



Though toiles can be polychromatic and nonnarrative, most people today associate them with pastoral, single-color prints. This antique red toile fabric contains images of life during the 1800s. [Spiderplay / Getty](#)

Need to Know

# Toile de Jouy: Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Design

Toile fabric is much more than a pastoral print. Learn why—and brush up on your decor history—with this explainer

By Stephanie Sporn

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For classicists, maximalists, and general lovers of home decor and interior design, it's impossible to resist the charms of toile de Jouy. With its bucolic scenes and eye-catching contrast, the pastoral toile design took the world by storm during the 18th century after German entrepreneur Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf (1738–1815) established his printed textile manufactory in Jouy-en-Josas, France, and became famous for his fashionable creations that embraced the cultural zeitgeist. Today people flock to toile de Jouy for its

storytelling abilities, and creatives are increasingly putting their own spin on it with locales close to their hearts—none more so than AD100 visionary Sheila Bridges with her [Harlem Toile](#) empire. Toile de Jouy-inspired textiles depicting destinations from Lake Como to Nantucket can even be seen on our list of [recent fabric trends](#).

To expand and correct the general public's understanding of toile de Jouy—which encompasses much more than pastoral prints—AD PRO has compiled this explainer on the beloved fabric.

## What is toile? And is it different from toile de Jouy?

First things first, some etymology: The word *toile* means “cloth” in French. “Toile de Jouy,” therefore, refers to cloth (typically cotton) from the commune of Jouy-en-Josas, France, in the southwestern suburbs of Paris, just four miles from Versailles. Toiles from other French towns, for example, include toile de Nantes and toile d’Orange. “Today, *toile de Jouy* has become a generic term meaning all [single-color] printed fabrics regardless of the design’s origin,” explains Sophie Rouart, an art historian, [Pierre Frey](#) archivist, and coauthor of *Toile de Jouy*. “Historically, however, toiles de Jouy are the printed fabrics made by Oberkampf at Jouy-en-Josas between 1760 and 1843.” Because many companies were producing similar toile styles before, during, and after the Oberkampf Manufactory, historians can identify authentic toile de Jouy fabrics by a distinct printer’s mark that was required to be added during production.



Interiors at the Auberge du Jeu de Paume feature toile print wallpaper. Matthew Hranek

## Defining characteristics

Toile de Jouy often consists of white or off-white cotton fabric printed with single-color bucolic scenes—but there’s more to it than that. In fact, the majority of Oberkampf’s production was dedicated to floral and geometric motifs. Marie Olivier, who manages the [Musée de la Toile de Jouy](#) collection, and Rouart share that while there are 650 Oberkampf patterns featuring the emblematic pastoral imagery, there are over 30,000 polychrome floral patterns. Historically “it was only the scale that determined if the fabric would be used in fashion or interiors,” says Rouart. Pierre Frey’s own [Petits appartements de la reine](#) upholstery from the Braquenié line (a French heritage label the company acquired in 1991) is one example of an interior toile fabric, she explains—versus, say, the house’s smaller-scale [Petit jouy](#), which was originally intended for clothing.

Rouart states that people remember toile de Jouy’s narrative French country patterns today because these fabrics were conserved more than their floral counterparts. “They taught us about mythology and literature” and recorded major moments in history, she says, and that storytelling capacity ultimately resulted in more of them being maintained over the years.



“Even if people don’t know the name ‘toile de Jouy,’ or Oberkampf, they immediately recognize the motif,” Olivier tells AD PRO.

## History

According to Rouart, the oldest printed textile was discovered in Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan, and dates back to 2500–1500 BCE. The popularity of such textiles in the West came much later: In the 18th century, after trade had expanded between Asia and Europe, “Indiennes”—lightweight, printed cotton fabrics imitating textiles from India—became popular in France. The fabrics were soft, fine, and easy to clean. Rouart adds that although today many clients prefer toile de Jouy fabrics with a creamy off-white background to convey a sense of history and patina, these textiles were originally intended to be as white as possible. Indiennes also achieved rich colors due to using a mordant technique which helped adhere dyes to the cloth and prevent fading.

In order to protect France’s silk industry, Louis XIV banned the production, importation, and wearing of cotton fabrics in 1686. “The aristocracy was known to sneak some cotton pieces,” says Olivier, noting Louis XV’s mistress Madame de Pompadour famously had a whole house decorated with “forbidden toile.”

Oberkampf came from a family of dyers and spent years traveling around Europe to educate himself and learn the art of engraving and printing. Heavily inspired by Indian and English fabrics as well as woven silks, the young entrepreneur began printing fabrics on the border between Switzerland and France. In 1759—the same year the cotton prohibition had ended—he transferred his business to Jouy-en-Josas in order to be close to Versailles and the Seine River. (The printing process for toile de Jouy requires large amounts of clean water.)

Using wood blocks, the printing process was highly labor intensive, making toile a luxury only the aristocracy could afford. Each color of dye required a separate bath, and as many as 20 colors could feature in one pattern. Techniques improved in 1770 with the factory’s introduction of copperplate printing (which Oberkampf discovered after visiting England), thus allowing for single-color toile print, such as the iconic pastoral scenes we associate with toile de Jouy today.

In 1783, Louis XVI gave Oberkampf’s business the Royal Manufactory designation. By the end of the 18th century, technology had rapidly expedited production, with the workshop using copper rollers that could make 5,000 meters of fabric per day (many times the output of its human counterpart). Impressed with Oberkampf’s entrepreneurship, the emperor Napoleon visited his factory and awarded him the Légion d’honneur in 1806.

The year 1815 marked a turning point for Oberkampf and France. The Napoleonic wars affected the importation of cotton and certain dyes, and Oberkampf died soon after the emperor's defeat. The factory was sold in 1821 before shuttering permanently in 1843. After the closure, a large auction was held in which Braquenié (then a carpet company) purchased many textile documents and printing equipment, which are still used today to revive and inform new fabrics. For its spring 2023 [collection](#), celebrating its 200th anniversary, Braquenié was even tapped by Versailles to reissue and print three fabrics to refurnish the small apartments of Marie Antoinette.

### **Why were Oberkampf's toile de Jouy fabrics so successful?**

As was standard for all manufactories at the time, Oberkampf often exchanged ideas and bought or copied engravings from England, Ireland, and beyond. Those factories, however, could not call Marie Antoinette their client. A true businessman, Oberkampf scaled his company to employ more than 1,000 workers at its peak and found ways to uniquely appeal to aristocracy and eventually the masses all across Europe. He produced toiles specifically for the middle class that would use two or three woodblocks, making them less expensive than the popular copperplate-printed monochrome varieties, as well as small floral fabrics, known as mignonettes, made by copper rollers.

Another key part of Oberkampf's market domination was his creativity. "He knew that the success of his factory depended on the beauty and diversity of his production. He liked to use fashionable things like chinoiserie or the latest operas and novels, because he knew using trendy subjects would increase his sales," says Rouart on the entrepreneur's efforts to release products tied to major events. The archivist believes designers remain deeply inspired by toile de Jouy today for its ability to tap into one's imagination. "When you look at toile de Jouy in an interior, you can travel from your bed. It's very magical to be with Figaro [from *The Marriage of Figaro*] or witnessing the first hot-air balloon."

Oberkampf worked closely with talented engravers and illustrators in his factory's ateliers to copy existing engravings from books and famous painters of the time, while also inventing new ones. "Jean-Baptiste Huet produced some of the manufactory's most famous toiles, such as *Paul et Virginie* and *l'Escarpolette* [depicting scenes from the story by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre]," says Olivier. "Huet was a painter who specialized in animals, and he produced many motifs for Oberkampf that responded to the general taste for pastorals."

### **How can I use toile in my home today?**

During the 18th century, decorative toile de Jouy was primarily used for curtains, lit à la duchesse canopy beds, and chairs; the following century it became popular for furnishings

and interiors to feature perfectly matching toile de Jouy textiles, “the total look,” as Rouart calls it. Today, [toile wallpaper, drapery, and upholstery options](#) are limitless in color and scale, ready to don sofas, curtains, powder room walls, and more.

## Examples

[Toile de Jouy](#) has long been a favorite of fashionable tastemakers, including Christian Dior, whose first boutique on Avenue Montaigne prominently featured a pastoral toile pattern in its interior. In the late 20th century, thanks to designers including Vivienne Westwood and Jean Paul Gaultier, toile de Jouy experienced a resurgence. And yet again, when Maria Grazia Chiuri became Dior’s creative director in 2016: Chiuri researched the brand’s archives and designed [her own toile de Jouy](#) in homage to the house’s heritage, and the pattern has become an integral part of Dior’s contemporary branding across fashion and home. The Musée de la Toile de Jouy frequently works with designers, including Chiuri, to teach proper printing techniques and history.





Sheila Bridges, the AD100 designer behind Harlem Toile Frank Frances

While in 2023 we are seeing several new takes on scenic toile de Jouy, one designer who has embraced the historic genre as her own for nearly two decades is AD100 designer Sheila Bridges. When she could not find a toile de Jouy that spoke to her, the New York-