



THIRD EDITION

DICTIONARY  
*of*  
FURNITURE

CHARLES BOYCE



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Charles Boyce

Foreword by Joseph T. Butler



Skyhorse Publishing

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**F**or Marya, without whom nothing

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In the 15 years since the *Dictionary of Furniture* was first published a great deal of furniture has been created, and although no earthshaking stylistic revolutions have come about, there are nonetheless a number of new designers and ideas to be recorded. While inclusiveness in this matter is impossible within the constraints of space imposed by a revision of a book of this scope, I have included those new furniture makers who have particularly impressed me.

My own awareness of the world's furniture making has increased during those 15 years, and I have been able to improve the range of the book's coverage, most especially with respect to modern Australian design and the traditional furniture of Africa. Also, a wider acquaintance with the timbers used in wood furniture around the world—notably in China—has produced a crop of new entries.

Perhaps most important, additional material has been added to the front and the back of the book that I hope will be of practical use to the reader. The introduction is a general history of world furniture making, and it offers a broad perspective for the entries that follow. At the back of the book an essay on the ins and outs of buying furniture, especially antiques, is meant to provide a primer on the fine points to be considered, and two large un-fine points that I cannot resist repeating here, so important are they: (1) buy from a reputable dealer, and (2) educate yourself.

Also at the back of the book are two new features that will permit further exploration of the world of furniture by the reader: a bibliography and a gazetteer of excellent public collections of fine furniture. Both are necessarily imperfect—whole books would be entirely appropriate for either—but I think they offer very sound approaches for reader and traveler. And so, in either case, bon voyage.

Joseph T. Butler



There's furniture everywhere, though most of us don't notice it until we mash a knee on a desk leg. Yet we use these elementary household objects—"movable articles in a room . . . that render it fit for living or working," as *The American Heritage Dictionary* puts it—in every aspect of our lives, homes, offices, and public places. Furniture has a small number of basic uses—for storage; for sitting or reclining; and to provide flat surfaces on which to dine, write, or perform other tasks. But this belies the tremendous variety which fertile imaginations have brought to its design. Just as the fine arts do, furniture gives expression to our always-changing sense of how things should be. But the ubiquity of furniture makes this easy to forget. This book is meant to open our eyes and reawaken our minds to a remarkable area of human practical and artistic endeavor.

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Splendid anecdotes illustrate the linkage between furniture and the larger world. For instance, Louis XIV of France (1638–1715), the Sun King, made a decorative style a key part of his domestic policy. In an effort to control the wealth of the nobility, he required French aristocrats to imitate in their homes the extravagantly luxurious architecture and furnishing of Versailles, which were meant to impress all Europe with the country's wealth. So opulent a standard—including a roomful of solid silver furniture—was set by Louis' designer, Charles Le Brun, that in following it the nobles impoverished themselves (at least by their own standards) and could not afford to, say, raise a private army. And yet they could not afford to just ignore this fashion, either, for those who did lost the king's favor and in doing so were likely to lose valued perquisites and sources of income as well. French aristocrats of the 17th century were truly "slaves of fashion." Noblemen therefore competed for the commission the newest, most richly adorned furniture Parisian *ébénistes*, makers of the grandest furniture, could devise. And thus was created Louis XIV–style furniture.

But even as that opulent style arose, royal policy prepared the ground for its replacement. As Louis declined—he had been bedridden for many years before his death in 1715—the French economy was as moribund as he was, due to a long series of debilitating wars. The king's pursuit of glory had proved disastrous. In these final years, Louis was no longer able to police the nobility, and leading aristocrats began to abandon Versailles for the delights of Paris, building town houses and calculatedly creating a new style that demonstrated their release. Furniture and interior decoration was pointedly lighter in feeling, and motifs were derived from the beauties of nature and anecdotes of love rather than from implements of war and the grandeur of ancient Rome.

Thus, the rococo was born.

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Similar dynamic relations between social and aesthetic development are found everywhere in the history of furniture. In the European decorative arts tradition in particular, the alternation of periods



between the classical—symmetrical, grave, and grand, with an emphasis on balance and rigor—and the romantic—exuberant, often frivolous, with an emphasis on movement and playfulness—is often in tune with political and social trends. The change from baroque to rococo is but one example. Contrariwise, in Chinese and Japanese furniture, the profoundly conservative nature of these cultures yielded styles that changed little over centuries, excepting the punctuation of occasional introductions of form or motif from India and Persia, or, in recent years, from Europe and America.

Changes in the technical capabilities of furniture makers are significant in all cultures, especially with the modern development of radically new techniques, most notably factory production, the molding of materials by steaming or vacuum-forming, and the use of power tools. New materials—steel, plywood, and plastics, among others—have also added to furniture designers' options. Analogous developments occurred in olden times as well. For example, the ancient invention of the lathe introduced turned wood to furniture design. Economic developments often play an important role, such as when the growth of cities and their wealthy elites in medieval Europe generated a sharp rise in demand for furniture in many new forms. And trade and communications between cultures frequently have as great an impact on furniture design as they do in other ways. The development of furniture thus both mimics and is formed by human development on larger scales.

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Furniture did not exist for most of humanity's time on earth. The hunters and gatherers who wandered the prehistoric world made do without it. The very few hunting and gathering cultures that have survived into modern times demonstrate this, for none of the known primitive tribes have designed or made furniture. The earliest known furniture is stone platforms that served as couches or beds in neolithic dwellings that can be dated to about ten thousand years ago. There was surely other furniture made of more perishable materials, that has not survived. But ancient farmers can have had little time to build any but the crudest furniture. With the slow development of surplus wealth, and the growth of villages and towns, came the division of society into specialized occupations, including political, religious, and military elites and the craft workers who provided them with, among other things, furniture.

The earliest producers were the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures, though furniture was a luxury in both, rare even in palaces. Portable tables and beds appeared early, but thrones were the most important early pieces, as nascent societies confirmed their hierarchical organization with symbolic trappings.

In Egypt, large pieces of wood were scarce, so craftsmen combined small pieces and in doing so devised basic techniques still used today, such as mortise-and-ten-on joints and dowels. By about 1500 B.C., nails and hinges were in use. The principal furniture forms made were chests, beds, and stools, with some light tables and chairs. Beds, originally simple frames from which were slung hammock-like arrangements of hide or cords, evolved through ever higher models to large pieces requiring a mounting block. Egyptian furniture spread to ancient Greece, over an expanding web of trade routes.

In Mesopotamia, the earliest culture was the Sumerian (c. 3000 B.C.), which both influenced and was influenced by Egypt. During the later Assyrian and Babylonian Empires (c. 1350–539 B.C.), quite heavy furniture was made, elaborately decorated with precious materials such as gold and ivory, using motifs from Egypt as well as a local repertoire that included the characteristically Assyrian winged bull. Most importantly, the lathe was invented in Mesopotamia and was transmitted to Greece, and thus Europe, via the Persian Empire.

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Greek furniture was largely inspired by Egypt, except that the *kline*, or dining couch, came from Mesopotamia. The Greeks devised a number of new forms, including the *klismos* chair and the first round tables. Also, in the Hellenistic era (conventionally 336-31 B.C.—from Alexander the Great's coronation to the final establishment of Roman dominance in the eastern Mediterranean, at the Battle of Actium), late in Greece's period of cultural ascendancy, the cupboard first appears. As in so many other areas, Greece formulated a tradition for the West from the practices of their predecessors.

Following the flow of history, Greek taste was diffused around the ancient world, first by the colonies that Greek city-states established throughout the Mediterranean basin from the 8th century B.C. on; then east to the fringes of India by Alexander the Great's empire, beginning c. 330 B.C.; and finally by the Romans, whose adaptations of Greek tastes overran Europe and North Africa with its armies and government.

Roman design built on the Greek tradition but displayed a penchant for practical innovation. This was perhaps most significantly demonstrated in the evolution of the *kline*, to which Roman designers added first the *fulcrum*, or headboard, and, later, a back, making the first couch, the *lectus*. Roman designers took wicker furniture from the Etruscans and devised a form that was popular for centuries, a wicker chair whose back extended into a hood above the user.

The Romans combined their innovations with a fondness for lush ornamentation, using precious metals, ivory, jewels, and rare woods. This taste was doubtless stimulated by the mighty Roman Empire's great wealth and its access to materials from throughout the known world. (This conjunction of practicality and opulence is similar to the combination of Yankee ingenuity and consumerist excess that has coexisted in American taste in this century.) A wide repertoire of decoration evolved, incorporating motifs from around the Roman world. Roman images have recurred again and again in Western decorative art and are still in use.

When the empire fell to the great barbarian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries, its design traditions deteriorated badly but never failed altogether. During the period of intense upheaval in Europe, medieval furniture developed very slowly and emerged in the Romanesque style. In the east the Roman tradition was more fully retained, while undergoing a powerful transformation into Byzantine furniture.

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In the early medieval period (c. A.D. 450-750), Western Europe's furniture was informed by the economic and cultural deprivation following the collapse of the empire. Only the richest and most powerful nobles possessed anything but the crudest domestic furniture, and even that was simple and sparse. They traveled constantly among various residences throughout their domains, for no one tract of land could support for long the immense retinues of soldiers and courtiers that maintained and demonstrated their power. Consequently, household goods consisted largely of easily transportable items, with little bulky furniture. A house's rooms were not yet associated with particular uses; furniture such as dining tables or beds could be, and were, set up in any room. Such forms as the folding stool and the *couchette*, a wheeled bed, were widely used. Moreover, the aesthetics of furniture was relatively unimportant, for the pieces of any consequence would most likely be swathed in fine fabrics or tapestries. For all these reasons, the range of furniture forms was severely limited.

The church was the great user of furniture at this period. In church buildings, furniture tended to be built into the architectural scheme, but in monasteries and libraries, specialized forms were used, such as the lectern and cupboards designed to hold books. The decoration and style of these pieces derived from church architecture; in fact, furniture tended to look like buildings, with such details

arcading and pilasters, and even, occasionally, buttresses.

Only one great stylistic change occurred during the long medieval period. Until the 12th century furniture makers strove to evoke the Roman imperial past by employing what remained of the classical repertoire of forms and decoration, in what we now call the Romanesque style. But around 1100 A.D., a “modern” style, now known as Gothic, arose. It employed a greater naturalism in decoration and emphasized verticality in structure. During the Gothic period, especially in the ports of the North Sea and the city-states of northern Italy, an emerging business class had a comfortable and settled way of life that generated the range of domestic furniture we are familiar with today.

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In contrast to the medieval West, the Byzantine Empire (A.D. 476–1453), successor to the Eastern Roman Empire, remained fairly stable, though its enemies gradually ate away at its territory. Classical traditions and techniques of craft endured; in particular, a range of metal X-frame stools and chairs, successors to the Roman *sella curulis*, were quite common, as were benches, small tables, and stools with legs, stretchers, and rails of finely turned woods. Grand Byzantine furniture was massive, rigid, and severely formal, often covered with jewel-studded ivory panels bearing the stylized religious imagery for which Byzantine art is best known. The extravagance of furniture in the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, is exemplified by a literary reference to a solid gold dining table that seated 36.

Books were a valued component of Byzantine culture, and lecterns, bookcases, desks, and pieces combining them, were popular. Carved or painted decoration included semi-abstract decoration from Middle Eastern traditions, including designs from Persia and, later, Islam. From the 10th century onwards motifs originating as far away as China were used, demonstrating the reach of Byzantine trade.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the influence of Byzantine furniture and decorative arts continued to be felt for centuries throughout the Balkans and Russia, domains of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

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Outside Europe, people were making furniture also, of course, but the dynamic of its development was very different. For reasons unknown, furniture seems to have been little used in the East's early civilizations—from the ancient cities of the Indus River valley (c. 2500–c. 1500 B.C.) to Shang dynasty China (c. 1600–1027 B.C.)—and a very limited range of forms was pursued. These cultures thus began making furniture somewhat later than their western counterparts in Mesopotamia and Egypt, though it is not known whether the earlier initiative influenced the later one. Somewhat later, by Roman times in the West, a clear but slight influence on the East is evident, either directly, through knowledge of Western furniture, or through intermediary cultures. But at any rate, as Europe approached the Renaissance, furniture traditions in Asia were progressing much more slowly.

India was the first of the eastern cultures to receive any influence from the West. Thrones, the earliest known Indian furniture, appear in carvings of the third century B.C., and may have been informed by Mesopotamian designs. Low, flat platforms, either polygonal or lotus-shaped, they had short legs carved as animal feet. Beds, similar to Egyptian and Mesopotamian models, were low rectangular frames. A larger bed, sometimes featuring a headboard, arrived with the beginnings of Moslem rule around A.D. 1000, but beds have never been very popular in India; bedding on the floor has always been the usual sleeping arrangement. Chairs and stools were introduced from Bactria, the easternmost of the Hellenistic kingdoms that survived the brief empire of Alexander, and were later retransmitted to China. Caning, prominent before the second century A.D., is India's one great original

contribution to the furniture of other cultures. Because insect damage is a major problem in India, ~~furniture was usually made of stone, ivory, or silver, and was always very expensive. Until colonial times, furniture was scarce, even among the elites.~~

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Because China has undergone repeated periods of war and social unrest, very little furniture has survived, and almost none from older periods. Nevertheless, much can be learned from art and literature. It is known that the Chinese began making furniture in very ancient times, and that Chinese furniture has always depended on highly sophisticated joinery, in which nails and screws are eschewed entirely, and glue or dowels are employed only rarely. This practice responded to wood's repeated expansion and contraction in China's extremes of weather. Elaborate joints—especially an amazing array of different mortice-and-tenon joints—had been developed by medieval times. The lathe and turnery were unknown.

Before the Shang dynasty and the creation of the Chinese Empire (that is, before the second millennium B.C.), a screen (*ping*), an armrest (*ji*), a variety of low tables, and a low platform (ancestor of the *kang*), were made. These forms served sitters on mats, placed on the floor, the ground, or the platforms. Other early forms included a framework of open shelves, the predecessor to the grand wardrobes of later tradition. Lacquer was already used, providing protection against insects, as big a problem as in India, especially in southern China, the early cultural leader.

Little Chinese furniture is known in detail until the rise of the medieval Tang (T'ang) dynasty (A.D. 618–907), which followed a long troubled period of political and social collapse after the fall of the mighty Han dynasty, the chronological and developmental equivalent to the Roman Empire (Note: Chinese dynastic names are given first in the recently adopted Pinyin transliteration, followed by the older Wade-Giles transliteration, unless the two are identical.) The Tang is considered a “golden age” of Chinese decorative arts, but its furniture is known only from paintings and manuscripts. A very large revolving bookcase, the *shuan lun jing chang*, was used in Buddhist monasteries. The massive *chuang*—a platform with railings—emulated the thrones of Indian tradition and served as a chair of state, a prestige item reserved for the highest-ranking member of a household. Small tables and the screen were still made, to be used on the *kang*. The screen underwent a portentous change, incorporating for the first time painted panels. These have remained a principal vehicle for fine painting to this day, both in China and Japan.

In the Song (Sung) dynasty (960–1279), seating furniture was brought by merchants over the Silk Road from India and the West, and the X-frame chair, in both fixed and folding forms, was made in a variety of styles. The *san cai tu hui*, or “chair of the old man who has been drinking” was popular for centuries. The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) brought another “golden age,” thought by many to be the greatest. A group of chairs featured a cubical frame below the seat, consisting of the legs and four low stretchers. The upper parts took different forms, colorfully named for fancied resemblances to the shape of the arms and back, among them the “scholar's cap” chair and the “chair like a hanging lantern shaped like a chair.”

A similarly wide variety of tables arose, including the “altar table,” the showpiece of a Ming household, and a number of specialized pieces intended for such uses as formal presentation, painting, and gaming. These designs frequently incorporated distinctively Chinese foot and leg forms that survive today, notably the “horse-hoof foot” and the “elephant-trunk leg.” Ming case furniture was grand and massive, with cupboards taller than a man. The most commonly made was a tall two-door wardrobe surmounted by a quite substantial “hat cupboard,” with matching doors, each featuring

modest hardware of brass or *paktung*, a Chinese alloy of copper, zinc, and nickel. Another large form was a massive closed bookcase whose base was wider than its top.

Materials included a widening range of exotic hardwoods, many from Southeast Asia, which an expanding China dominated militarily. Lacquer was applied to less splendid surfaces, and furniture entirely of lacquer was also made. Root furniture, fashioned from the gnarled roots of trees, was brought to a state of great sophistication. Porcelain was also employed in molded, barrel-shaped forms called *dun*, which were used as stools, generally outdoors. This is still a prominent piece of Chinese furniture, even in the West. Porcelain plaques also decorated especially ornate chairs and tables. Ming designers created the Chinese furniture forms most familiar today, and Ming designs continued in use through the next, and last, imperial dynasty, the Qing (Ch'ing) (1644–1911).

China resisted the imposition of political and cultural Western influence, as was the case for East Asia in general (Japan was a late and lone exception), but unavailingly. Weakened by Western demands and its own inadequacy, the empire fell to revolution in 1911. An almost constant state of turmoil has reigned in China throughout the 20th century, and there has probably been little energy available to effect changes in furniture styles, though there is very little information on which to judge. Nevertheless, the historical conservatism of Chinese design probably means that the forms and methods of traditional furniture making will survive.

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In Japan, furniture has traditionally existed only in a very limited range of forms, the most important being screens—the familiar, multipaneled *byobu*, decorated with fine paintings, and the wide, low single-paneled *tsuitate*, akin to the modern room divider—and *tansu*, a range of storage chests in a variety of sizes and configurations. Accustomed to sitting on the floor (a practice that was transmitted to Japan from China with the great waves of immigrants, obscure in origin but probably from southern Korea, who overwhelmed the aboriginal hunters and gatherers of the Japanese islands around the third century A.D.), the Japanese made no other furniture at all, except a few light, portable tools: small reading stands, writing desks (less than a foot high), a wooden headrest, an armrest, and various boxes. Kimono racks were also made, but the only piece of furniture not easily portable was the *butsudan*, the family shrine. Unless lacquered, this furniture was largely undecorated, apart from metal hardware at the corners of the case pieces. This austere regime came originally from the conservative world of ancient China, and Japanese furniture was, until modern times, even less apt to change than that of the Chinese. But beginning in the 19th century, Japan opened itself to Western influences and itself influenced the West.

Korean furniture, like Japanese, has been strikingly conservative and has thus displayed little dramatic development over time. Since at least the last few centuries B.C., Korean furniture has emulated that of northern China in its forms and techniques. In the 20th century, however, Korean makers have made a specialty of case furniture modeled on the Japanese *tansu*.

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The history of post-medieval European and, later, American furniture, is very complex. Many different styles have evolved in a pattern of linked influences that often doubles back on itself. What follows is a cursory survey of the high points.

The Middle Ages came to an end with the flowering of philosophy and art that we know as the Renaissance. Beginning in the 14th century in northern Italy, scholars and artists sought to revive the cultural and intellectual world of ancient Greece and Rome. In the decorative arts, this meant the

adaptation of ancient architectural and ornamental devices. In furniture, this reformulation was superficial at first: the unspecialized forms of medieval furniture were made with ancient Roman decorative motifs. These included putti, urns, and mythological beasts such as the sphinx and the chimera. Human figuration was also popular, especially in the miniature busts known as Roman work. More elaborate carving favored the use of gesso and *pastiglia*, soft and workable materials. Another material, walnut, easily worked, became the material of choice over the traditional oak, which is a much harder wood. Also, pictorial images promoted the development of elaborate inlay techniques, including *intarsia* and *pietra dure*.

The first new form was the *cassone*, which is basically the traditional chest decorated with paintings on panels. However, particular rooms—and particular types of furniture—began to be associated with particular uses, and a wider array of forms evolved. The *cassone* became the *cassapanca*, a couch. A light side chair, the *scabella*, emerged, as did the *credenza*, a sideboard that became a standard piece of furniture. Many sorts of cupboard were devised, including the armoire.

Originally Italian, the Renaissance style seduced the rest of Europe, especially after King François I of France invaded Italy in 1494 and, impressed by the arts and architecture he encountered, brought Italian craftsmen and artists (including the likes of Leonardo da Vinci and Rosso Fiorentino) back to France. The result was the François I style, a distinctive amalgam of northern Gothic and Renaissance decorative arts that was powerfully influential throughout northern Europe.

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By the second half of the 16th century, Renaissance decorative styles had evolved into the phase we distinguish as mannerism. Astounded by ancient Rome's painted interiors, recently discovered by designers throughout Europe began adorning furniture with a phantasmagoria of extravagant and bizarre images, united by fields of arabesques and strapwork. The motifs included strangely rendered human heads, fantastic creatures such as griffins and winged beasts, and multitudes of naturalistically rendered vines, flowers, and birds. Known as "grotesque ornament," this mode continued to be used throughout the baroque and rococo periods.

François's successor gave his name to the Henri II style, French mannerism in the decorative arts. In furniture, this mode involved denser and more complicated carving, particularly of the human figure, in such elements as caryatids, atlantes, and terms. Furniture forms grew ever more elaborate. Various subtypes of cupboard evolved. The draw-leaf was applied to all sorts of table forms, from simple, light pieces to the largest, the grand display piece known as the *table à l'Italienne*. Tables and cabinets often bore complex marquetry and *pietra dure* work. Pendant finials were applied to each corner of many tables. In short, mannerist furniture was, to the taste of our age, overdecorated.

As the 16th century ended, Paris, not Rome, was the artistic capital of Europe. But in France, the Wars of Religion (1562–98) stalled the country's cultural development, and mannerism thus lingered as the major European style until the development of the baroque Louis XIV style in the second half of the 17th century. Today, the term *baroque* suggests decoration that is too greatly elaborated and too grandiose, but the baroque style emerged as a simplifying reaction against the excesses of mannerism.

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The baroque style stressed grandeur, opulence, and a symmetry organized around sweeping S-curves—a compositional device developed in early 17th-century Italian painters. It had first been used in ecclesiastical architecture, as part of the Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation aesthetic program meant to demonstrate the continuing power and wealth of the church despite its loss of Protestant

northern Europe. The baroque effects its drama with a strong unity that is very different from the crowds of vignettes that characterize mannerism. Architectural motifs continued to flourish, but baroque designers employed highly theatrical broken or curved pediments and created dramatic contrasts of light and shadow with deep moldings and carving. Exaggerated fullness of scale and proportion lent grandeur to these pieces, and opulent materials—marbles, gilt bronze, and exotic woods—brought an aura of magnificence to the rooms they embellished. The baroque sense of drama also embraced the exotic, and Europe's first wave of enthusiasm for Chinoiserie was one consequence.

Early in the period, the influence of Rome was still powerful, especially in Spain, where the Italian baroque was emulated in the exuberant style of Churrigueresque furniture. To the north, in France, the baroque came to full flower at midcentury, and Louis XIV found its glorious and often absurdly expensive expression well-suited to his purposes, as we have seen. When Louis revoked France's famous guarantee of religious toleration, the Edict of Nantes in 1685, thousands of Protestant craftsmen and their families fled to other countries, especially the Netherlands and England, thereby spreading the baroque style throughout northern Europe, where it dominated taste for almost a century.

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In England, on an island off Europe, artistic revolutions arrived late. The Renaissance did not appear until well into the 16th century, when mannerism was already established on the continent. The result was Tudor furniture, an unsophisticated use of Renaissance motifs on medieval furniture. However, a few distinctively English forms were developed, most notably the Nonsuch chest and the farthingale chair. Jacobean furniture arose as the baroque was gaining strength abroad but added little to the repertoire. Named for King James I, who ruled from 1603 to 1625, the Jacobean style continued in use through the reign of James's son, Charles I, until the outbreak of the English Civil Wars in 1642. The success of the Puritan revolutionaries in this conflict mandated the very austere and conservative Commonwealth furniture.

In 1660, the English monarchy was restored, in the person of King Charles II. Charles, who had spent his years of exile in Holland and France, was quite responsive to the arts, and he had acquired a taste for the baroque. He recruited many continental cabinetmakers and sculptors to work in England. The Great Fire of 1666 destroyed most of London, creating a market for furniture to fill the new buildings that rose thereafter. This furniture was made in an enthusiastic version of the continental baroque known as Restoration furniture.

King Charles indulged in extreme opulence, going so far as to commission suites of furniture veneered in silver. However, such excess was not wholly in tune with the national character. Though the baroque continued to dominate English design for several generations, a reaction against the Restoration aesthetic produced less grandiose versions—the William and Mary and Queen Anne styles. These in turn were succeeded by the idiosyncratic Palladian style, in the second quarter of the 18th century.

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Even further from the centers of style, the British colonies in America followed London styles, but they took them up later and retained them longer. Thus, the American baroque only began in the William and Mary style, which did not arrive until near the end of the century and did not give way to the Queen Anne style until after that monarch's death in 1714.

Other colonial styles evolved around this time, such as Spanish Colonial furniture, another

American development. The Spanish Empire in the New World was fabulously rich in gold and silver and fine furniture was soon being produced there. Generally European in form, its decoration was influenced by indigenous traditions. In Mexico, elements of Mayan art were carved in furniture; what is now the southwestern United States, makers borrowed the geometrical motifs of the local Indians; and Incan motifs were used in Peru.

In India, from the 17th century on, European empire builders introduced Western furniture, and they provided a market in the West for Indian craftsmen producing furniture in a variety of styles such as Indo-Portuguese and Burmese furniture, employing indigenous materials and decorative techniques. British influence dominated, and most Indian furniture of the 19th and 20th centuries in fact followed British styles.

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In Europe, national traditions were quick to respond to the rococo of Paris, once the Sun King died. Rococo began as the Régence style, named for the period of Louis XV's minority, when France was ruled by a regent (1715–23). Régence lasted somewhat longer, but it was a transitional style, and rococo furniture reached its maturity in the Louis XV style, around 1730. Lighter and more playful than baroque, yet clearly a grand style, rococo featured asymmetrical ornamentation and picturesque motifs that have charmed people ever since.

In Italy, Austria, and the Catholic countries of southern Germany, where the Counter-Reformation had encouraged the most grandiose of baroque styles, the rococo was similarly exaggerated; in northern Germany, rococo decoration tended to be applied to older, more stately baroque forms, in a manner adopted in Scandinavia. British rococo was milder and less extravagant than the French prototype. Its curves were smoother and simpler, its asymmetries less pronounced, its motifs less fantastic. And comfort was deemed more important.

Pattern books were important in this period, and in England one of the most influential pattern book makers, Thomas Chippendale (1718–79), gave his name to several varieties of British rococo furniture: American Chippendale (for the varieties made across the Atlantic), Chinese Chippendale, and Chippendale Gothic. The first of these characteristically trailed London by half a generation and lasted well into the 19th century, especially as so-called Country Chippendale. Chinese Chippendale, as the name suggests, employed Chinoiserie motifs. Like it, Chippendale Gothic, which emulated the decorative stonework of medieval cathedrals, grew out of the period's taste for the exotic.

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Rococo was succeeded by the neoclassical style, a reversion to the sterner, archi-technic ideas of classical antiquity. Among the historical styles of Europe, the neoclassical is most closely associated with a great social movement outside the arts. As Enlightenment philosophers and writers formulated and popularized the notion that the legitimacy of governments should reside in the consent of the governed—the most important of the ideas that eventually led to the French Revolution—they looked to the Roman republic for historical precedent. Artists and designers, spurred by the contemporary reaction against the rococo, were further inspired by the fortuitous discovery of a trove of neoclassical motifs in the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, first excavated in 1738. The furniture to which such images were applied was severely angular by comparison to its predecessors; the bombé shape and the serpentine front were discarded, and cabriole legs were supplanted by square or cylindrical ones. Marquetry became increasingly simpler and less copious until, by the 1780s, plain wooden panels were the norm.



In Paris, a reaction against the ever more whimsical extravagances of rococo set in during the 1760s, yielding first the Transition style and then the fully neoclassical Louis XVI style, whose considerable opulence and formal solemnity was meant to suggest grandeur, hearkening back to the Sun King. This period has been called the “golden age of French cabinetmaking,” when Paris harbored many great cabinet makers, often from other countries.

At about the same time, the architect and designer Robert Adam (1728–92) led a similar alteration in taste in Britain. The Adam style, whose influence was chiefly confined to America and northern Europe, was by comparison less stern. Its emphasis on light-colored materials and painted decoration—often floral motifs derived from ancient Greek vase painting—made for a sense of gaiety and pleasure rather than grandeur and pride. If rather more understated than its French cohorts, Adam’s furniture was nevertheless opulent and very expensive. Two furniture designers, George Hepplewhite in the 1780s and Thomas Sheraton in the ’90s, presented a neoclassical style more suitable to bourgeois tastes, being both less rich in materials and more austere in character. Their pattern books were the principal sources for makers of American Federal furniture.

Europe, too, had followed neoclassical Paris and London. By the 1790s, as the French Revolution changed virtually all aspects of European life, rococo furniture was gone except in a few corners of the region, chiefly Venice, Spain, and parts of Catholic Germany.

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The period of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars (1789–1815) altered the Western world in many realms, including that of the decorative arts. At first, furniture design remained fairly stable. Elements of the Louis XVI style persisted during the Revolution in the Directoire and Consular styles. In Napoleonic Europe, the Empire style was a grandiose reworking of that mode. It was expressly intended, like the Louis XIV style, to aggrandize the new monarch, Napoleon. Self-conscious and majestic, it was massive and formal. Its decorative schemes involved, along with the usual range of classical motifs, a specially devised iconography featuring the letter N, often within a laurel wreath; the bee, Bonaparte’s heraldic symbol; eagles, the Roman (and Napoleonic) military emblem; and the swan, a device introduced by the Empress Josephine.

Despite the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Paris remained the art capital of Europe, and the Empire style influenced furniture makers throughout the continent. In Britain, its monumentality influenced the highly eclectic Regency style, among whose practitioners was Thomas Sheraton, who added French ideas to his later pattern books. These in their turn helped stimulate the Directory style in America. France had been an American ally since the Revolutionary War, so French styles were already popular in America, and Directory furniture quickly evolved into the American Empire style.

The French neoclassical model persisted beyond the Napoleonic Wars, which completed the cycle of the French Revolution with the restoration of the French monarchy and others. Such styles of the Restoration, Louis XVIII, and Charles X incorporated elements of the neoclassical with references to the *ancien régime*. Even the Biedermeier style, a simplifying mode that was developed in Germany and Austria and was associated with the newly dominant bourgeoisie, was clearly in the continuum of the post-Renaissance high style that had begun in the 17th century. But the dam was about to break.

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The remarkable flowering of modern and contemporary furniture, in a remarkably diverse range of styles, some entirely novel and others nostalgic revivals, can be bewildering. This is perhaps fitting

given the complexities and confusions of modern life. Speaking generally, its roots are perhaps best seen as comprising two linked strands: the 19th-century growth of industrial techniques and the concomitant nostalgia for “the world we have lost,” an imagined golden age before the onslaught of the machine age and its social dislocations.

Ironically, the modern begins with historical revivals, in the eclectic Revival styles that arose around 1840, shaking off the long dominance of the neoclassical. The newly powerful middle class did not want to associate themselves with the grandeur of monarchy and its echoes of imperial Rome, nor could they afford it. At the same time, they sought the reassurance of familiarity, and so designers turned to earlier periods for inspiration.

Two trends initially arose, the Neo-Gothic and Rococo Revival styles, and each quickly developed distinct national and regional variants. Neo-Gothic was much more popular in Britain, America, and northern Europe, while the rococo was more prominent elsewhere. Around 1850, the Renaissance Revival style joined the mix, and it provoked even greater variation—Italy followed Italian Renaissance models, German-speaking countries followed German Renaissance models, and so on. Moreover, the Renaissance revival, based as it was on the classicizing Renaissance, reintroduced classical elements. This led to neoclassical revivals including the French Louis XVI Revival style (which was promoted by Napoleon III, ruler of France’s Second Empire, in the manner of his uncle and namesake) and Britain’s inaccurately named Queen Anne Revival style.

Significantly, the rise of these various styles coincided with the early 19th-century emergence of factory-produced furniture. Mass manufacturers produced vast quantities of mediocre furniture in the revival styles—or in pastiches of more than one. As early as the 1850s, beginning in Britain, designers and artists rebelled against this influx, focusing on craftsmanship and materials, and developed new modes, most notably those of the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau. They employed new designs, distancing themselves from the Revival styles. These artists and designers often drew on the spare aesthetics of Japan (and thus, ultimately, China), thereby furthering the ongoing mingling of Eastern and Western traditions. Both the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau were highly influential on early 20th-century design throughout the Western world. Their offspring ranged from the Prairie School and Mission furniture in the United States to Art Deco in France (and elsewhere) and Scandinavian modern.

But the industrialization of furniture making also offered opportunities. Fine furniture could no longer be made available to the great mass of the public who could not afford the carefully crafted handmade furniture of the reformers. Such groups as the Art Furniture Movement in Britain, the German Deutsche Werkstätten and Deutscher Werkbund, and the Roycroft Community in the United States were among the first designers to attempt combining the notions of fine design and mass manufacturing. Especially in Germany, where the Bauhaus style emerged from these endeavors, they laid the groundwork for the International Style of the mid-20th century, centered on the ideas of functionalism: the importance of utility and designs that emphasize the industrial process and use modern materials.

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Since the Second World War, furniture design has blossomed in a myriad of directions. In America, partly influenced by the presence of European refugees, furniture makers revived the International Style pieces of Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier, and others. Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen led a revolution in materials; their new methods of molding plywood and plastic and joining them to steel elements were influential throughout the world, especially on Britain’s Contemporary Style and

Scandinavian modern furniture. Eames was also a pioneer of ergonomic design, intended to create furniture whose shapes and sizes were attuned to the configuration of the human body, particularly those pieces intended for work (“ergonomic” is from the Greek *ergon*, meaning “work”). Plastic, particular—inexpensive, easy to work with, and extremely versatile—lent itself to the flowing lines and informal character of postwar furniture and has been prominent in all styles since.

In the 1960s, the sensible, smooth “good taste” that came to dominate furniture under the influence of Eames and Saarinen triggered the inevitable reaction. Pop furniture, inspired by Pop Art and the general sense of irreverence that permeated the decade, used vivid colors and purposefully vulgar imagery to both parody and exploit consumerist culture. Well-known pieces included inflatable armchairs and a baseball-glove-shaped chair by the Italian firm De Pas, D’Urbino, Lomazzi; and Allan Jones’ pornographically sculptural work. This furniture’s tone of satire and oddity reflected the social and political upheaval of the times.

In the 1980s, a more purely formal variant of anti-, or non-International Style furniture, arose, sometimes known as “Memphis style,” after the firm of Italian designer Ettore Sottsass. Milan, home of Memphis style and of an influential annual furniture show, is the epicenter for designs in which whimsy is as prominent as in Pop designs but is abstract, featuring forms in odd shapes and unexpected arrangements of elements, often with plastic veneers in several different colors and patterns within a single piece.

It should be emphasized that Functionalism and International Style furniture have not disappeared; they continue to coexist with newer styles among leading trends in contemporary decorative art.

Within all these stylistic developments, a highly significant factor in 20th-century furniture design and manufacture has been the close involvement of many architects. Since at least the early 18th century, some architects in many periods have designed furniture for their own buildings—note, for instance, François Cuvillies, William Kent, Benjamin Latrobe, and A. W. N. Pugin—but only in modern times have architects made a practice of designing furniture for the general market. In addition to Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames, Saarinen, and Sottsass, mentioned above, important architect-designers of the period include Alvar Aalto, Frank Gehry, Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

The eclecticism of contemporary furniture design encompasses a return to the most ancient mode of making furniture in the work of various makers who collectively represent the Handicraft Revival. Emerging in the 1970s, such makers as Wharton Esherick, George Nakashima, Wendell Castle, and John Makepeace place a great emphasis on craftsmanship in wood, rather than mass production in new, synthetic materials.

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The history of furniture, then, proceeds from beginnings in isolated parts of the neolithic world to the time when humans first became settled dwellers in houses, through a progressively more complex linkage of one local sort of design to another, and arrives at—or rather, continues on from—the linked strands of progress and nostalgia that give rise to the amazing eclecticism of contemporary design. The contents of this book present the steps on the way, offering brief glimpses of a myriad of furniture makers, designers and schools—and their products, the furniture itself. Collectively, they display the manifold roots of furniture design as well as its potential for the future. The reader will not only be dazzled by an astonishing range of creativity, but may also, perhaps, detect the shape of furniture design to come.

**NOTE**

Chinese entry titles are given first in the Pinyin transcription, followed in parentheses by the older, more familiar Wade-Giles transcription, unless the two are identical.

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Entries are filed word-by-word; for example, *cabinet stand* precedes *cabinetmaker*.



## **AALTO, HUGO ALVAR HENRIK (1899– 1976)**

Finnish architect and designer; a leader in SCANDINAVIAN MODERN design. Though primarily an architect, Alvar Aalto designed much furniture that has been immensely influential both in Finland and in the United States. In Helsinki, as a young man, he studied the work of Josef HOFFMAN and the WIEN WERKSTÄTTE, and he worked for a time for Eliel SAARINEN. After the First World War, Aalto practiced architecture in what was later known as the INTERNATIONAL STYLE, and when he began to design furniture in the 1920s, he followed that style. However, he always used wood, to the exclusion of metal, and his style was less rigidly functionalistic than characteristic BAUHAUS designs. Following the example of THONET's bentwood chairs, and continuing in the International style, Aalto designed in the 1930s the laminated beechwood chairs for which he is best known. He was the first designer employing the cantilever principle in chair design (see Mart STAM) with wood instead of tubular steel. Aalto also designed fabrics, glassware and lighting fixtures; in 1935 he established a company to manufacture and sell these products. This firm, Artek, is still extant, and many of Aalto's designs are still in production.

## **AARNIO, EERO (b. 1932)**

Contemporary Finnish furniture designer. Aarnio is best known for two chair designs of the 1960s, the "Globe" or "Ball" chair (1966) and the "Gyro" or "Pastilli" chair (1968). The latter is made of reinforced fiberglass molded into a flattened sphere, with a hollow carved into the top and one side to make a seat. All curves, it rocks on the floor without legs or pedestal; it thus wittily and completely ignores the traditional character of a chair. The "Globe" chair is an ovoid fiberglass shell, higher than it is wide and with a large, circular opening. It revolves on a cast aluminum base, and both base and chair are painted in a primary color. The user sits in the opening, which is completely upholstered and sometimes equipped with stereo speakers. Evocative of space travel, this chair has a fantasy element to it, as does contemporary POP ART FURNITURE but its sculptural elegance and ingenuity place it in the lineage of development stemming from Charles EAMES and continuing through SCANDINAVIAN MODERN design, as in the work of Arne JACOBSEN.

## **ABACUS**

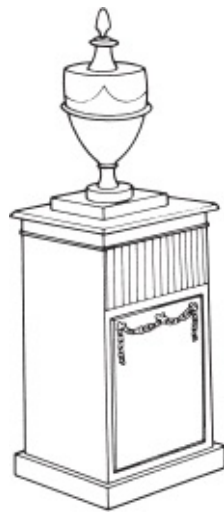
In the classical ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE, the topmost member of the CAPITAL of a column; slab on which the ARCHITRAVE rests.



**Laminated chair by Aalto**



**acanthus**



**pedestal design by Robert Adam**

## **ABILDGAARD, NIKOLAI ABRAHAM (1743–1809)**

Danish painter and NEOCLASSICAL STYLE interior designer. Best known as a neoclassical painter, Abildgaard also designed a small amount of furniture in about 1800, first for his own use and then for the Danish royal family. Like French painter Jacques-Louis DAVID, he attempted to replicate ancient GREEK FURNITURE

as seen in ancient pottery painting.

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## **ABURA**

Nigerian HARDWOOD; plain, pale yellow-brown in color. Abura's uniform texture and susceptibility to stain make it useful for furniture, especially moldings.

## **ACACIA**

Any of several hundred species of HARDWOOD tree, distributed worldwide, several of which are valuable to furniture makers. Some have been in use since very early times (see, for example, EGYPTIAN FURNITURE). Hard and very durable woods, the acacias range in color from pale green to a variety of browns, sometimes with streaks of a contrasting color, in generally straight grains.

## **ACANTHUS**

Ornamental motif consisting of a conventionalized leaf of *Acanthus spinosus*, a Mediterranean plant with large, prickly leaves. Originally used in ancient Greek architecture to decorate column capitals of the CORINTHIAN ORDER, the acanthus has been used on furniture in most European styles since the Renaissance, excluding the modern styles that repudiate historical references. In British and American furniture, it was particularly notable as the ornamentation on the knees of cabriole legs in the QUEEN ANNE STYLE and in ROCOCO FURNITURE, and it was also very widely used in the REGENCY STYLE.

## **ACROTER**

Plinth or pedestal for a statue or other ornament, placed at the apex or lower corners of a PEDIMENT. More loosely, the term often refers to the ornament itself. A decorative device of classical architecture, the acroter was commonly used on European case furniture in all of the NEOCLASSICAL STYLES, especially in the 18th century. Also called *acrotere*, *acroterion* and *acroterium*.

## **ADAM, ROBERT (1728–92)**

British NEOCLASSICAL STYLE architect and designer. The ADAM STYLE, the British neoclassical decorative mode of the 1760s–1780s, is named after him. He was born in Edinburgh, son of the well-known Scottish architect William Adam. In 1754 Robert Adam began four years of study in Rome under the French neoclassical designer J.-L. Clerisseau. There he associated with French and Italian artists and met the Italian engraver G. B. PIRANESI, whose creative response to classical architecture influenced him deeply. Adam studied the architectural ornamentation of ancient buildings and developed a vast repertoire of classical motifs, with which he would create a new style of decoration. He launched his career in London in 1759, and his success was immediate and lasting. For the rest of his life, in partnership with his brother James (1730–94), he always had several architectural commissions in progress. He employed many designers and furniture makers, including Thomas CHIPPENDALE Jr. and Michelangelo PERGOLESI. Adam felt that an architect should design not only the exterior but also all the details of an interior, in order to maintain a coherent decorative scheme. He rigorously followed this doctrine.

designing furniture, carpets, even keyhole plates and fireplace gratings for his rooms. A striking innovation in dining-room furniture is usually attributed to Adam—the use of a SIDEBOARD flanked by PEDESTALS. The Adam style, a reaction against the whimsical fancies of the preceding rococo (see ROCOCO FURNITURE), revolutionized British interior decoration and furniture design, and Robert Adam has always been best known for the style's light and airy grace. He was so famous in his own time that he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

## ADAM STYLE

British NEOCLASSICAL STYLE in furniture and interior decoration of about 1760–90, named for its creator and principal exponent, Robert ADAM, the leading architect and designer of the period. The Adam style furniture was characterized by the liberal use of classical motifs in painted or inlaid decoration of rectilinear forms with slender, elegant proportions. The use of light-colored woods and paint created an effect of charm and grace. Conceived to counter the frivolity and asymmetrical whimsy of the ROCOCO FURNITURE of the 1750s, the Adam style nonetheless had a prettiness and gaiety that the more solemn LOUIS XVI STYLE, the contemporary neoclassical mode of France, lacked.

While its straight lines and inlays contrasted with the curves and carved motifs of the rococo, the Adam style was marked chiefly by its repertoire of ornamentation, motifs from the ordered, rational world of classical architecture. Fluted COLUMNS, FESTOONS, SWAGS, PALMETTES, ram's heads, SPHINXES and CHIMERAS were all featured on furniture. Cornices, aprons and moldings were decorated with PATERAE and ANTHEMIONS, the Greek KEY PATTERN and the VITRUVIAN SCROLL. These motifs were evocative of the classical world so admired during the Enlightenment.

Adam believed that an architect should pursue a coherent expression of this theme in his buildings, so he designed every detail of his interiors, including furniture, carpets and even keyhole plates and doorknobs. Furniture was thus regarded as part of an overall decorative scheme. Adam's furniture was often painted in pastel colors with gilt and other painted ornamentation. Angelica KAUFFMANN and Antonio ZUCCHI were frequently commissioned to paint mythological figures in idealized settings on framed panels of furniture as well as on walls and ceilings. One scheme of painted decoration that Adam devised was based on ancient Greek pottery painting and came to be known as the ETRUSCAN STYLE. Whether painted or inlaid, the furniture of Robert Adam was often further ornamented with gilding or either wood or bronze mounts. He also favored rare and exotic woods, and he frequently used marble or SCAGLIOLA panels for further enrichment.

This elegantly extravagant work could be afforded only by the rich, and Adam worked principally for the aristocracy. Other designers, most notably George HEPPLEWHITE and Thomas SHEARER, modified the style to suit a more middleclass clientele. Hepplewhite's less angular furniture, simple and elegant, typified by the SHIELD-BACK CHAIR, represented the Adam style in the 1780s. And in the 1790s Thomas SHERATON's pattern books continued to translate Adam designs to a practical and popular level. However, more archeologically oriented pieces appeared in Sheraton's designs, along with the first hints of the French influence that characterized the REGENCY STYLE.

Beginning in the same decade, the archeologizing tendencies of the Regency style led to the rejection of the Adam style as frivolous and overly decorative. However, its influence had already been enormous, not only in Britain, where it was dominant for 30 years, but in northern Europe, Russia and the United States, where the designs of Hepplewhite and Sheraton were very important FEDERAL PERIOD furniture makers.



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