

## INTERIORS

A wall full of plates may remind you of your great aunt's kitchen, or Dolores Umbridge, the headmistress in Harry Potter, who displayed her collection of cat-themed crockery behind her desk. But in 2018 hanging decorative ceramics is cool, as well as being an affordable way to add an original work of art to your living spaces.

Henriette von Stockhausen of VSP Interiors has arranged more than a dozen green cabbage-ware-style plates in her dining room, against pale Ralph Lauren Marlowe Floral wallpaper and to one side of an antique mirror. She has been collecting them for the past 20 years from Austria, Germany, Morocco and auctions in the UK. The varying shades and styles add a vibrant focal point that makes the room sing.

"I love it," she says. "It is relatively cheap to acquire a nice collection of plates, and it is a shame not to display them. It is also a fun way of injecting a bit of colour into a room. You do not necessarily need to buy a painting to do so, and plates are more flexible: you can hang them in awkward spaces, over doors for example, or either side of a fireplace."

Janine Stone, an interior designer, added a pattern of blue-and-white oriental-style plates to an exposed stone wall in a refurbished estate house and believes that they can work beautifully in a classic or contemporary setting. "I often use a variety of artwork within a scheme. Artisan plates that form part of a series or are a one-off design can make a strong statement."

The 20th-century Mexican artist Frida Kahlo was a fan of rustic homeware, and plates adorned the walls of her vibrant kitchen.

Many plates on sale this year are considered pieces of art, says Lucy Currell of Studio Iro, an interior design practice. "The ceramics add depth, texture and pattern, either singularly or as a collection."

Liberty has recently launched its London ceramics collection, created to "elevate your living space with a piece of modern design history". The bone china plates are designed in-house and are decorated by hand with colourful, heritage Liberty London prints.

They are not meant for eating off. Bryony Sheridan, a Liberty home buyer, says: "The Liberty customer can invest in one special piece and give it pride of place on their wall, or can gradually curate a collection that can be mounted alongside traditional artwork for a gallery wall experience."

The store's small Peacock garden plate may seem expensive at £95, but it is relatively affordable when compared to



Bone china plates from Liberty London, from £95. Inset below: stick to a colour theme, such as blue and white, like those in this Smallbone of Devizes kitchen

## Plates too good to eat off? Use them as art

a piece of contemporary wall art. This value for money is also true of the decorative plates designed by British artists such as Ella Hookway, who draws sketchy faces on stoneware clay, and Laura Bird, a potter who favours bright colours and is influenced by Greek, Roman, Mayan and Celtic art, as well as African sculpture. Each of her plates is unique and decorated by hand.

"I started out as an illustrator and found ceramics were great canvases for my paintings," Bird says. "The plates started off small, with the idea that they would be trinket or jewellery trays, but I would get lots of people asking me how to display these pieces on a wall, which made me think of my plates more as pieces of art. This inspired me to make much larger plates and to spend more time decorating one-off pieces."

In the 1950s the Italian architect and industrial designer Gio Ponti and the Italian artist and interior decorator Piero Fornasetti had the idea of decorating plates to bring art and culture into homes.

"Over time, Fornasetti plates have almost entirely lost their practical function, becoming true art collectibles," says Barnaba Fornasetti, Piero's son. "Hung on walls, they give character to



These plain plates have been painted to match the decor (neptune.com)

each space in a way few other objects can. Today they take their place among the desiderata of an audience that is especially receptive to art and culture."

Plates come in various sizes, so you can mix and match, and they're easy to hang, with wall fixings available for a few pounds from hardware shops. To start your collection Von Stockhausen recommends auctions and flea markets. "Plates do not have to be pristine: if they have a chip but you are hanging them high, no one will notice."

She suggests sticking to a colour theme or a uniform style: for example, blue and white. Others advise mixing plates in an eclectic wall of art, with prints, photos and mirrors.

Marimekko's latest floral design plates, available from Skandium, the Scandinavian homeware company, such as the Unikko in white, pale blue and brown, and the Mynsteri in shades of pale and dark blue dots, cost from £17. See also Emma Bridgewater's spring collection, with purple pansy prints or rainbow dots, made to be displayed in a country kitchen dresser.

If you like the idea of a wall full of plates, but don't fancy the risk of them smashing, there's a way to fake it. Andrew Martin's Cargo wallpaper, available in blue-white, blue-grey, red and taupe, repeats a classical motif of china plates. It costs £78 a metre.

Laura Whateley



Mary Fedden Lions crockery by Emma Bridgewater; plates start at £17.95