

Off the wall (and loving it)

Forget flock patterns, nasty stars and the slow-peel. Wallpaper's twee days are over, as **ALICE WOODFALL** discovers at a new exhibition at the Geffrye Museum

Pity the plight of the wallpaper manufacturer through the 1990s. Sweet Laura Ashley sprigs and jolly gold stars had become embarrassingly passé. Even the magnificent publicity garnered by Lord Irvine's rich (in every sense of the word) Pugin wallpaper failed to have any effect on the rise and rise of minimalism in the house and the desirability of nice white walls.

Something had to give, and it did, six years ago, in the shape of Sharon Elphick's dramatic Tower Blocks, in which a photograph of a high-rise was endlessly and oh-so-effectively repeated: creating a geometry of soaring lines and neatly bringing the outside inside – so post-modern – into the bargain. Tower Blocks created an almost frenzied excitement at the newly spied possibilities of wallpaper, and the industry has been reaping the benefits ever since.

Moreover, as a new exhibition at the Geffrye Museum sets out to prove, the effects have been felt not just in photographic reproductions – though who could fail to thrill to Showroom Dummies' "Volcano Explosion" – but in florals, 3D designs

and even interactive patterns. Though there is nothing tame about most of the new wallpapers, even nostalgic prints from masters of the genre like Cath Kidston, Neisha Crosland and Osborne & Little have acquired a new popularity.

It will come as no surprise to learn that contemporary florals bear scant resemblance to the delicate bouquets of genteel bedrooms. Instead, companies like Timorous Beasties have produced giant thistles in black and white. Those with a desire to customise their décor will be intrigued by the half-painted "colour by numbers" wallpaper of Jenny Wilkinson, while texture fetishists will respond to the flapping panels of Tracy Kendall and the stitched paper of Clare Coles.

One final proof of the current allure of wallpaper is that the fashion world is in on the act, too: also in this show is the work of Wayne Hemingway and Eley Kishimoto.

Flock 'n' Roll: New Ideas in Wallpaper Design is at the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, London E2 (020-7739 9893) from 9 March-31 August

