not to sprawl a pattern over everything, and to use some careful judgment. Our role is still key in that respect.'

The prospects for radical intervention

So what of modern day pattern pioneers? Is there anyone leading the way in showing what can be achieved with patterned impact? Amtico's Escott said: 'There's so much visual "noise" out there. I'm waiting for the visionary to emerge, the "disruptor" who is going to come out and make a big impact. But it's so hard for anyone to pick their way through when there is so much being published online and elsewhere on a constant basis.'

'I was at the Milan Furniture Fair in June and one of my thoughts was how "comfortable" everything felt. No-one was

'What's lovely about pattern is that you can design something in which you can see the inspiration and the subtle references to time or place, but at the same time, you are creating something unique and new that is memorable and ownable. You can build a story in to the design but in essence you're also creating something new.'

Alice Munday

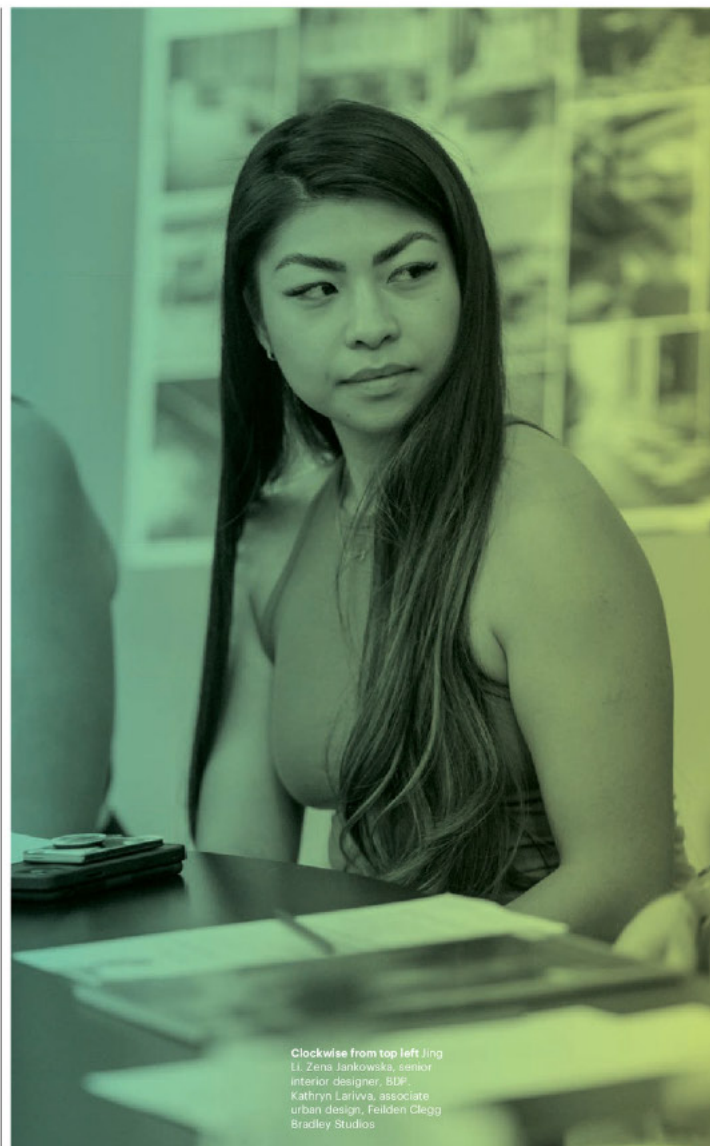
Below Sarah Escott, design manager, Amtico and Alice Munday, associate design director, Curious

really doing anything radical. It was beautiful, with new patterns and textures and there were some definite trends, but nothing that really challenged me or my view on things. We're still emerging from the pandemic crisis so it may still be a little early for this radical movement to come through.'

Sustainability – in various forms – could be at least partially steering the creative direction away from brash and bold, and instead towards warmth and comfort. Gledstone said: 'One of the greatest crimes of fashion is its throwaway nature, and right now everyone is conscious of that. But I think there are layers that can be incredibly expressive. Possibly those top layers – which are not necessarily throwaway but do allow you to be bold – still enable a design to stand the test of time.'

Munday added: 'Perhaps people are looking more for the comfort of hand-crafted things, for the simple pleasures in life. It could be the reaction to having been denied some of these close connections during the pandemic, with an interest in hand-me-downs or more personal items.'

'There's also interest in hand-me-ups, in repurposing,' suggested Franklin. 'We're interested in taking things and upcycling them. Some building and construction can be so wasteful, and we want to take the fashion side out of that and look to make more and more use of what is already there. Of course, some things are easier to upcycle than others, but many enduring items can be polished or "mined" from the site. These factors are already really telling in how we approach specification today, not least because people are prepared to pay more for processes which previously may have been dismissed on the basis of cost.'



Clockwise from top left Jling Li, Zena Janikowska, senior interior designer, BDF, Kathryn Lariwa, associate urban design, Felken Clegg Bradley Studios



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Munday agreed: 'With upcycling, there is just that wonderful warmth of taking something which has had a previous life, keeping what you can of that story but then giving it a new purpose. Bringing something that has a story or a history into a project seems to have more and more appeal, rather than sourcing something "off the shelf" which may be more cheaply made and more of a throwaway item.'

Gledstone believes increasingly creative approaches will come from this desire to repair rather than throw away.

'I think we could see things like reupholstering really taking off as a way of utilising much better-made old furniture but with new fabric that really brings it to life. It is an approach to buying old quality but adding new layers. You could cover an old chair with new fabric, and when you're tired of that, the fabric could be re-used to make cushions. It's about finding new ways to repurpose materials and give a future life. For example, when my son left school, there is a small business that makes a teddy bear out of old school blazers. It's really quite cute. I'm not

sure what it's next life will be – perhaps as an even smaller blazer!'

Lewis pointed out: 'The success of The Repair Shop on TV is all about that emotional connection with items. We're definitely in an age where we want to retain things from the past but to recondition them for the future.'

Brand bravery

When it comes to branding, are companies ready to embrace patterns as a visual representation of what they are all about, or

Taking part were

- Sam Boyd**
commercial project specialist, Amtico
- Gema Coates**
head of commercial for London and SE, Amtico
- Theresa Dowling (chair)**
editorial director, FX Magazine
- Sarah Escott**
design manager, Amtico
- Alex Franklin**
director of architecture, Basha-Franklin
- Julie Gaultier**
associate, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
- Tim Gledstone**
partner, Squire & Partners
- Zena Jankowska**
senior interior designer, BDP
- Kathryn Larivva**
associate urban design, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
- Darren Lewis**
head of 2D, MET Studio
- Jing Li**
A&D commercial project specialist, Amtico
- Alice Munday**
associate design director, Curious
- Macaila Vorster**
design director, Interbrand
- Lorna Williams**
head of product design and creative branding, Amtico



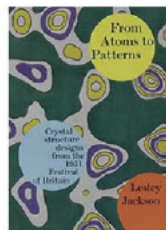
Far left Lorna Williams, head of product design and creative branding at Amtico

Left Theresa Dowling, group editorial director, FX

is clean and simple still the preferred modus operandi? Vorster said: 'I think we are still in a time where the most important thing is for spaces to be comfortable. In the branding world, it seems clients are wanting things to be brighter, clearer, fresher and with a happier vibe. Some of these are big brands too, and are unlikely to change again for five to 10 years, so they are going for sometimes quite bold rebranding. It's interesting that we're going through such changes with branding but spaces are not quite as radically inclined.'

Lewis added: 'When it comes to branding, there can be a difficulty where clients want something quite new, but they are also quite fearful of the reaction. You have to really guide them and hold their hand to get them through that - and not just the design phase, but the launch and for some time after that. I wonder if it's reflective of wider society in that many seem to want new things, but not too new.'

Zena Jankowska, senior interior designer at BDP, believes that since the pandemic, we may be in a period of self-exploration where people are looking for immersive environments. 'I'm seeing that with clients where there is a desire for a sense of belonging or being more social. There is also a strong social conscience too - at a recent design meeting on sustainability, everyone was getting quite involved, with strong views. I think because now we are all exposed to so much information on the topic, everyone feels that they can say something.'



Left: 'From Atoms to Patterns' by Lesley Jackson provoked discussions of the Festival of Britain, science, space exploration and how external factors influence pattern

'Smaller projects - where it is possible to explore new ideas - are helpful in slowly pushing the boundaries. And the positive feedback from those can flow through to other projects where the benefit of some of the experience of new colours and concepts can be felt and really harnessed.'

Vorster said: 'We recently worked with a client on a major brand and we went through the process by undertaking detailed testing with the various communities involved. The client was hesitant to go through with major changes unless the communities were happy with it. We were able to come up with something that was very different from competitors, and which really stands out, but the client had the confidence in it because of a positive response from the communities that are so important to them, including consumers and professional users.'

Gledstone added: 'There are very few "individual" clients out there, I would say. Many designers are working with committees

most of the time, made up of people who don't want to put their head up above the parapet. Really, they look to you, as well as the metrics, before making their decisions.'

Jankowska replied: 'They want it to be successful, so clients do tend to take a collaborative approach. It's a good way of getting a result everyone is happy with, although of course it can mean that you don't get that true innovator.'

More than just a backdrop?

History suggests that patterns have had an important role to play in human environments. Why and how they affect our conscious mind is a little less clear, however. Gledstone of Squire & Partners asked: 'Do you think we need pattern for our psyche? Does it give us some kind of link to nature that we find comforting? Or are we just living with the historical limitation that patterns repeat because we couldn't figure out how to make them not repeat? Because if you had an image of tree foliage on the floor, is that a pattern? And does it offer the kind of comfort to help our minds wander?'

BDP's Jankowska pointed out: 'There are so many patterns in nature. Replicating patterns of nature in interiors can provide camouflage to blend or connect spaces or provide a significant expression. I've noticed the use of large, bold wallpapers and graphics recently. What's new is more openness towards an immersive space or interior, which can express "pause"; a moment of the self-exploration, or inward examination.'

Amtico's Williams believes that the relationship between colour and pattern is especially interesting: 'When we create a flooring design, we might have our patterns but then we have to think about how to populate them. You may have two projects with the same pattern but when you populate it with different colours it can make for a very different feel.'

'Sometimes you need subtle colours that blend, where mixed or contrasting colours might be seen by many as a little too scary, but also there are contrasts - such as black and white - which should probably be just as scary, but for some reason we are generally okay with somehow, perhaps because we are familiar with them. But they are still contrasting and bold, so it's not always a case of having neutrals together in order to create something people are comfortably with, sometimes black and white can also have that effect.'

Jankowska added: 'I think it was the artist Henri Matisse who said that you can mix almost any colour if you also include black. It somehow reduces the extent to which the colours compete with each other.'

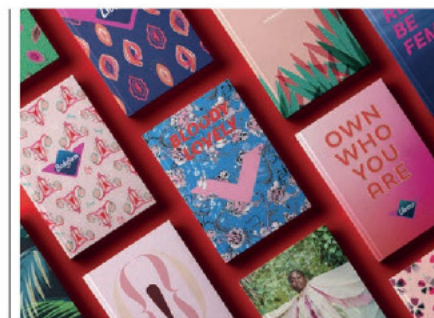
'There's something pure about the craftsmanship element [of a flooring project], and the interplay between the colour and geometry of the pieces that make up the pattern.'

Sarah Escott

So, where might the future of patterns lie? Are traditional techniques and styles at risk of being crushed by the high-churn, easy pattern production offered by modern technology? Vorster believes there is scope to achieve the best of both worlds. 'Technology has helped us to be more creative, and do things that we never thought possible. Perhaps 3D printing is the turning point. In the past we simply didn't have this ability, and it offers a chance to really challenge and fuel our innate desire to create. This urge to create things that are bespoke and unique offers hope that we won't lose the craft skills but instead tech just helps that process along.'

'What's lovely about pattern is that you can design something in which you can see the inspiration and the subtle references to time or place, but at the same time, you are creating something unique and new that is memorable and ownable,' adds Munday. 'You can build a story into the design, but in essence you are also creating something new.' **FX**

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Clockwise Graffiti image of famous footballer and pundit Ian Wright. BDP used inventive patterns to decorate the walls and ceiling at PwC Glasgow. Interbrand used a variety of patterns to brand Bodyform

