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This essay explores how marine environments can inform the development of calming, sensory surface pattern designs for interior spaces. By examining the colours, textures and organic forms found in underwater habitats, as well as practices such as coastal gathering and aquarium observation, I aim to build a research foundation that supports the creation of a marine-themed interior collection. The essay also considers relevant designers, theories and practical methods that relate to my approach, including the work of Florence Broadhurst, Iris van Herpen and the influence of fractal patterning in nature. The overall aim is to understand how these combined elements can guide the development of an interior pattern collection for an aquarium or coastal café, where atmosphere, mood and visual identity are essential.

Marine life has always been something I feel naturally drawn to, especially the calming atmosphere of being inside an aquarium. Underwater habitats feel soothing and gentle, where soft colours and gentle movements emerge within a space of liquid paradise, reducing sensory overload creating a sense of safety. Because of this I often find the ocean as an inspiring place for creativity. When I look at sea creatures, I notice how many of them already contain beautiful patterns, textures and shapes that can transform smoothly into surface pattern design. Corals (Figure 1), sea slugs (Figure 2), anemones, jellyfish, shells and seaweed all have organic forms that contain repeating structures that can easily become motifs for pattern design. I find marine colour palettes to be inspirational; the blues, greens, purples and soft pinks have an iridescent shine to them when hit by underwater reflections providing a multi-dimensional perspective. These combinations offer me a strong foundation for building interior design concepts.



Fig. 1 *Basket star, Spain, Mediterranean Sea*, Lars von Ritter Zahony, Ocean Image Bank



Fig. 2: *Sheep nudibranch*, *Tulamben, Bali*. Photo by Toby Matthews / Ocean Image Bank.

Visiting aquariums will be an important part of my primary research. They allow me to observe marine species closely and study their colours, shapes, textures and movements in a controlled environment. Taking quick photographs and making quick sketches will provide real time references to develop colour palettes and drawings. Observing sea life firsthand can also help me to understand how light behaves underwater, especially with the additional coloured lighting used in aquariums. This will help me see how different textures, gradients and patterns appear under various lighting conditions, which can inspire my design work.

There are many different forms within marine environments that I can translate into design elements. Corals for example have so many different qualities of branching structures, with some of them even having lace-like textures: jellyfish create soft, flowing shapes with transparent qualities; sea slugs have bold, graphic markings with various tones of colours and patterns. Shells naturally have spirals and symmetry, while seaweed forms long, ribbon like lines. All these characteristics can be reinterpreted into wallpapers, tiles, textiles or printed surfaces for interior spaces.

Marine environments naturally feel calm and soothing, and much of this comes from colours found underwater. Blue tones are strongly associated with peace, freshness and a sense of clarity. Kauppinen-Räsänen and Jauffret (2018) explain that “the interpretation of blue as a colour for cure can be explained by its iconic relation with objects such as water and the sky, which may in specific geographical contexts be perceived as not only cold but also fresh and calming” (p.108). This helps reinforce why

marine palettes and underwater environments can provide such effective inspiration for interior spaces focusing on wellbeing.

This section of my project also links directly to other areas of my research, such as coastal gathering and the artists I will be exploring. The shapes, colours and movements found underwater connect closely to natural materials washed up on shores, forming a bridge between marine environments and coastal landscapes. These themes also relate to the work of Iris van Herpen, Angela Maddock and Florence Broadhurst who each explore organic forms, movement, walking, collecting, or the natural world as inspiration. Marine life therefore forms a strong starting point for my project and will guide both my research and my design development.

Costal gathering is an important part of my research because it connects the underwater world of marine life with physical objects that wash up along the shoreline. Beachcombing allows me to collect natural items such as shells, sea glass, driftwood, stones and seaweed which all have unique textures and colours that I can develop into motifs that will fit into an interior space. Beachcombing and gathering different materials connect to the idea of 'one man's trash is another man's treasure' (Stack Exchange, 2012) as many of the objects washed ashore, whether natural or discarded can gain new value when reinterpreted through design. This idea supports my interest of transforming overlooked materials into something new that one can enjoy within the designed interior space.

Walking itself is an important part of this research. It will allow me to not only enjoy the aspects of nature but also allow me to look at nature as a form of artistic research, stopping and noticing any small details and any subtle colour changes that mother nature has to offer. Angela Maddock's project *Sometimes All You Can Do Is Walk* demonstrates how walking can be used as a creative and reflective method, something I want to include into my own process (Maddock, 2019). An image from her project shows a weathered red bench marked with "Sit and Rest", see figure 1, reflecting on how her project is about taking in the landscapes around us using a walking-based practice (Maddock, 2019). This idea of pausing and noticing resonates with my own approach of walking along the beaches and gathering any materials I find.



Fig. 3: *Sit and Rest*, Angela Maddock, 2019

Building on this, I plan to use a colour focused method where I choose a specific colour and go on a walk with the intention of finding objects, surfaces, textures and graphics, anything that correlates to the specific chosen hue. Although this idea has appeared in online trends, I want to adapt it into a structured design technique that helps me gather authentic colour palettes that will be found alongside my walks and beachcombing adventures. This approach will encourage close observations highlighting how seasons and weather conditions can change the colour appearance of different structures.

A local example of costal gathering in creative practice is Freshwest, *Twin Gates* project, which was directly developed from the beach environment. During a community 'Beach Day,' participants collected objects scattered around the shoreline and created sand moulds that captured the textures and patterns of those found materials. These moulds were later cast in aluminium to form a decorative surface of the final gate design. This project demonstrates how natural marks and gathered objects can be transformed into structured, professional design outcomes, reinforcing the idea that costal gathering can be a useful research method within my own project (Figure 2).



Fig. 4: *Twin Gates Project* (Swansea), Freshwest, 2015.

Iris Van Herpen's *Sensory Seas* collection is highly relevant to my project because of the way it merges biology, marine ecology and fluid design. Van Herpen explains that the collection "draws inspiration from the sensory processes that occur between the body and the fibrous marine ecology of our oceans" (Van Herpen, 2020). The designer was particularly influenced by the anatomical drawings of neuroanatomist Ramón y Cajal, who studies nerve cells (see figure 4). Similar themes such as branching appear both in nerve cells and underwater structures such as corals and seaweed. Many garments in *Sensory Seas* feature translucent layers, flowing silhouettes and iridescent surfaces that mimic jellyfish and lionfish movement and underwater reflections as seen in Figure 3. The visual links between Cajal's nerve cell drawings and marine organisms can be further understood through fractal theory. Fractal theory helps explain why the human body and marine life often share similar shapes. Mandelbrot (1982) argues that natural forms do not grow in simple geometric shapes, he explains that "clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles" (p.13). Instead, nature develops through repeating, irregular patterns that reappear at different scales through the universe. This supports the idea why Ramón y Cajal's drawings of nerve cells also resemble branching corals and other underwater structures that Iris Van Herpen decided to use in her collection *Sensory Seas*. Using fractal theory helps support my own interest in developing calming, organic patterns for interior design that reflect the natural rhythms found in ocean environments.



Fig. 5: *Sensory Seas*, Iris van Herpen, 2020.

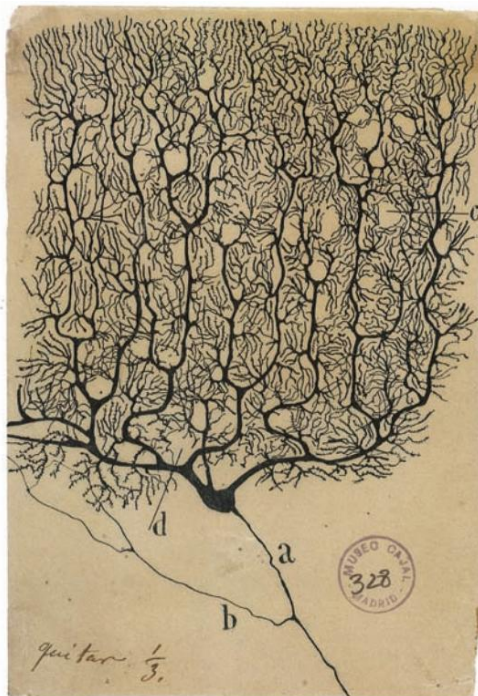


Fig. 6: A *Purkinje neuron from the human cerebellum*, Cajal Institute

Florence Broadhurst's 'Spotted Floral' design supports my project because of its expressive, hand-drawn quality and its connection to screen printing (Figure 5). The official Florence Broadhurst archive explains that her designs were "hand drawn and produced using silk screen printing, creating bold, highly graphic wallpapers" (Florence Broadhurst Designs, n.d.). This links strongly to my own practice, as I also prefer to create loose sketches rather than detailed illustrations, which I later turn into bold screen-printed designs that allow me to express my mark-making skills giving off that hand painted look that Florence Broadhurst had in her designs. The flowing shapes and dotted elements in 'Spotted Floral' relate to the natural movement found in marine life, which will support exploration in my own patterns. Studying Broadhurst helps me understand how simple, expressive drawings can be developed into refined interior patterns that still retain a hand-made, organic character.



Fig. 7: *Spotted Floral*, Florence Broadhurst

My project will be focused on a combination of primary research, material-led exploration and practical experimentation. A significant part of my method will involve coastal gatherings and beachcombing, where I will explore both Swansea and Felixstowe beaches. These two locations offer different types of shorelines, allowing me to collect a diverse range of natural materials such as driftwood, sea glass, rocks, shells, seaweed and potentially small fossils. Gathering objects from multiple beaches will help me compare textures, colours and shapes from different environments, giving my research a wider visual representation. These collected items will act as both physical references and practical tools, influencing drawings, textures, cyanotypes and motif development.

Alongside beachcombing, aquarium visits will form a central part of my primary research. Through observing marine species in controlled environments, I will be able to study the movement, forms and colour behavior of corals, jellyfish, anemones, sea slugs and other underwater organisms. I plan to take detailed photographs, quick observational sketches and video recordings to capture subtle patterns such as translucency, gradients, light reflections and movement that I can later use as references to develop motifs.

To push my observational skills further, I will set myself creative challenges such as colour walks, where I choose a colour each day and photograph or collect items that match that palette. This method is inspired by coastal gathering and Angela Maddock's slow, attentive approach to walking and noticing. Colour walks will help me build mood boards, refine my palette choices and strengthen my understanding of how colour appears naturally in different environments. This method also encourages spontaneity and mindfulness in my process, allowing me to build a more intuitive connection to colour.

From these visual and material collections, I will produce a large body of experimental artwork. I plan to work with watercolour, gouache, ink, fine-line drawing, lino printing, and even sand drawing directly on the beach. Creating small temporary artworks from gathered materials such as arranging shells, seaweed or driftwood into patterns within a beach environment, will allow me to generate compositions that can be photographed and later developed into designs. Using cyanotypes, as the process works particularly well with gathered objects such as seaweed, shells and organic shapes, will allow me to capture textures and shadowed outcomes that I can later develop into patterns or draw directly on with my chosen mediums.

Digital experimentation will run alongside my physical methods. Using Procreate, Photoshop and Illustrator, I will refine motifs, test repeating structures, and explore scale, layering and composition. This digital stage will help me translate my hand-made marks into interior-ready designs. I also plan to use specialised workshop equipment such as the laser cutter to engrave my motifs into materials, the UV printer to produce pattern tests on tiles and other interior surfaces, and the digital fabric printer to get my designs onto fabrics. These techniques will allow me to explore how my designs can function within real interior contexts, such as bathrooms, cafés, wellness spaces or decorative tiles.

Finally, screen printing will be a key developmental method, as it allows me to preserve the hand-drawn quality of my marks while exploring different methods and techniques. My intention is to be influenced by the work of Florence Broadhurst, who uses hand drawn designs transferred onto silk screen and hand printed to show the variety of detail

that can be achieved just by using a screen. I myself, will be doing the same but with my own motifs that I have gathered throughout my research and adventures.

A key direction for my project is to apply my marine-inspired patterns within a café environment that is directly connected to the sea, whether positioned inside an aquarium or located along a coastline. Both settings naturally complement the calming, organic qualities of my research, as they already contain the colours, textures and forms that influence my work. By designing for these environments, my patterns become part of an immersive experience either extending the fluid atmosphere of underwater exhibitions or reflecting the peaceful environment where one can enjoy their meal.

I intend to create a mural or wallpaper that becomes a focal point within the café, using flowing motifs inspired by coastal gathering objects and sketches based on the aquarium visit. These elements work particularly well in hospitality spaces, as soft marine palettes such as blues, greens, lilacs and muted iridescent tones help create a soothing and sensory environment for visitors. 'Studies on colour psychology suggest that cooler hues such as blues and greens can have soothing and anxiety-reducing effects in visual environments (WGSN, no date)'. Beyond wall surfaces, I want to transfer my motifs into seating fabrics and cushions, allowing the interior to carry a consistent visual language across different areas of the café.

I also aim to explore how smaller details can reinforce the identity of a space. Branded items such as mugs, plates, takeaway cups and cutlery could incorporate engraved or UV-printed versions of my motifs, giving customers subtle tactile contact with my designs. Bathroom areas and tiled surfaces may also feature my patterns, developed through techniques like screen printing, cyanotype or UV printing, bringing natural marine textures into more functional spaces.

Working across an aquarium café or a beach café allows me to approach the interior space, treating it as a complete ecosystem of surfaces, materials and visual touchpoints. This direction enables me to translate my marine research into a cohesive interior experience, demonstrating how surface pattern design can shape atmosphere, storytelling and customer engagement within a real commercial environment.

For my final design collection, I aim to create a cohesive set of marine-inspired surface patterns suitable for a café interior located within an aquarium or along the coast. I plan to develop a variety of around 8–10 designs, allowing enough flexibility for the project to grow naturally as new ideas emerge. These outcomes will consist of various repeated designs that I create using a set of different techniques. Each design will be based on aquatic life and coastal items that I have gathered around the beaches.

My collection will include a mixture of interior applications, such as mural concepts, wallpaper designs, repeating patterns for upholstery fabrics, decorative tile designs, and

smaller applied motifs for items like mugs, takeaway cups, packaging or engraved café details. This range of outcomes will help create a visual identity throughout space while allowing my patterns to appear across different surfaces and scales.

The colour palette will be soft, cohesive and inspired by underwater hues, combining calming blues, gentle greens, purples, lilacs and muted pinks, with the option to incorporate subtle iridescent tones. These colours will support the feeling of calm I want the café environment to have, helping the interior feel soothing and immersive.

Overall, my intention is to develop a flexible but well-connected collection that captures the peaceful character of marine life and demonstrates how surface pattern design can enhance the mood, branding and overall experience of hospitality spaces.

Through exploring marine environments, coastal gathering, aquarium observation and a range of designers and theories, I have developed a clear foundation for a project that connects natural form with interior surface pattern design. Studying the colours, textures and movements of underwater habitats has helped me understand how calming, organic shapes can be translated into visual motifs, while designers such as Florence Broadhurst and Iris Van Herpen have shown me how expressive, hand-made marks can evolve into refined, interior-ready outcomes. This research has confirmed that a marine theme works strongly within hospitality spaces, especially cafés located in aquariums or coastal settings, where atmosphere and sensory experience are central to the environment. Moving forward, I feel confident in developing my drawings, cyanotypes, digital repeats and printed samples into a cohesive pattern collection that reflects the immersive, soothing qualities of the ocean.

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Figures

Figure 1: von Ritter Zahony, L. (no date). *Basket star, Spain, Mediterranean Sea*. [Photograph]. Ocean Image Bank. Available at: <https://oceanimagebank.theoceanagency.org/coral-reefs> (Accessed: 3 December 2025).

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Figure 4: Freshwest (2015) *Twin Gates*. Available at: <https://freshwest.co.uk/portfolio/twin-gates/> (Accessed: 27 November 2025).

Figure 5: van Herpen, I. (2020) *Sensory Seas*. Available at: <https://www.irisvanherpen.com/collections/sensory-seas/runway-3> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).

Figure 6: Cajal Institute (2017) *A Purkinje neuron from the human cerebellum* [photo]. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-father-of-modern-neuroscience-discovered-the-basic-unit-of-the-nervous-system/>

Figure 7: Florence Broadhurst Designs (n.d.) *Spotted Floral* [Online image]. Available at: <https://www.florencebroadhurst.com.au>