

Delving Into the Minds of Ancient Decorative Artists

[Create actual samples of replicas of these ancient historical sites depicted by the Galilee Stencils in our class – “Ancient Art Revival.” Click here for information or to register.](#)

**By Debbie Ellison for Paintin' the Town, Faux
Reprinted from “The Faux Finisher” magazine, Spring 2005**

The Bible comes alive when you stand on the grounds where its stories unfolded centuries ago. In Israel, the Holy Land, stenciling, like the Bible, is alive and well – or at least being resuscitated by archeologists and stencil artists dedicated to uncovering and preserving the designs of ancient decorative artisans.

Several years ago the Israeli Council for Preservation of Buildings and Historic Sites was established and a law was passed requiring homeowners to preserve old architectural detail in historic houses for future generations. Shay Farkash, an Israeli who owns a stenciling and decorative painting business, has been working with the Council since 1999, searching for and photographing stencils hidden in old houses and buildings all over Israel from about 1870 through 1935.

Three main ethnic groups were present during this period: Muslim and Christian Arabs; Jewish settlers, mostly from Eastern Europe, Germany, and North Africa; and German settlers, the Templars, who arrived in Israel around 1870.

“My main work,” Farkash says, “is to uncover the old stencils hidden in old houses all over Israel of 70-100 years ago. Also, I search and study the old painter books.” He says he has over 1200 old stencils in his stencil library.

The designs being revived are all from historical, archeological, and religious sites in Israel, mainly from the historic Sea of Galilee area in Northern Israel, including Nazareth, Capernaum, Tabgha, Kursi, Tel-Aviv, and other areas.

These stenciled designs have been uncovered in old homes, churches, temples, and synagogues in Israel, many of them discovered under numerous layers of paint. At the time they were originally painted, stencils were cut by hand. Because there were few books in Israel containing design patterns, many designs were adapted from embroidery books that were available.

Farkash has discovered and photographed over a thousand different stencil borders all over Israel, including entire wall and ceiling patterns. In the nineteenth century, decorative wall painting was popular among the wealthy, and many stencils were brought from Eastern Europe by decorative wall artisans; some originated in Egypt and Turkey, although the origin of many stencils cannot be determined. Farkash reconstructed and reproduced the old stencils with graphic computer software, then cut the stencils by hand, some up to five layers.

Linero, an Israeli company that manufactures drawing, measuring equipment, and display systems, is working with Farkash to expose and document these ancient stencils. The result is its collection of Galilee Stencils which accurately and intricately replicate these architectural designs found in documented archeological sites.

Made from photographs taken by Farkash, the stencil restorations incorporate original frescos, stone reliefs, and mosaics. By utilizing the technical resources available today, Linero is dedicated to renewing interest in the ancient culture of the Holy Land and this very specialized field of decoration.

The three stencil revivals pictured here were recreated by Alyson Smith, a faux artisan at Paintin' the Town Faux.

“Odeliya” is one of the first ten stencil designs found by Farkash in 1999. Rain uncovered this design in a ruined house in Neve Zedek, the first Jewish neighborhood outside of Jaffa, which later became Tel-Aviv in 1909. Farkash says most of the stencils there were painted by the Krol family – a father, mother, four sons and three daughters - who immigrated to Israel (Palestine) in 1907. He has found more than 300 old stencils of the Krol family in Tel-Aviv.

To create this beautiful rendition, "Odeliya," Alyson troweled a texture randomly to reproduce the fresco with areas that would have been worn or broken off over the years. She then glazed it for an old-world ambiance.

The other two stencils pictured here, "Lotus and Fish" and "Large Vase" were stencils taken by Linero from archeological excavation.

"Lotus and Fish" is part of the collection's mosaics group, from a mosaic found in a synagogue in Kursi. To reproduce the beautiful mosaic pattern, Alyson replicated an ornamental relief by applying textured stone through the stencil with a broken effect and distressed it. She then hand painted the mosaic design, adding a lime wash finish to create an old, rusted effect.

"Large Vase" was taken from an old decorative engraved stone in Capernaum and is part of the collection's stone reliefs group. This revival features a heavy layering of texture through the stencil with a half-inch buildup. It is then lime washed to reflect its original old-world charm.

In the early Byzantine period (4th century A.D.), many monasteries, churches, and synagogues were built in the Galilee region with elaborate stencil designs, stone reliefs, and intricate mosaic patterns.

The Sea of Galilee, one of the most well-known bodies of water in the world, is known to Israelis as Lake Kinneret. Nazareth, Capernaum, and Kursi, some of the areas from which these stencils, mosaics, and stone reliefs were discovered, are part of the Galilee area and were first mentioned in the New Testament.

Nazareth is located near the lake of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was born in Nazareth and spent his boyhood years there before beginning his ministry at about the age of 30. Little is known about Nazareth from ancient sources. Outside of the New Testament, Nazareth is never mentioned until the Byzantine period. Today Nazareth is home to more than 60,000 Israeli Arabs and thousands of Jewish residents.

Jesus spent much of his life in Capernaum, where the Bible says he taught in the synagogue and "cured many who were suffering from diseases." Capernaum was also home to at least five of the twelve disciples. Archeological evidence indicates that this fishing town on the northwestern shore of Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee) was established around the second century BCE. The village was damaged by an earthquake in 746 and rediscovered in 1838 by the American biblical geographer Dr. Edward Robinson.

Kursi, another fishing village, is the Arabic name for the ruin on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee. The remains of Kursi were discovered accidentally after the 1976 Six Day War, when a road was paved along the eastern bank of the Sea of Galilee. According to the New Testament, Jesus healed a man possessed by demons in Kursi.

The Galilee Stencils, created by Linero, consist of a collection of more than 30 stencils. Paintin' the Town Faux in Atlanta, Georgia, is the United States distributor for the Galilee Stencils. Alyson Smith will reveal her techniques to recreate these and many more beautiful ancient stencil designs in Paintin' the Town Faux's exclusive upcoming "Ancient Art Revival" workshop. For information on this workshop or to see the full line of Galilee Stencils, visit www.paintinthetown.com, or call 770-641-7641 (Atlanta area) or 1-800-549-0414 toll-free.

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