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Fortuny Showroom with Mickey



Martha Stewart Living Television

When Martha decided to reupholster three of her favorite Victorian wingback chairs, she visited the Fortuny Showroom in New York City to select an elegant but understated fabric. Fortuny fabric is printed and dyed in Venice, Italy, using the same techniques that Mariano Fortuny, the company's founder, patented in 1910. Fortuny is particularly renowned for its printed cotton fabrics, which resemble silk in their iridescence, but which have a subtler sheen and are more versatile than silk.

The Riad family acquired Fortuny in 1988. Mickey Riad explains that every printing, or run, of Fortuny fabric is unique and nearly impossible to replicate -- temperature, humidity levels, and variations in the fabrics and dyes all affect the appearance of the final product. Since each run is different, it's important to buy the entire quantity of fabric you need at once. Rather than an inconvenience, Mickey views the fabric's variability as an asset. Each run is one-of-a-kind, like art, and encapsulates a moment in Venetian history.

Fortuny produces prints inspired by design motifs from Italy, France, Persia, Indonesia, and even the Maori of New Zealand. Some fabrics, pigmented with silver or gold, oxidize over time to produce a desirable antique effect. For her chairs, Martha chooses a pattern called "Corone," based on a 17th-century crown motif, in tones of beige on cotton.