



## DESIGNER PROFILE

# ERIN DOLLAR

High quality, natural materials and minimal, modern prints give Erin Dollar her signature aesthetic. We sat down to chat fabric



### How would you describe your company, Cotton & Flax?

Cotton & Flax is my home decor company, which offers handmade home goods featuring my minimalist geometric pattern designs. Everything I create is made with sustainability in mind, using high-quality natural materials like linen and wool. I screen print my

patterns onto fabric in my studio, and each printed fabric panel becomes a tea towel, pillow cover, cloth napkin or drink coaster. Cotton & Flax products are designed for easy, eco-friendly lifestyle, with a modern aesthetic to keep things stylish.

### You recently designed your debut fabric collection, Arroyo, for Robert Kaufman. How did that come about?

My customers have been asking me for fabric yardage for years. Ever since I launched Cotton & Flax in 2012, I have had countless emails, Instagram comments and in-person requests for fabric yardage. For a long time, I told everyone the same thing: my studio is too small to print yardage by hand, and even if I could scale up, it would be prohibitively expensive for most people. With that in mind, I didn't really give it much thought until I saw the Blueberry Park collection that Karen Lewis

created with Robert Kaufman. That collection was also overprinted, which gives the designs a rich, opaque look, very similar to the hand-printed fabrics I create from my own studio. This got my wheels turning... I pitched a collection to Robert Kaufman with that overprinting in mind, and luckily they were excited about the designs I offered!

### What was your main inspiration?

While I was developing this collection, I lived in Northeast Los Angeles, near a beautiful Arroyo canyon that had hiking trails and a park within walking distance. My preferred colour palette is always influenced by my surroundings – when I lived in Portland, Oregon, I used a lot more green and blue in my work.

Moving to LA, I was drawn more towards neutrals and dusty colours. I was definitely influenced by the colours of the Arroyo





Above: Eco-friendly power products by Fast Fashion & Play, such as these cushions, are often printed in her small studio.

Below: Fastfash's tea towels, coasters and more are created with natural materials and are proudly made in the U.S.

an alternative to fast fashion. "I'm also proud to help limit the company's impact on the environment."





Above: Erin's felt printed coasters for Cotton & Flax. Above right: The full Arroyo collection for Robert Kaufman

area as we selected the colours for this collection; the rich greys and neutrals that make up the landscape, as well as the lovely pops of colour from wildflowers and other fauna. It's very personally meaningful to me now that I've moved away to a new city – that collection will always capture a very specific moment in my life as a designer.

Below: The rich greys and neutrals influenced by the Arroyo canyon landscape in LA

**You work with a lot of natural materials, including linen fabrics and eco-friendly inks. What is it about the natural quality that appeals to you?**

Sustainability is a huge concern for me in developing products for Cotton & Flax. I'm always trying to advocate for high-quality, well made goods, rather than throwaway designs. It's so frustrating to see how many large companies are producing tons of cheaply-made designs every season, just to have them end up in the landfill the next year.

By using natural materials and creating classic, minimalist designs, I want to offer an alternative to the 'fast-fashion' method of decorating. Anything I can do to limit my impact on the environment is worthwhile.

**How do you think your background in fine art printmaking has influenced your aesthetic?**

When I'm designing new patterns or artwork, I still really think like a printmaker. I think in layers, building up colour and texture in a deliberate way. Working as a printmaker means that you start to get really efficient with colour, since every additional colour you add to a design means another screen needs to be created to print that colour onto the fabric. I think my designs remain really minimalist because I want to create impactful patterns with a minimum

## I'M ALWAYS TRYING TO ADVOCATE FOR HIGH-QUALITY, WELL-MADE GOODS

**Can you give us a glimpse into the design process behind your patterns?**

I try to spend as much time as possible creating new patterns each week. I draw in my sketchbook, and make trips to galleries, art museums and the library to gather inspiration. I love to experiment with different printmaking techniques, as well as drawing loose, imperfect motifs using a brush and sumi ink. I'm known for my deceptively simple patterns, so the challenge for me is creating dynamic, interesting patterns using a limited amount of colour and line.

of time at the printing table. That printmaker's spirit of efficiency has stuck with me through the years.

**What is your favourite part of your job?**

It's probably tied between drawing new patterns and meeting people who use my designs in their homes. Obviously I get a huge amount of satisfaction from creating the work in the first place, but it's also really special to get to meet my customers face to face. Since Cotton & Flax is primarily an online shop, I don't always get to hear about how my customers have added my designs



to their homes, to see how each piece is integrated into someone's life. When I get the opportunity to get that feedback, it's really special.

**You have a very beautiful Instagram. Do you feel the Instagram community has helped to grow your business?**

Thank you! And yes, Instagram has absolutely helped me to grow Cotton & Flax, and my own profile as a designer. I am grateful for that entire creative community on a daily basis. Being able to share my work at all stages of production, as well as sharing the things that inspire me from my daily life, gives me a unique opportunity to connect with other creative people, and share the vision behind my creative work. I've discovered so many new, amazing artists on Instagram, and it has definitely led to some really fun collaborations. For example, I've done two collaborations with a company called American Thread in New York. They discovered my work on Instagram, and we were mutual fans of each other's work. Working remotely, we were able to collaborate on two different gift sets that combined our products in unique ways, adding my pattern designs to their cooked muslins and cutting boards, and creating a brand new product. It's been really fun to see those creative collaborations come to life, and they may not have happened if not for the interconnected creative community on Instagram.

Beyond my own inspiration and creative growth, social media really levels the playing field for indie designers like me, and makes it easier for us to reach customers without spending a ton of money on advertising. When you're an up-and-coming designer, that's a huge help!

**How does it feel seeing others making quilts with your fabrics?**

It's so exciting! I love to see, but I don't have as much free time as I'd like for personal sewing projects. Now that Arroyo is out in the world, I



integrate another artist's work, natural, natural and contemporary.

Some of the color in the design collection naturally follows around the design.

can live vibrantly through other artists. I get a thrill seeing all the amazing things they create with Arroyo. I'm also excited when I see people sewing clothing using my fabrics - I'm not an amazing garment maker yet, but I am hoping to improve with more practice. Every time someone shares a photo of their handmade Arroyo dress, skirt or bag, I am delighted. It's almost like getting the opportunity to collaborate on a massive scale - collaboration is one of the best parts of my creative life.

**Are you a quilter yourself?**

I am... but I always feel a little intimidated to share my work! I have met so many incredibly talented quilters in the last few years, and even though they would never criticize my quilts, I know that I still need to dedicate a lot more time to learning this sophisticated art form. I have been so impressed with modern quilters like Lindsay Gold and Carolyn Froelander, and I hope to learn from the ways they are innovating in the world of modern quilting. Since I'm obsessed with sewing scraps from Cotton & Flax, I

always have lots of material to create quilts from. It makes me so happy to be able to repurpose my linen scraps in this way, and I've made a few really lovely quilts for my friends and their children.

Since I create all my quilts as one-offs rather than something I need to add to my product line up for Cotton & Flax, I feel more free to experiment and try something new each time. One of the things I love about quilting is that there are endless possibilities. This makes quilting a wonderful creative outlet for me, where I can try out new ideas and add a sense of play to my work.

