


O breaking the rules

Who Says... Traditional Decorative Arts Can't Be High Tech?

Trompe l'oeil techniques go digital, but the design sensibilities stay connected to a handcrafted past.

EVEN UPON CLOSE INSPECTION, THE FOYER at right appears to be a veritable bacchanal of marquetry, the art of using thinly slivered wood to create designs. Timbered garlands, urns, and flowers decorate every surface. The wealth of woods used is mind-boggling: It includes mahogany, ebony, rosewood, tulipwood, maple, and several varieties of oak. No tree is safe—or so it seems.

The truth comes out when you actually touch the surfaces. *They are seamless and smooth, and that's because they are merely images printed onto veneer bases, sealed and then varnished as the wood itself would have been.* "What used to be hand cut or handpainted, we now create digitally," says Alan Carroll, who, along with his 

At last year's Kips Bay Decorator Show House, the firm Decorative Imaging took over a foyer, filling it with its high-tech digital ornamentation. The piece on the right is a radiator cover, with simulated marquetry and neoclassic vignettes printed on premium maple veneer and glued to a plywood box.

photographs by michel arnaud





ABOVE: The designer inserts shadows to give a three-dimensional appearance to the plaster shapes on a ceiling medallion.

RIGHT: This digitally inlaid floor, which is made up of panels in various sizes, employs the same wood tones and textures that would have been used in a 19th-century English house.



partner, Mark Kusek, founded the New York City-based design firm Decorative Imaging. "It's a lot faster and more intricate."

The men choose wood from the thousands of high-resolution textures in their digital library. "We have scans of 600 different sheets of oak," Kusek says. "It's like having a lumberyard in your computer." To simulate a patina, they add layers of computerized grime.

When Carroll and Kusek—who draw by hand, on a computer as well as on paper—come up with a design, they insert a giant sheet of veneer into a top-quality digital printer and then apply a finish, such as shellac or polyurethane, to the print. They create bas-reliefs using a similar technique; for a "raised plaster" medallion, a design is printed onto fire-retardant canvas, which is then mounted to the ceiling as if it were wallpaper.

Decorative Imaging also has developed a line of do-it-yourself flooring components—borders, parquet squares, medallions, and more—that work with any hardwood or laminate flooring. "This will allow you to get a palace floor," Kusek says, "for a fraction of the price." **O**

—Lise Funderburg

Pieced by Piece



When 15th-century Italian cabinetmakers began to apply marquetry to furniture, they used chisels to shape each piece of wood. Today, some forward-thinking craftsmen use computers and lasers to take marquetry in stunningly complex directions. Other artisans, however, have stayed true to the *hand in handcrafted*. At North Carolina-based Baker furniture, on-staff inlayers (as they were called in 18th-century England) still cut and assemble every piece of marquetry by hand. The design of Baker's Demi-Lune console, above, was adapted from a 1780 English commode. (Not surprisingly, the piece retails for \$7,392). The only difference between then and now, says Baker's lead case-goods designer, Shaun Melvin, is that now the veneer is made in an air-conditioned room. *For details, see Shop Guide.*