

# Pretty in print

Nothing delights artist Angie Lewin more than the structural form of plants set against a late summer skyline. Harriet Smith talks to the print maker about how she transfers her passion to paper. Photographs Cristian Barnett

IN AN ATMOSPHERIC 18TH-CENTURY MERCHANT'S house in Spitalfields in London's East End, acclaimed printmaker Angie Lewin is holding an open weekend, her jewel-like wood engravings and linocuts brilliantly offset by the dark panelling. There's a delectable succession of intricately detailed alexanders, dandelions, honesty, goatsbeard and ribwort plantain – weeds to most gardeners, but irresistible images to Angie. "I pretty much never do flowers, always seedheads. I think it's the skeletal forms that particularly appeal to me: I like looking at a landscape through the plants."

Angie's colours may be stylised, but there's a sense of horticultural knowledge behind what she does, borne out by the fact that at one point she trained to be a garden designer. "Although I think when I stopped being a garden designer plants came into my work even more." Work is undertaken in a small, tidy studio, idyllically situated in the garden of her north Norfolk home. Landscape plays a vital role in Angie's work. "I lived in London for 19 years and you don't really notice the seasons there. But when we [she, her husband Simon and border terrier Milly] moved to the Norfolk coast, the clifftops where we walked Milly looked different every single day. I think the landscape here, with its chalky, washed-out colours, has really influenced my work."

The process of printmaking is involved and time-consuming. For each wood engraving Angie starts with sketches,

which she then turns into a detailed drawing to the same scale as the wood-block she will cut. Even uncut, the blocks (made of box, holly, lemon or pear) are things of beauty, with a smoothness reminiscent of glass. The next stage is to trace the drawing on to the block and then cut it; each colour (Angie uses up to four) requires a separate block, which takes anything from four days to about a week to cut, so intricate are the images. "It needs

such concentration – if you make a mistake, you have to start again from scratch." Having taken an initial print off the block to check she's happy with the design, it is then printed on to exquisite Japanese paper, one colour at a time. The process may be complicated but that's part of the appeal for Angie, and also the reason for keeping editions small, anything between eight and 40 prints. "Because I print by hand, it's laborious to



The design is painstakingly cut into blocks of wood, with each colour requiring a separate block.

Angie's studio pin board with colourful swatches, ideas and detailed sketches.



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do long runs. And I have so many sketches that I'm always keen to move on to the next print." Each time a print run is completed, Angie sends the block away to be resurfaced, so it can be reused for another design. Surely it must be distressing for her work to be destroyed in this way? "It's a bit sad but a necessity because the blocks are relatively expensive. But I do tend to keep my favourites."

Angie originally signed up to do sculpture at London's Central School of Art (now Central St Martin's), but quickly realised where her true vocation lay. "While I was there, I got to do everything – etching, lithography, silkscreen printing and wood engraving." One of her tutors was the distinguished and charmingly named Bernard Cheese, who at one point was part of the extraordinary circle of artists – most famously Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious – based at Great Bardfield in Essex during the 1930s. Ironically it was only post-college that Angie discovered these eminent figures. "I bought a book on Bawden and suddenly here was a whole new world of fantastic work. I particularly liked the way he did everything from book illustration to wallpapers, linocuts to china design. I love the idea of applied arts."

Angie has been putting that into practice herself, with a new departure into fabric design. "I've thought about it quite a lot over the years and several people suggested that some of my designs would translate well. So we [it's a joint project with husband Simon, who has a background in print production] decided to do a few fabrics a year in limited colourways, working with a British fabric company, and sell them ourselves."

She makes it sound deceptively easy but it was clearly a process of trial and error, particularly where colours – about which she is meticulous – and pattern repeats were concerned. “It was so exciting when the first fabrics arrived, though we did quickly discover that we needed somewhere to store them – you can’t reel off 11 metres from a sofa bed!” This was solved serendipitously by the acquisition of a gallery in nearby Aylsham, where a mouth-watering array of Ercol furniture and vintage and modern ceramics sit comfortably alongside Angie’s fabrics and exhibitions by contemporary artists.

Ever looking forward, Angie has a hankering to explore other techniques. "I'd like to do more mixed media prints – combining silk screen and block printing, for instance." No doubt whatever the technique, Angie's beloved weeds will continue to steal the show. ■

### Further information

Angie Lewin sells her work direct via her website at [www.angielewin.co.uk](http://www.angielewin.co.uk) or from a number of galleries (details on website). Her email is [angie@lewin.net](mailto:angie@lewin.net). She is also taking part in the Norwich Print Fair, St Margaret's Church Gallery, St Benedict's St, Norwich, 11-23 Sept, 10-5, [www.norwichprintfair.co.uk](http://www.norwichprintfair.co.uk)

EXCLUSIVE WOOD ENGRAVING OFFER

We are delighted to offer readers the opportunity to buy an *Angie Lewis* print, exclusively designed for *Cumtate, unattached*. Limited "Madison's Edge" (see right), *Angie* has used bold blocks of oranges and greens to create an evocative image of meadow grass seedheads in late summer. Hand printed on 100 percent paper (180mm x 180mm) this exclusive wood engraving is limited to a print run of just 40 and costs £85 plus £3 p.p.h. To order your print, please send a cheque, made payable to *A. Lewis*, to: **Angie Lewis/ Cumtate, unattached Press, 26 Jule's, 25 Red Lion Street, Aylesham, Norfolk NR11 6EN. Tel 01263 735777**. Availability will be on a first-come, first-served basis.



'Meadow's Edge', Angie Lewin

