

Get the Scoop on NedGraphics

“Q&A” with Chelsea von Hasseln, Director of Surface Design at Western Sensibility

Tell us a bit about the work you do and your role at Western Sensibility.

I am a freelance surface pattern designer and have been designing prints and patterns for apparel, interiors, and paper products for the past thirteen years. I am deeply fascinated by the visual language of patterns and that seems to be the lens through which I see the world--my friends joke that when I travel I rarely take pictures of landscapes or people or architecture, but my camera roll will be full of close-ups of tree bark, peeling paint, or textures in the sidewalk. I have always been super detail oriented and love getting lost in the fractal veining of a leaf, just like I love zooming way in on my computer screen and making sure that a repeat is pixel-perfect :)

I have such a fun job in that I get to start from a client's rough ideas, sketches, or inspiration images, and transform them into a polished finished product that then finds a home out in the world. In the past I worked mainly with apparel brands, but since joining the Western Sensibility team I have fallen in love with the world of interiors and had the thrill of building patterns that have become curtains, upholstery, and wallcoverings. I love collaborating with interior designers, restaurateurs and artists from disciplines other than my own, who might have the vision but not necessarily the particular skillset to turn artwork into a repeating pattern. For a creative job, surface pattern design can also be quite technical and mathematical and I really enjoy that precise, meticulous nature of the work. Yes, I am a proud pattern nerd!

The long and short of my job is to ensure that an artwork file is ready for production and can be printed seamlessly on a length of cloth or wallpaper. It's very satisfying to take a composition by a fine artist or a photographer and to tile it out in such a way that the repeating image flows and feels natural. It's important to me to disguise the repeat as much as possible, because an obvious repeat can be really distracting and to the eye and make a pattern look low quality and carelessly designed.

So, how do you disguise a repeat?

One of my favorite ways is by using a half-drop repeat. You can see the difference here where the first is a standard block repeat or what's also called a side by side repeat, and it's a bit lackluster and predictable. The second is a half-drop, which staggers the motifs and makes the layout feel a lot more dynamic. It helps keep your eye moving around the design and just generally makes for a better balanced print.

Interesting! What are the tools you utilize in creating something like this? We'd love to hear more about your design process.

I have always loved to draw and doodle, and I often start my designs on paper before bringing them into a digital space. I'm a bit of a marker addict and love Posca paint pens, Tombow brush pens, Sakura Gelly Roll pens, Stabilo Boss highlighters, and good old Sharpies! If I'm starting a design from scratch, I typically draw a series of coordinating motifs, scan them, and then split them into their own layers in Photoshop so that they can be moved around independently while I'm deciding how the layout should look. I then open up the NedGraphics plugin for Adobe and finish the repeat there.

Why do you switch programs to finish the repeat?

I used to build my repeats in Photoshop, either manually or with the aid of the Pattern Preview tool, but once I was introduced to the NedGraphics plugins for Adobe® there was no turning back! I love the ease of developing a repeat in this program which allows you to switch back and forth between different repeat types with the click of a button. That allows me to super quickly and easily see if the artwork would look best as a block repeat, a half drop, or a number of other options that affect the spacing and flow of the design. It's a huge time saver and also a great way to present different layout options to a client.

Once I'm done with the repeat I can also use the NedGraphics for Adobe® to develop additional colorways, which is always one of my favorite parts of the design process.

What is it about colorway development that you find so enjoyable?

Color is such a creative realm because the combinations are literally infinite. Just like with repeats it's all about finding a balance and giving your eye a ▶



▶ reason to wander around the design, hungry to take it all in. As much as I feel this is a strong suit of mine, color can also be overwhelming because of all the options--how to choose? For this reason I love the color utilities in NedGraphics for Adobe. In addition to keeping palettes organized across platforms and between multiple users, it also offers a variety of powerful tools for generating new colorways, including creating blends of colors, beautiful gradients, and shuffling the placements of colors in a design to create an entirely new look. These are great tools to use when I find myself in a rut with color; it really helps break up the log jam and spur further creativity.

Once I have colorways I'm happy with, I can use the NedGraphics Templates feature to create a pitch sheet, which is a handy document that includes all of the information needed for printing, such as the repeat size and type and the colors used in the design. It's a great way to present samples (or strike-offs as they're called in the biz) and lets you communicate super clearly to a client. As a freelance textile designer it feels really powerful to have a tool that allows me to deliver files that are professional, consistent, and on par with what would be created by an in-house designer at a large company.

Okay this program sounds really useful! How difficult is it to learn?

As a long-time Photoshop user the NedGraphics interface feels familiar and intuitive and many of the same key commands carry over. After a one hour Zoom training I was up and running and able to immediately begin using the program. The designer who trained us on the software, Michael, gave an incredibly clear and easy to follow tutorial and has since been a wonderful resource when we've run into any questions. I definitely recommend NedGraphics for Adobe to any surface pattern designer looking to save time and bring efficiency to their workflow! I am a pretty die-hard Photoshop devotee, but there are certain things that can be done much more smoothly and with fewer steps using the NedGraphics plugin.

For instance, I was initially excited when Adobe came out with the Pattern Preview tool in Photoshop, but I found it lacked certain functionality and would often overload my computer and bring about the dreaded spinning wheel of death!

Even when it was working smoothly, I always wished for an option to create half-drop repeats but unfortunately it was only able to do block repeats. And I found it frustrating that motifs placed over the edge of the repeat seam would split apart if I wanted to rotate or re-size them.

In NedGraphics the motif remains intact so there's a lot fewer steps involved in order to make the pattern seamless. As I said, definitely a time saver! :)

