

Focus On...

The Shed

The Innovative Starter For Ten scheme, developed by Gateshead Council and design guru Wayne Hemingway MBE, was set up to address a demand for creative workspace in Gateshead, and to revitalise the High Street. It's seen the transformation of The Bed Shed, a redundant furniture store on Gateshead's High Street, into a thriving creative cluster for small businesses called 'The Shed'. Initially a pilot scheme, The Shed now houses 36 creative businesses. We focus on just a few of them.

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Kate Usher, designer

How did you start?

I set up my design studio after graduating in 2009 as I felt passionate about nurturing talent and creativity in the North East. Because of the lack of textile design jobs available here, I was inspired to create my own business. Initially my aim was to create a luxury wallpaper collection which would appeal to both adults and children as I was frustrated at the lack of exciting design for children's interiors. I launched my collection of hand-drawn designs on high quality non-woven wallpaper, in July at the New Designers One Year On event.

What inspires you?

This really depends what project I'm working on as I get inspiration from everywhere I visit and everything I do. For the wallpaper collection, I felt inclined to create something which children would find fascinating whilst maintaining an air of sophisticated design to please grown-ups at the same time, aiming to bridge the gap between childlike elegance and grown-up cool. I thought about what I would have liked on my wall as a child and what I would like on my own children's walls now. My 'Oh Sweetie' wallpaper was inspired by a vintage sweet shop in Corbridge (Skrumshus) which my children love to visit as well as the super old-fashioned Jubilee sweet shop at Beamish Museum. For the turtle and meerkat wallpapers I made numerous trips to the pet shop and farm to take photographs and draw. The Potting Shed wallpaper (coming soon) is inspired by my parents' love of gardening and growing vegetables and my children's fascination with their grandparents' garden. So basically the collection is pretty self-indulgent, but hopefully it has resulted in some good quality designs which other people can enjoy!

What are you currently working on?

Besides the wallpaper design, I'm also working on various freelance projects and commissions. In the past six months I've designed tableware and outdoor accessory prints for two major supermarkets and I have also been working on unique surface designs (curtains and wall-coverings) for a school in Northumberland. I occasionally do freelance trend research and forecasting work for other companies and work very closely with Trend Bible, a trend consultancy based in Newcastle. In September I'm taking my wallpaper collection, including some new designs, to 100% Design in London (23rd-26th September) where they will be exhibited on the Design Event North East stand within the 100% Futures section. kate.usher@live.co.uk

