

A Rorschach Test for Kitchen or Bath

Description

Alistair McAuley and Paul Simmons met at the Glasgow School of Art in the 1980s.

They were studying classical textile design, like the pastoral scenes of Toile – horses, fox-hunting and picnicking – where deep reds or blues are usually printed on a cream-colored background.

In 1990, the pair set themselves up for business in a firm they called Timorous Beasties.

It's aptly named.

Their first studio wasn't in the best part of Glasgow – far from it. But their environment fed a wry sense of humor and a subversive wit.

Their new Toile designs for textiles and wallpaper depicted the kind of vision they saw from their front door, where junkies, drug dealers and the homeless were commonplace.

All of a sudden, the work of the Timorous Beasties was an instant hit – in Great Britain and across the pond

"It's very British – you could easily find it in the Victoria & Albert Museum," says Deborah Osburn of [Clé](#), the San Francisco-based tile boutique that's home to artisans of every stripe. "It's very Victorian, with this fabulous modern twist."

The duo's newest, intense-but-whimsical work was unveiled by Osburn earlier this week. It's a series of lithographed, 12-inch by 12-inch tiles for kitchen or bath. They're riffs on the classic Rorschach tests, presented in the oh-too-familiar black-and-white, but in color as well.

In either format, the designs are quite rich.

Some are hand-sketched, and some of the repeats are done digitally. But the heart of the detail is very much by hand. "You can take any of the images and blow them up and the more you drill down the more that's revealed," she says. "It's fanciful – it looks accidental but it's hand-crafted."

First there was Freud and his cigar. Then came Jung and *his* symbols. And now, up here in the 21st century, we have the subversive wit of the Timorous Beasties.

Things could be much worse.

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