

INFLUENCES THROUGH THE AGES

The Egyptians

The British archaeologist Howard Carter found the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922. When it was opened, it was not the boy pharaoh that stimulated so much interest but the other contents that the tomb contained. The solid gold mask and the intricate jewellery that lay next to his body encased within the tomb gave the greatest insight of all as to how the Egyptians lived. Their love of ornament and design was the start of the search which was to typify the magnificence of early Egyptian style.

Early digging revealed that basic every day household items were adorned with decoration that by today's standards would be considered remarkable. The Egyptians have never given up their secrets easily so we still are not sure where their passion or inspiration for design originated.



The Romans

The Romans were the masters of design and still are in many ways especially in regard to classic ideals. They loved to show off their wealth and status and would not tolerate anything less than luxurious living and lavish style. Their passion for beautiful things and comfortable style was paramount. Their designs are as remarkable today as they were then, simply because what they were able to achieve in terms of interior decoration, remains unsurpassed even by today's standards.



Their beautiful painted interiors incorporating murals and mosaic floors were the most amazing design achievement for that period. They designed and built furniture, claw footed tables, chairs, occasional furniture and even soft furnishings with all the trims and embellishments their imagination could conjure up.

The Ancient Greeks

The Ancient Greeks were more widely celebrated for the heavenly style of architecture still so apparent in the ancient city of Athens but little known for their interiors.

Classic Greek architecture is made up of three different orders that are most seen in their temples. They are Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. The orders are known because of their column style.

At the end of the Dark Ages, with the beginning of the Iron Age and the Archaic period in Greece, we saw a new type of building: the temple for the gods. These earliest temples are built in the Doric style. There were also houses, roads and bridges and stone walls being built.

In the Classical period, there are more temples, they were larger, with new design ideas: the Parthenon was built in the 440's BC. People began to build in the Ionic style. Democracy prevented the Greeks from building palaces or big tombs, because politically all men were supposed to be equal, and so it would look bad to have a big palace even if they could afford it. Instead, the Greeks built public buildings: gymnasia, and stoas, where men met and talked.

By the 300's BC, in the Hellenistic period, there were some new architectural features. People began to spend less time on temples. The new form was the theatre, and many theatres were built all over the Greek world. Also, there was a new interest in town planning. Streets begun to be laid out in straight lines, instead of just developing naturally.

When you look at what kind of architecture we are producing today along with the iron and electronic technology available, it still does not nearly compare to the works of art carried out our Greek and roman ancestors so long ago in history.



Monastic & Cold Europe

With the uprising of Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire, a cold and monastic style swept across England and Europe. Gone were the classical lines and the freedom of design. Influenced by the climate, the threat of invasion and politics of the day, in came the sober and austere attitude of the Church.

Beautiful columns and graceful architecture were replaced with dark wood panelling. Castles were built as fortresses not homes and living standards went down not up as invasion from foreign shores threatened.

Gothic

The Gothic period evolved in the 12th century in France. It was an eerie and austere contribution to architecture design and just a little uncomfortable to look at.

Architects had to be very careful when it came to respecting the Church and in this case, it is plain to see that a different and very sober style of design, especially in England, emerged as a result of being under the suspicious eye of the Church at which time held tremendous power.



If designers were suspected of following the ideals of classical Roman architecture they were in grave danger. In those days, there only had to be the tiniest hint of treason or suspicious practices and you could be hurtled into the next world without a trial.

Renaissance

This period spanning 1450-1600 was a time when Europe was able to emerge from the dark ages of stagnation and decline. It was a time of revival and celebration of all that was good in the social arts.

The term Renaissance is French for rebirth and indeed the Renaissance period was literally the “Rebirth”, because it revived and developed certain elements of Classical Greek and Roman thought and material culture.

Of all the arts, the “rebirth” was most apparent in Architecture. The Renaissance encouraged logical and methodical thinking and with it a conscious revival of Roman Architecture with its symmetry, its mathematical proportions, geometrically-perfect designs and regularity of parts. Columns and lintels were arranged orderly. Surfaces were regularly divided, semicircular arches and hemispherical domes replaced the haphazard proportions and irregular gabled facades which preceded the new style.



The cities of Italy in the early 1400s and Florence in particular were cultural centers. Beautiful music, the arts in all forms, social, political and cultural issues were on the agenda in the intellectual sense. It was a wonderful time of great progress. Italian architect Andrea Palladio 1508-1580 who is one of the most celebrated architects of all time Renaissance Architecture:

Regency

The Regency style of architecture refers primarily to buildings built in Britain during the period in the early 19th century when George IV was still Prince Regent, and also to later buildings following the same style.

The Georgian Style of architecture has an air of elegance and light. Many buildings of this style have a white painted stucco facade and an entrance to the main front door (usually coloured black) which is framed by two columns. Regency residences typically are built as terraces or crescents. Elegant wrought iron balconies and bay windows came into fashion as part of this style.

John Nash produced fine examples of Regency architecture in Regent's Park and Regent Street in London. There are also many streets in the style in the areas around Victoria, Mayfair and other central districts. The town of Cheltenham in Gloucestershire provides many fine examples of Regency architecture as does the city of Brighton in Sussex.



The term Regency style is also applied to interior design of the period, typified by elegant furniture and vertically striped wallpaper, and to styles of clothing; for males, as typified by the dandy Beau Brummell, for women the Empire silhouette.

Victorian

Queen Victoria was on the throne from (1837-1901) Because she reigned for so long, it was only natural that so many design styles should evolve in that time.

Victorianism can be virtually anything you wish to make of it. It was the time for the reintroduction of Gothic, Romanesque and Classical designs, as well as a time for the introduction of its own movement – Arts and Crafts.



However, 'Victorian' in the context of interiors was a time of innovation and mass production in industry and excessive use of pattern, ornaments and so on.

In the homes of the affluent, the classic image is of a dark drawing room with busy patterned wallpaper clashing with an equally busy carpet. Colours during this time were often mixed together in strange ways and were likely to be strong and vibrant. Sitting rooms and dining rooms were likely to be decorated in different shades of red, greens or in blues and purples either in the form of paint or, more commonly, elaborate wallpaper. Bedrooms were often quite tame by comparison being decorated in pinks, greys, blues and greens. Paint techniques such as sponging and stencilling were also common particularly if expensive wallpaper could not be afforded.

Rooms usually had an open fire surrounded by an elaborate fireplace and mantelpiece covered in ornaments with a massive gilt mirror over it. Heavy drapes at the stained glass window would keep out the light as well as the dust from the factories and mills. Over stuffed horse-hair furniture, paintings covering large amounts of the wall and photographs would adorn a piano.

Furniture was solid and ornate and in large proportions. It was made from dark wood and tables and chests were often topped with marble. Chairs were overstuffed and covered in velvets and damasks or highly patterned cottons.

Soft furnishings were made from expensive materials such as silk, velvet, damask and particularly chintz and chenille. Floral patterns were very common and trimmings were such as deep fringes and tassels were often used.

Flooring was mainly of hardwood highly polished and topped with deep, woven or dyed rugs from the Far East. In hallways it was common to find tiles set in a geometric pattern using either dull reds, blacks, greys or creams.

Lighting at the beginning of this era this was only by candle but as the century progressed, first gas and then electric lighting was introduced. Elaborately worked metal candelabras were common. Victorian lamps were made from metal with clear or etched glass chimneys or the classic fringed shaded china lamp decorated with children, classical figures or cupids. Wall scones were also very common. Tiffany glass lamps were also popular.