

# furniture line



## *A history of happenings that shaped your favorites pieces*

So where did our furniture obsession begin? What's now a desire started as a need, and we're happy to say that furniture design has come a long way since stone beds were en vogue. When hunter-gatherer communities started to settle into more agriculture-based civilizations, they used stone, the most readily accessible material, to build homes and furniture, and the seeds of home design were planted.

But while most of Europe was still in the Stone Age with Barney Rubble, over in Ancient Egypt, culture was rapidly developing. In between setting up a government and developing one of the first written languages, the Egyptians also found some time to furnish the palaces of pharaohs with ornate gilded furniture—and they thought it was so knockout they tried to take it with them into the afterlife, too. Even Egyptians of the non-ruling class were constructing simple chairs, tables and baskets.

Early Greek furniture was heavily influenced by the rectangular styles of Egypt (Who wouldn't have wanted to emulate Cleopatra?), but by the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the Greeks had found their groove, and were creating pieces with softened angles and curved lines. And they did their predecessors one better by using their knowledge of the human body to create pieces that were actually comfortable to sit in. It was during this time that our favorite klismos chair was born. Some inlays and carvings served as decoration, but embellishments were significantly toned down from the

designs of the Egyptians, who, dare we say, may have gone a little over-the-top with the gilding.

When Greece was annexed by the Roman Empire in 146 BC, Greek design was put in place to influence European furniture styles for centuries to come. But by the medieval years, furniture had become less about form and more about function. Famine arose, the Black Death killed nearly one third of the European population, and kings were constantly fighting with each other to expand their borders and influence. Safe to say, it was not a great environment for creativity. Most families had few pieces of furniture, and the ones they did have were light and portable, making it easier to quickly escape conflicts or move for work opportunities.

The Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, brought about a renewed interest in design. Creative minds like Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael offered new ideas about art, science, religion and philosophy. Though furniture styles differed among countries, across Europe, designs were heavily influenced by the Greek and Roman styles of an earlier era. A new class of skilled craftsmen had emerged, and was carving elaborate designs into cabinets, chairs, table legs and other wooden pieces, including chests, of which some families owned hundreds. Beds were status symbols, and rope beds were the most common. In more modest homes, people slept directly on the ropes, but wealthier families could afford the comfort of a mattress.

In England, during the reign of Elizabeth I in the late 16th century, Elizabethan furniture took shape, characterized by enormous scale, heavy ornamentation, and tons of scrollwork. Rarely was there a table without skillful joinery work or a bed that was not enormous, four-poster and elaborately carved with fruit and floral designs.

But things got really heavy—figuratively speaking—when Oliver Cromwell took over England as Lord Protector in 1653. An extremely religious man, Cromwell imposed fines for swearing, and banned makeup and Christmas celebrations. Following suit, under his rule, furniture design became simple and utilitarian. Cromwell’s son Richard succeeded him when Oliver died in 1658, but he clearly couldn’t hack it; and in 1660, Charles II returned from exile to become king of England. After Charles had Cromwell’s body exhumed from Westminster Abbey and hanged near Hyde Park in London, he introduced the English to the flamboyant Carolean (also

known as “Restoration”) style of furniture—a look he’d discovered during his exile in France and Holland. (And if “exile” means traveling across Europe checking out the latest in décor and design, sign us up!)

It was around this time that the first settlers arrived in America, founding Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, and the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts

in 1620, bringing with them Jacobean and Carolean-style furniture from England. Though French and English influences are very evident in early American designs, the settlers soon created their own sturdy, heavily carved pieces in which practicality trumped decoration, and fit the utilitarian needs of their lives in the colonies. The earliest American-made piece of furni-

ture is a chest made by Nicholas Disbrowe, around 1660.

In France, rococo furniture, also referred to as “late baroque,” originated in Paris in the early 18th century, as a reaction to the grand, symmetrical and strict designs of earlier baroque, particularly those used in the Palace of Versailles. Furniture had become a status symbol for the French upper classes, who



### Ancient Egypt

Klismos chair, price upon request, Eric Appel LLC Antiques, NYC, 212-605-9960, ericappel.com.

### Jacobean

Seventeenth-century Jacobean oak chest, circa 1680s, \$3,800, The Antique & Artisan Center, Stamford, 203-327-6022, stamfordantiques.com

# 1600S

# 4000 BC



wanted versatile, comfortable pieces with some stylish, playful flair. Furniture became lighter in both weight and color (pastels abounded), and designs were whimsical and often asymmetrical. Furniture was no longer anchored to walls, and could be easily moved around to accommodate guests at parties and gatherings.

In Great Britain, the ever-

popular designs of Thomas Chippendale's were a more refined take on rococo, keeping the curves and general whimsy, but nothing so over-the-top. Or, in other words, although you may be attracted to the wild charm of rococo, Chippendale is the furniture you can take home to Mom.

In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought

technology that allowed furniture manufacturers to mass-produce pieces to meet the demands of a new class of wealthy furniture buyers. Greek, Egyptian, Rococo, and Renaissance—among other—revival styles were disseminated through pattern books and journals to furniture makers and the general public. And as mass production rose, the age of the

skilled craftsman was petering out. Something else that was created during this time: Those “industrial” lamps and tables that are back in style today—by people who actually worked in factories.

Later in the 19th century, “Art Nouveau” (French for “new art”) emerged in Paris. A reaction to academic art of time, it sought to harmonize

## early 1700s



## late 1600s

### *Early American*

Connecticut Cherry Queen Anne Highboy, circa 1750, \$28,000, George Subkoff Antiques, Inc.



### *Rococo*

Italian Rococo Gilt Mirror, circa 1730-40, \$35,000, George Subkoff Antiques, Inc., Westport, 203-227-3515, [subkoffantiques.com](http://subkoffantiques.com)



### *Chippendale*

Set of four Chippendale mahogany side chairs, circa 1770, \$12,500, George Subkoff Antiques, Inc.

## late 1700s

with the natural environment, indulging in natural forms like flowers and plants, and also the organic feeling of flowing lines and “whiplash” curves. The style was heavily influenced by Czech artist Alphonse Mucha’s lithographed advertisement for a play featuring Sarah Bernhardt, which appeared on the streets of Paris in 1895. Hard woods and iron were often used for strong

but slim support structure in furniture designs.

In the 1920s Art Nouveau was succeeded by Art Deco style: Elegant, glamorous, and modern, its linear, symmetrical designs contrasted with Art Nouveau’s flowing, more whimsical look. However, the style lost popularity in the 1930s and early 1940s, when people started to see it as a façade for false luxury, and

when World War II began, just like Jay Gatsby, Art Deco met its end.

In Germany, architect Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus school in 1919, with the revolutionary idea that all design, including architecture, art and furniture, would be brought together. Its last director before being shut down under pressure from the Nazi regime was

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1930-1933), but we got some of the best-known pieces of furniture from the school—both the Cesca and Wassily chairs are by Marcel Breuer, who was involved with the school.

After the war, furniture designers started used materials developed during the crisis, including laminated plywood, fiberglass and plastic, to make



### Bauhaus

Cesca Chairs by Marcel Breuer, 1920s. \$495 each (two armchairs and three side chairs available), Montage, Westport, 203-349-5859, montagemodern.com

## 1920S

### Art Deco

Art Deco dressing table, late 1920s, AWK Design Antiques, Stamford, 203-984-4222, awkdesignantiques.com.



### Mid-Century

Edward Wormely Extra Long Chaise, early 1960s, \$14,750, Gallipoli, Stamford, 203-594-7917.

## early 1900S



## 1950S

new, innovative designs. Out of the Bauhaus and Art Deco styles came the post-WWII mid-century Modern style. No more gilding, no more dark wood: Simple, polished metal was the basis for original, technologically innovative designs that looked toward the future, rather than reviving the past.

The middle of the century into the 1960s saw the creation

of many of the furniture pieces that are still so hot today: Hans Wegner's wishbone chair (1949), Eero Saarinen's pedestal table (1956), Arne Jacobsen's egg chair (1958), among them. There was an explosion of radical social and political change in the United States, and furniture designs became more over-the-top and groovier too. Women were entering the workforce in larger

numbers than ever, TV was coming into homes in Technicolor, college students were getting into political activism, and the Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements took shape. Curvy, colorful furniture took shape as well, including Verner Panton's cantilevered stacking chair (1960) and Eero Aarnio's Ball chair (1963). By the 1970s, designs had become slightly more restrained.

The 80s, the 90s—some things are better left in the past. Overstuffed upholstered furniture, bad abstract art, and ugly color combos defined this era, and unless improved upon, we are happy to leave these styles in the past.

In response to the neon-centric decades preceding it, modern furniture is minimal and geometric, with clean lines and little decoration or pattern, if any. Critics call it cold, but in an ever more technological world, many modern Americans are overstimulated by phone calls, e-mails and texts, and a home with clean lines and a neutral palette is what they need to decompress.

Today, the chicest thing in furniture is mixing all periods, from klismos chairs to Art Deco lamps to sleek modern pieces—but getting it right is no easy task. We've asked twelve designers to show us how they mix up the past to create a look that's all new and now. >>

# 1960s

## Modern Classic

Warren Platner  
Lounge Chair,  
circa 1960s,  
\$2,700, 33Now  
Gallery, Stamford,  
203-858-1155,  
33nowllc.com



Inside Out  
Bookshelf, Polart,  
polart.com.mx

### RESOURCES

[onlinedesignteacher.com](http://onlinedesignteacher.com)

[Furniturestyles.net](http://Furniturestyles.net)

[Gutenberg.org](http://Gutenberg.org)

[Metmuseum.org](http://Metmuseum.org)

[Encyclopedia Britannica, Britannica.com](http://Encyclopedia Britannica, Britannica.com)

[Victoria & Albert Museum, vam.ac.uk](http://Victoria & Albert Museum, vam.ac.uk)

# today >>

**T**hese top interior designers know how to create modern classics with pieces from past and present.



1

*"A Parsons-type table can be reproduced simply or with luxurious finishes, and virtually any chair with style, old or new, looks good with this form. The more extreme the shape and the more antique, with beautiful old surfaces, the better. Good design is always about contrasts, both subtle and extreme, and in this combination the chairs you select will set the tone."*

**-Thomas Jayne, Jayne Design Studio**



2

*"I love the juxtaposition of contemporary artist Anish Kapoor's concave sculpture over the 20th-century John Dickinson original draped console (now being reproduced by Sutherland), next to the 19th-century gilded rope chair and 18th-century George III carved console. The play of periods and simplicity of shape next to the elaborate carvings create interest which, along with the colors and finishes, make it all come together."*

**-Alex Papachristidis, Alex Papachristidis Interiors**



3



*"In my living room, you see a Willem De Kooning abstract oil on vellum c. 1970, hung above an 18th-century style, black-lacquered Jansen commode with Chinoiserie decoration. This juxtaposition of traditional furniture and modern art is very exciting to me, and I also delight in the subtlety and richness of decorative paint—here a terra cotta Venetian stucco with an overwhelm of gold."*

**-Ellie Cullman, Cullman & Kravis**



THOMAS HEADSHOT AND ROOM SHOT BY PIETER ESTERSOHN; ALEX HEADSHOT BY DONNA GOODMAN



"My home is more than where the heart is. Like most designers, it's also my canvas with which to experiment. My living room encompasses my ideology of a pleasant tension. Putting disparate objects and furniture together not only helps to mix it all up, but also creates this pleasant juxtaposition of forms. I love the patina of antiques in sharp contrast to the perfection of new furniture, and truly believe that all good things go together."  
**-Amanda Nisbet,**  
**Amanda Nisbet Design, Inc.**



"Furnishing a home is like making the guest list for the perfect party: It's all about the mix. You need some introverted, some extroverted, and a sense of welcome to bring everything together. In this project, it was vital to create a neutral foundation of key pieces so that vintage pieces could float throughout. The result is a fresh take on "traditional," in which the antiques dance around the space and ignite it with a sense of style."  
**-Jon Call,**  
**MR CALL DESIGNS**

JON ROOM SHOT BY PHILIP FICKS





"I have had to navigate a number of keepsakes throughout my career. This was perhaps the crown jewel, and yes, it is the least obvious challenge to the room. I designed the petite 'edifice' of sorts to support this rock from Mr. Kilimanjaro, which was given to my client by a dignitary. Thank goodness he had worked with me previously on another apartment, so he was well aware of how my mind works. The daybed is period Art Deco, and the tripod table, American-antique though modern and timeless in their simplicity."  
**-Darryl Carter, Darryl Carter, Inc.**



6

7

"In cases such as this living room, a very special antique piece (here, the desk) has been paired with a dramatic modern piece (the lamp). In pairings like this, where both pieces are very strong but hail from distinct periods of design, an exciting tension is created between them and the presence of both becomes stronger and more noticeable."

**-Lucien Rees Roberts, Rees Roberts + Partners, LLC**



THIS PAGE: DARRYL HEADSHOT BY STEVE PROCKO, ROOM SHOT BY GORDON BEALL; LUCIEN PHOTOS BY SCOTT FRANCES/OTTO; MARY HEADSHOT BY NINELLE EFREMOVA, ROOM SHOT BY MIGUEL FLORES-VIANNA



8

"I feel adding a very modern piece of art, lighting or Lucite to an otherwise traditional classic interior always heightens the contemporary relevance of a room."  
**-Mary McDonald, Mary McDonald, Inc.**



"Mixing eras takes tremendous restraint. It's easy to have an interior with an eclectic collection turn out looking like all the ingredients were thrown into one big pot. It's far better to have a room unfold gradually and with intention, like a five-course meal."

**-Eric Cohler, Eric Cohler Design**



9





# 10

*"My key to mixing old and new is using bold color, and not being afraid to combine different periods, shapes and forms. For example, in this room, the clean lines of the custom-designed sofa are juxtaposed with the opposing pair of Art Deco mahogany-and-brass armchairs."*

**—Jamie Drake, Drake Design Associates**



*"Blending quality antiques with new pieces adds instant style and character to a room, and the balance of the two is what makes a space unique. Instead of a room that anyone can duplicate, the antique is a one-of-a-kind piece that contributes to making a room classic and timeless."*

**—Matthew Patrick Smyth, Matthew Patrick Smyth, Inc.**



# 12



*"The best decorating tip we can offer is to buy things you absolutely love and cannot live without. Even if you don't know where to put them at that moment, you will find a way to work them in, and those pieces usually become the most interesting parts of a room. If you buy something you don't like, but think you should, it is never going to work, and you will pass it every day and feel regretful!"*

**—Kelli Ford & Kirsten Fitzgibbons, Kirsten Kelli, LLC**