

# Colenbrander and Point Paper

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For the purposes of production, a carpet design that has been executed as a drawing or painting is not complete until it has been transferred to point paper. If the designer is unfamiliar with the technical requirements of carpet production, his design may prove to be wholly unsuitable for its intended purpose.

In 1904 a primer about the technical requirements of designing Brussels and Wilton carpets was published in the trade journal *Textile World Report*. The article starts with an admonishment: "Always remember, when preparing a sketch the difficulty you will be under in transferring this sketch onto point paper, i. e., into the full sized working design, and thence into the woven carpet."<sup>1</sup> There are several aspects to this "difficulty," one of which is curved lines. "...[A] curve which appears graceful in the design, may when repeated and on the floor, run into a straight line, prominent portions may be found crowded together on one line, leaving another comparatively empty, etc."<sup>2</sup>

According to the author, the best way to avoid such problems is to use point paper: "If making a sketch on plain paper procure a piece of the proper point paper to which the sketch will eventually be transferred, and from time to time carry out some of the finer detail of your sketch on this paper, by means of which you will guard yourself against the introduction of such detail work as is impossible or only imperfectly possible to be executed on the point paper."<sup>3</sup> An even better method, the author suggests, is as follows: "Submitting finished, i. e., full-sized, designs on point paper, from the start, will undoubtedly be the best plan to avoid an unsatisfactory result in the woven fabric, both to the manufacturer and to the designer."<sup>4</sup>

William Morris promptly discovered the importance of point paper at the outset of his own work as a carpet designer:

[W]hen Morris...produced his first design for a Kidderminster carpet in 1875: 'the manufacturer gravely pointed out to us that the pattern Mr Morris had designed "would never do" – it would not sell – it was not in the style, and he suggested that we should allow his designer to do something for us.' When this objection was overcome and a trial piece made, 'it was a horror, almost unrecognisable! Morris and Wardle claimed that the drawing had been altered, and that the firm's designer could not draw. In fact, the problem had arisen with the transfer of the original design to the point paper (which showed each individual knot or loop as a dot on squared paper) which the manufacturer used to set up the loom, rather than with the artist's original drawing. After this experience, Morris took great care to point up his own designs and supply them in a form that commercial manufacturers understood, thereby avoiding any further misunderstandings.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike some designers, Colenbrander almost always created his designs directly on point paper. This did not, however, preclude the use of curved, flowing lines. As is readily apparent in Figure 2, the first stage of a design consisted of a pencil sketch of the design's outlines, and all of these outlines are curved. So how did Colenbrander translate these curved lines into the knot-by-knot structure of the point paper grid? Figure 3 shows a detail of Colenbrander's design *Weefsel/Tissu*. This design, like the one shown in Figure 2, is unfinished. *Weefsel/Tissu* is, however, closer to completion. As can be seen in Figure 3, after drawing the outlines of a design, Colenbrander proceeded to mark each individual knot that was part of an outline. He also used a number of different marks to specify the knots that comprise a line or fill a motif. These marks include dots, dashes, short lines, and extended lines.

1. "Brussels and Wilton Carpets. Their Construction and Manufacture with Practical Points on Designing. Points on Designing," *Textile World Record* 26 (Oct. 1903-March 1904): 1378. [Published in Boston, Philadelphia and New York by Lord & Nagel Company in the March 1904 issue, p. 98.]

2. *Ibid.*, 1378 [p. 98 in the March issue].

3. *Ibid.*, 1380 [p. 100 in the March issue].

4. *Ibid.*, 1378 [p. 98 in the March issue].

5. Charles Harvey and John Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*, Manchester (Manchester University Press), 1991: 86.