

Revival of the fittest

Interior designers are bringing dodos and dinosaurs back from the dead in homage to Darwin



KATRINA BURROUGHS

The 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth has inspired a multitude of exhibitions, books and documentaries. By now, we're familiar with most of his exploits: the voyage on HMS Beagle, his early interest in fossils and his study of the wildlife of the Galapagos Islands, which led to The Big Idea: that those best suited to their environment survive and pass on their characteristics. Yet many people are unaware of the bearded old cove's influence on the evolution of contemporary interiors: Darwinmania has inspired a host of homewares. Here's our natural selection.

My favourite design is a delicate motif, based on fossilised footprints, from Graham & Brown's Eco Collection. Fossils, by Andrea Sallee, a timeless pattern in a subtle aqua tone, is part of

G&B's collaboration with students at Central St Martins (£30 a roll; 0800 328 8452, grahambrown.com).

Osborne & Little has just unveiled a lovely new range of wallpapers called Onyx. It features beautiful subdued greens and earthy hues, with patterns evoking fossilised timber and dinosaur hide (£39 per roll; 020 7352 1456, www.osborneandlittle.com). And dealers and designers, including Candy & Candy, are snapping up real fossils to display, mounted on plinths and dramatically lit, as natural works of art (Jurassic ammonites, pictured far right; £1,900, from Ammonite 2000; 020 7881 0592, ammonite2000.com).

The natural history theme is one of the most popular trends in interiors stores this year. A quirky menagerie of ceramics by the American interior and product designer Jonathan Adler has just launched at Heal's. Adler's style tends towards the maximalist ("over-the-top majesty", as he puts it), but these stoneware animals, though packed with character, take simple forms. Highlights include a white turtle box (£93) and a beautiful curvy jade bird bowl (£73; 0870 024 0780, heals.co.uk).

Thomas Paul is another American designer turning out beautiful wildlife-inspired homewares. His melamine Sea Life collection includes trays (£16), dinner plates (£32 for set of four), side plates (£24 for set of four) and coasters (£12.95 for set of four), with motifs from turtles to sea horses (pictured far right;



Top, Dodo cushion; finecellwork.com
Above, Birdie Blossom cushion; therugcompany.com

INNER VISION

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Give them a swirl



Roseate Spoonbill mural, £75 per square metre (0118 922 1327, surfaceview.co.uk). Coral and Link upholstery fabrics, from £41 per metre (0844 543 4600, zoffany.com)

Means of Natural Selection out being descended from the monkey motif is plenty of designs this year. Colourful hand-embroidered coffee in brushed cotton flannel Kids (28cm by 31cm, £75; 0, www.bobokids.net). And Italian firm known for its equipment, is releasing a monkey gadgets, available online; family members start

at £11. Captain Banana is the corkscrew, a cheery-looking ape with a parrot perched on his head (£34; 020 8576 6100, alessi.com). The final word on the primate theme goes to Syd TV, a street artist whose canvas Darwin was Wrong shows a progression from gun-toting human to well-balanced ape (100cm by 60cm, from £42.50, from Art by People; artbypeople.co.uk).

At the top of the evolutionary tree is Vivienne Westwood's wall hanging for

The Rug Company. Like its revered designer, the piece scores a 10 for style and lasting appeal. The 125cm-square needlepoint, entitled Adventure, looks like the scrapbook of a 19th-century explorer and communicates the wonder of the natural world seen through the eyes of a Victorian scientist. Dozens of images of flora and fauna overlay one another: a palm frond, a camel and a rhino horn, a leopard and an exceptionally well-endowed mandrill (£1,995; 020



Top, ammonite fossil; above, Sea Life plate and tray by Thomas Paul

7229 5148, therugcompany.info). The Rug Company is also stocking Paul Smith's Birdie Blossom hand-woven tapestry cushion (pictured far left; 56cm square, £275).

If a three- or four-figure outlay threatens your budget with extinction, the thrifty alternative is the Open University's Tree of Life poster. So popular is this free wall art, keen evolutionists are facing a 28-day wait. Still, if we learnt anything from Darwin's study of life on earth, it's that some things are worth waiting for. Sign up for yours at open2.net/darwin/poster.html.

TALK ABOUT EVOLUTION

Swot up on the fittest design trends at timesonline.co.uk/interiors



Welcome home £8

The home accessory store Oliver Bonas does a lovely line in doormats. The Purple Cochin mat is woven from coconut fibre and stencilled with vibrant designs of birds and leaves. 73cm x 43cm; 020 8974 0110, www.oliverbonas.com



Steal of the week

Swedish stunner was £1,675, now £1,173

The Rosersberg dining table, from Nordic Style, has a hefty discount of over £500. The white-painted table with hand-carved frieze, which seats up to a dozen when extended, is inspired by an 18th-century Swedish original. 180cm/260cm x 110cm x 79cm; 020 7351 1755, nordicstyle.com