

When I finished my textile degree in 1993, I didn't even know the difference between a chintz and a toile,' laughs Melissa Kerkhoff. Fourteen years later, after working for top fabric houses Mavromac ('I cut my teeth there; I'll be forever grateful'), Home Fabrics and Tessa Sonik Fabrics, Melissa bravely stepped out on her own and Lula Fabrics was born. In 2007 she launched her first fabric, Navy Flat Paisley, a traditional take on paisley in an Indian block print. A celebration of delicious monster leaves and Indian ornamentals followed; and Tribal, a range inspired by the Suzani designs from Uzbekistan, is currently on the printing table. 'I appreciate detail, and I love ethnic patterns from India or Mexico,' she says of some of the influences in her work. 'They have to be handmade and authentic, and passion must have gone into them.'

Sourcing her base fabrics locally, Melissa has her designs hand-screen printed onto them for a block-printed look and feel. Her range has a refreshing and playful feel that is often conveyed through her colour combinations – lime on silver, pink on red, an elegant silver on white – all printed on natural fibres such as cotton and linen. 'I'm like a magpie, bright things catch my eye,' she says. 'Colour makes me happy.'

Buy the May issue of *House and Leisure* and get a free limited-edition tea towel from Lula Fabrics. □

Lula Fabrics showroom, unit 5, Canterbury Studios, 35 Wesley Street, Gardens, 021-461-0620, 083-4555-765. Nationwide stockists: Black Fabrics, 011-262-3130; Walnut Interior Fabrics, 031-303-8203.



colour me happy

Fabric designer Melissa Kerkhoff celebrates colour, texture and a love of detail

Q+A WITH MELISSA

Why Lula? My daughter Erin went through a stage where everything was called Lula. It's also our cat's name!

Childhood dream? To be a fashion designer. I spent a lot of time admiring the fabrics at Oriental Plaza when I was a teenager.

Favourite local designers? Haldane Martin and Marianne Fassler.

Memories of starting out? Knocking on Colefax and Fowler's door in London and asking them for a job mixing paint, sweeping floors – anything! Nothing came of it.

Current projects? A commission from a Seychelles hotel and a heavy red linen adorned with printed and embroidered Mahendi motifs.

The person you most admire? Tricia Guild is my guru.