

# A ferm hand

Trine Andersen not only creates the graphic patterns her company Ferm Living is recognised for – she also runs operations single-handedly

WORDS JOANNA BOOTH  
PHOTOGRAPHY THOMAS STEWART

**this page** Trine Andersen, the creative and driving business force behind Ferm Living **opposite** Trine's vibrant Feather wallpaper takes its influence from bohemian designs of the twentieth century, but like the rest of her work, it's fresh and thoroughly modern

## Upfront Grand master Trine Andersen

who Trine Andersen

lives Aarhus, Denmark

**background** After studying design management at university, Trine worked as an art director with an advertising agency. Then, at the age of 26, she launched her design company Ferm Living. Her first collection of wallpaper was launched in 2005, and 2008 sees the now globally recognised company move into textiles famous for Her bold, organic designs with hints of the Fifties and Sixties that introduced wallpaper to a younger audience in Denmark



Upfront  
**Grand master**  
*Trine Andersen*



At the tender age of 29, Trine Andersen has achieved a lot. She's changed careers, started her own company, renovated her house and almost single-handedly brought wallpaper back into Danish homes.

'It's not been fashionable in Denmark to use wallpaper since the Sixties,' Trine says. For years it was seen as a grand old furnishing, somewhat stuffy and posh, or a psychedelic nightmare in houses left untouched since the Seventies.

But only two years after launching her first collection of wallpaper, Trine is turning the tide. Her clean graphics are just the kind of designs that are making wallpaper popular again. Trends are changing, and Danish wallpaper sales are starting to boom. Her patterns are simple and unfussy, beautiful, but down to earth – not words that used to be associated with wallpaper, but certainly ones that are making it popular now. Ferm Living's biggest market is still in Denmark, but she now exports to the UK, the US, the rest of Europe, and even Taiwan and Bahrain.

Trine's designs are predominantly inspired by nature. Her papers are full of organic patterns – leaves, clematis, bindweed, orchids, fir trees, feathers and even a sparrow. It's not too surprising to learn that Trine's earliest ambition was to be a florist.

As a child, she lived with her family in an old farm building outside the city of Aarhus, surrounded by nature.

Her parents also encouraged her creative streak. 'My mother taught me to draw,' she recalls. 'During the holidays we'd spend days together working on the same painting. Looking back it was very funny – my mother's part would be really good, and mine much less so!' But Trine persevered, and her skills as a draughtsman are now evident – many of her designs are based on simple, but perfectly executed line drawings.

She still starts each design with a sketch, but then moves on to a computer to continue the process. 'After university I worked as an art director with an advertising agency, which meant spending most of my time on a computer, which is probably why I'm so comfortable using them,' she explains. The delicate lines of some of her designs contrast with the bold, graphic shapes of others, and it's easy to see both threads of Trine's background combining in her output.

**right** A Verner Panton Panthella standard lamp blends with delicate framed pictures **opposite** The house is testament to how well Ferm Living's pieces, such as the new Apple and Pine cushions, mix with other modern designs like the Illums Bolighus sofa (royalshopping.com) and the Sixties dining table and chairs, given to Trine by her parents



Her love of mid-century design is also palpable in the retro feel of many of her patterns. 'I could happily have lived in the Fifties and Sixties,' she says. 'I'm fascinated by the period – the clothes, the hair, the furniture, the design. But I don't want my designs to be totally retro. I think they have a cleaner feel, more modern and Nordic. I hope they have a twist of personality, and touches of humour and naivety.'

As well as fostering her artistic streak, her parents also inspired her to start her own business. 'My parents owned their own clothing company, so I think I've always had it in my blood,' she says. At university she studied design management, a course that allowed her to combine her creativity with her practical business skills.

It was the process of renovating her house that gave Trine the impetus and inspiration to take the plunge. 'I couldn't find any wallpaper I liked,' she says. 'There was a real gap in the market for something graphic and Scandinavian – something I felt I could create.'

Giving up a secure job and going it alone would be a leap of faith for anyone, but while considering whether to quit her job, Trine visited a palm reader. 'It's not something I'd normally do, and I'm not even sure if I believe in the whole thing,' she says. 'But she talked so much about my career. She said she could see a little bird sitting on a branch, not knowing which direction to fly in. She told me I had to make sure that the bird spread its wings, so when I started the company I decided to make our logo a bird on a branch.'

The branch is a symbol that's popped up throughout Trine's career. Her first ever wallpaper design was a beautiful\_\_



*'I remember watching the rolls of my first wallpaper emerging from the machine in the factory. It was a nervous moment, because even a minimum production seemed a lot!'*

monochrome shape of winter tree branches against the sky. 'I remember watching the rolls of my first wallpaper emerging from the machine in the factory,' she says. 'It was a nervous moment, because even a minimum production seems like a lot!'

The rolls were snapped up by eager punters. After launching the first collection in February 2005, Ferm Living has gone from strength to strength. A second collection of wallpapers has proved equally popular, especially as Trine again second-guessed customer needs. She decided to alter the make-up of her products to make them more user-friendly. 'The younger generation tends to be a bit nervous about hanging wallpaper, so we've made it easier.' The second collection, instead of being printed on 100 per cent paper, is Wallsmart, which is half-and-half paper and textile. More flexible and stable, instead of pasting the wallpaper, you can simply paste the wall.

Knowing many modern, style-conscious homeowners want to frequently change the

**right** Wilderness wallpaper is a dramatic feature in the couple's bedroom. Ferm Living's latest venture - textiles - is also evident, the Plywood bedlinen is new for 2008 **below left** Verner Panton Flowerpot suspension lights hint at Trine's love affair with all things mid century **left** The Walldots paper brings bold pattern to the otherwise neutral landing

look of their rooms, Trine also launched a range of wall stickers. They're the perfect solution for dithering decorators, and absolutely typical of Trine's designs - clearly wrought shapes that give a decorative or humorous twist.

Trine's now-complete renovation showcases her designs perfectly. 'I don't believe in designing something I wouldn't have in my own home,' she says. Instead of covering entire rooms with her paper, Trine makes them the focus by restricting them to one wall. In her study, the vibrant blue of her curving Feather design sets off the dark wooden shelves, and her collection of Scandinavian glassware and brightly coloured ornaments. On the landing the abstract, sepia tones of Walldots sits behind a dainty white dressing table, with a circular mirror above it mimicking the shape of the paper's pattern.

The light, bright, stylish home is a far cry from the building she and her boyfriend Martin bought. The mid-Sixties brick box in a suburb of Aarhus was being sold off cheaply. 'No one wanted it,' she remembers. 'It looked terrible. An old professor had lived in it for 40 years and done nothing - no painting, no gardening. But we could see the possibilities.'

Built into a slope, the level change means the back of the house is underground on the lower storey. To bring light in, the couple knocked down internal walls and opened up the lower floor. Outside, they cut back the trees that had been left to grow unchecked.

Apart from plumbers and electricians, Trine and Martin did most of the work themselves, although the couple are quick to credit Trine's parents with giving up many of their weekends to come and help. The\_\_\_



# Upfront

## Grand master

Trine Andersen

old kitchen and bathroom were ripped out and new white ones fitted, and the whole house repainted white – apart, obviously, from those walls graced by Trine’s designs.

In the bedroom, the rich gold and brown of the Wilderness pattern on the wall is echoed in the bedlinen, its striated pattern like the grain of a piece of wood. This is also Trine’s work. Ferm Living is branching out into soft furnishings – a range of bedding and cushions will be launched this spring. As well as the Plywood design in her bedroom, the new textiles are visible downstairs, too. The bright cushions on her neutral Illums Bolinghus sofa are called Apple and Pine.

The house is furnished with a combination of vintage finds and family hand-me-downs, and again Trine’s love of mid-century modern design is evident. There’s a classic Eames chair and lounge in the living room, and Verner Panton pendant and standard lamps. Trine’s parents donated the original Sixties Danish-made table and chairs which sit so comfortably on the dining room’s tiled floor.

Trine has experimented with many of her own designs in her home, but it will be hard for her find the time to change them now – the company is diversifying, and 2008 looks set to be another year of growth. As well as producing wallpapers, cushions, tea towels, bedlinen and even greetings cards, Trine is starting a business in bespoke wallpaper. Her website, [wallcollection.com](http://wallcollection.com), allows you to design your own patterns by uploading



**left** Ferm Living’s Lightbulb wallsticker creates a beautiful silhouette on the frosted window in the couple’s bathroom **below** When they moved into the neglected flat, they ripped out the old bathroom and replaced it with sleek, modern fixtures. The wire chairs are by fellow Danish designer Hee Welling ([scp.co.uk](http://scp.co.uk))

photographs and graphics. ‘You can use your own pictures and have a wallpaper made to measure and delivered to your door,’ she explains.

‘It’s exciting, but I’m biting my fingernails,’ she says. Her nervousness seems unfounded. The company’s name ‘Ferm’ comes from an old Danish expression which means good with one’s hands or dextrous. With her ability to create appealing patterns, and steer her company through the choppy waters of the design market, Trine seems to be more than living up to that description. ★

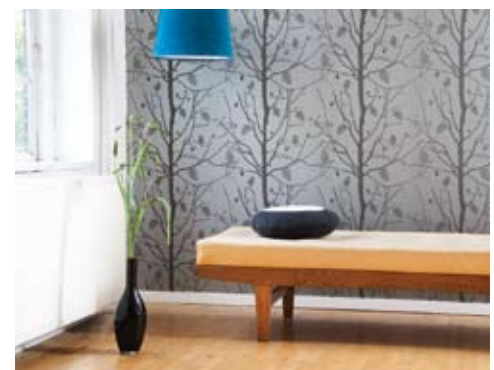
**Ferm Living** [[ferm-living.com](http://ferm-living.com)]



**Walldots/** With hints of Sixties futurism, this is a cool alternative to plain stripes. Its easy-hang system makes it ideal for nervous decorators



**Berry Black/** These organic silhouettes are chic and flexible enough to match any bold colour. The paper has been treated to make it washable



**Family Tree/** This forest design is typical of Trine’s nature-inspired work, and is reminiscent of her first design – branches against a winter sky