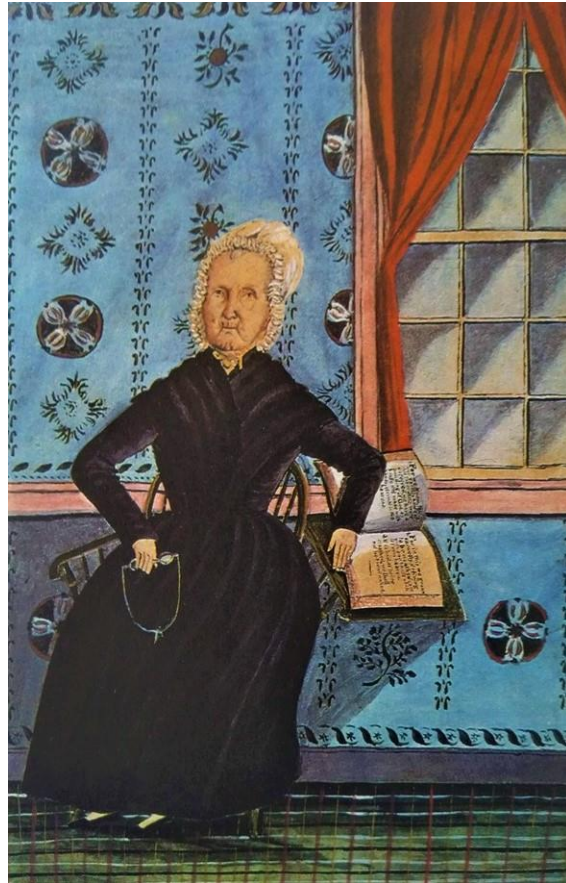


# Make & Use Your Own Stencils



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## Stenciling: Early American Interior Design

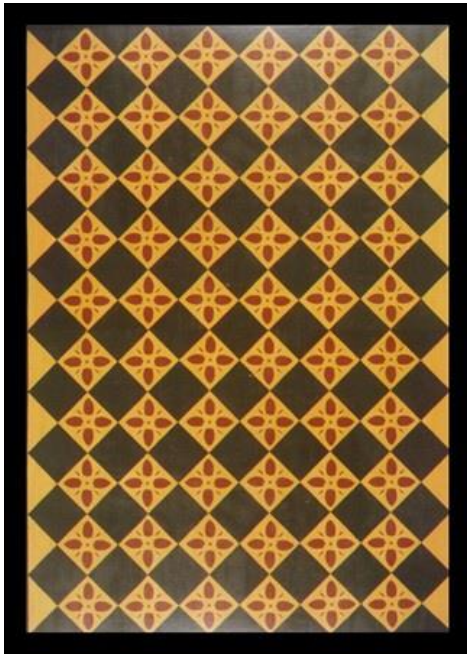
In the later 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, alongside other decorative options like wallpaper or fully rendered murals, walls in American homes were sometimes adorned with repeating patterns of painted motifs created by stencils.



Stencil House at the Shelburne Museum

These relatively simple geometric or natural designs were straightforward, easy to combine into pleasing patterns, and far less expensive or complex than other decoration methods. In fact, stenciling was so versatile that it was used on all sorts of other surfaces, including bedspreads and other textiles, tin trays and wood boxes, and many other decorative objects around the home. As long as an object had a relatively

flat surface, it could—and quite possibly would—be stenciled.



Replica floorcloth via [Wilton Historical Society](#); stenciled coverlet from the collection of [Strawberry Banke](#)

While wall painting was often done by itinerant stencilers like the well-known Moses Eaton, Jr. and Rufus Porter, some of whom traveled widely between states and also did more complex mural-painting for wealthier clients, stencils could be produced at home and used by almost anyone, and painting on tin, wood or oilcloth was a popular at-home craft. Paints could be made at home using ingredients like plants, clay, charcoal, and even skimmed milk, and stencils were made with thick waste paper. While stenciling became less popular after about 1850, as cheaper printed textiles and papers became available to more and more households, it can still be a fun, rewarding and creative way to decorate!

**To create your own stenciled piece, you will need:**

**Thick paper or cardboard** to cut the stencil out of (pasta or cereal boxes work great for this!)

**Scissors** or an **X-acto knife** to cut the stencil out

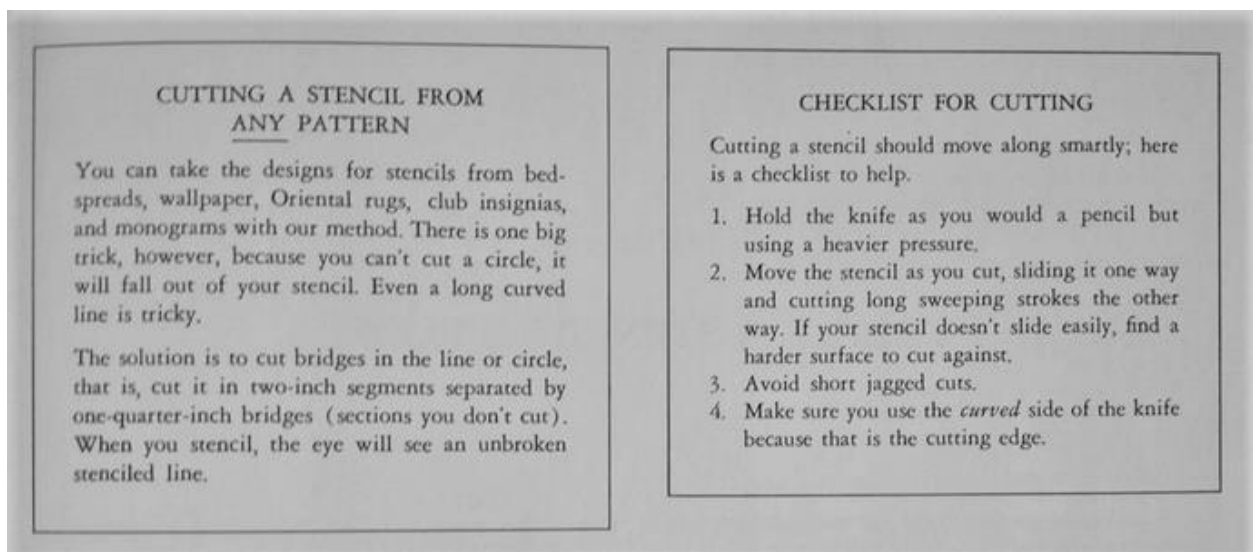
**Masking tape** to secure the stencil in place

**Paints** (tempera or acrylic work on many surfaces) and **sponge brushes** (or even just pieces of kitchen sponge) so use as applicators

**A surface to be stenciled** (we used a blank greeting card)

## Creating and Using Your Stencil

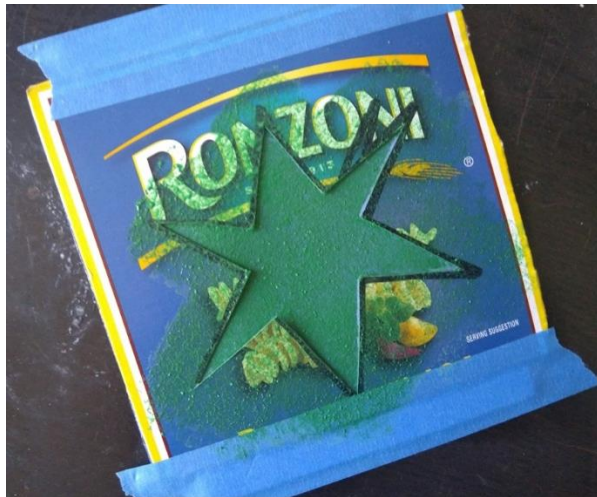
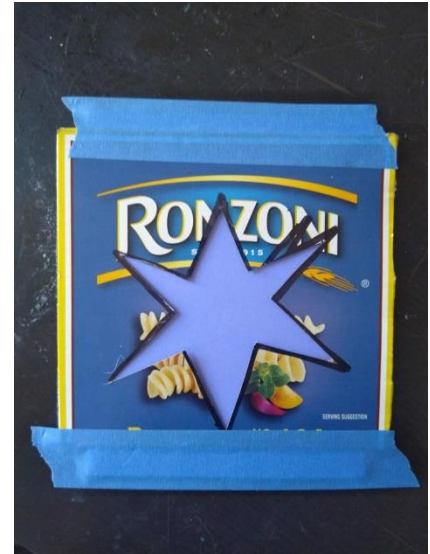
1. Pick your pattern from those included at the end of this booklet, find one from another source, or design your own image if you prefer.
2. Trace your pattern design onto the cardboard you're using for your stencil and cut it out carefully, being very attentive to including details and cutting smooth lines. Remember that since you will be creating holes in the pattern pieces to paint through, it doesn't matter how many pieces you cut out as long as the final shape comes out right!



Stencil-cutting advice from *Early American Wall Stencils in Color*, Alice Bancroft Fjelstul and Patricia Brown Schad with Barbara Marhoefer



3. Select or mix your paint colors on a palette or extra piece of cardboard. Have as many colors as you plan to use ready.
4. Tape your stencil in place using masking tape to make sure it remains steady as you paint.



5. Load your sponge brush or sponge with paint and dab it carefully and evenly over the holes in the stencil. (If you would like to use multiple colors in your design, be careful to only paint the sections you

mean to with each one!) Let the stencil sit for a moment while the paint begins to dry, then carefully lift it off and admire your image!



## Motifs for Stencil-Making

