

FINDING THE PERFECT FABRIC

BY ROSEMARY KNOWER, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You may be feeling that your home needs a bit of a lift for spring. And you may have read that one of the fastest facelifts (and an inexpensive one, too) for ailing ambiance is to scatter newly covered cushions about, or to cover the battered living room tables with a lovely piece of fabric. If you haven't much time or money, and you want to do something special with your particular cocoon, you might want to consider decorating with vintage fabric.

It used to be that finding that perfect piece of velvet, or discovering a superb piece of antique damask that was just right for a table runner or a cushion was a

hit-or-miss proposition. You needed lots of time, and lots of luck, to comb thrift and antique stores, hoping to find just the right colors and just the right amount of fabric. No more. Like many other niche markets, the antique textile sites on the Web have seen a phenomenal rise in popularity over the last year.

Today, you can tap a few keys ("vintage textiles" on your search engine) and shop from well-photographed galleries of vintage material for sale. The best of the sites offer full details about the fabric, including exact measurements, a precise description of condition, the composition of the fibers and the probable age of the cloth.

Looking for 1950s bark-cloth with a green tint? French cut-velvet with beading? Feedsacks from the '30s, for a rustic look? Antique satin for a boudoir pouffe? Chances are you can find it. All you need is access to the Web, since none of these sites market any other way.

ebay.com has a staggering selection of vintage textiles — 63 pages worth, on a recent browse. I found everything from a pair of vintage floral feedsacks in a thistle design (estimated bid, \$14.50) to three yards of "smoky burgundy vintage stripe upholstery" estimated to sell at about \$25.

At Dunes Antique Center, (www.dunesantiques.com) the

stock included a Czechoslovakian linen tablecloth and napkins, never used, for \$55, and a handmade European wedding quilt for \$800. Martha Arney, the site's owner and a veteran textile collector, predicted that fabrics by name designers from the '40s may be the next big trend. The site is well organized, with clear pictures, and you can e-mail to ask questions about the materials.

eureka-i-found-it.com recently featured such disparate treasures as a woven advertising panel from the Cotton Club with vivid Art Deco dancing figures for \$10, and 10 yards of Grandma Moses' "Early Springtime on the Farm" printed on bark cloth

for \$35 per yard. As the owner, whose e-name is Susan, pointed out, "Since vintage items can be 'one of a kind,' the Internet opens up a vast new marketplace for shoppers to find something unique. I've had very few returns, since I'm very fussy about the conditions of the items I offer for sale and give detailed descriptions."

Because the stock is always changing, if you don't find what you're looking for immediately, it may come in if you check back next week. As with all 'net purchases, be sure you're ordering from a secure server that will guarantee condition and safe payment procedures. •