

How To Identify Traditional Furniture Styles

No question about it — designing a room is hard work. Selecting colors, fabrics and furniture that work together to create a comfortable, beautiful environment requires an eye for design that's difficult to acquire.

You can, however, learn to identify the styles of furniture that best suit your personal decorating needs. By paying careful attention to details you'll be able to choose pieces that complement your home and each other, according to Tom Burak, fashion director at Pennsylvania House, makers of fine quality furniture.

"Although trends in home furnishings tend to change from year to year, classic furniture designs remain popular and versatile choices," says Burak.

"Whether it's Colonial, Queen Anne or Chippendale, there is a variety of furniture styles available today in a wide range of prices, many inspired by priceless originals but refined to suit today's active lifestyles." Burak offers several suggestions to help the furniture shopper identify these popular styles.

"Most furniture styles are characterized by a particular silhouette, shape or proportion," he says. "Long tapering legs, a square back or gently curving arms and decorative carved motifs like shells, acanthus leaves, or ribbons all offer clues to identifying each style or period."

An understanding of the basic history of furniture is also helpful, notes Burak. "For example, during the early Colonial period, American furniture design was utilitarian with few fanciful elements. Painted designs, usually on native pine, were the only sign of decoration.

"As the country grew, fine craftsmen and cabinet-makers brought more elaborate designs from England to the New World," Burak continues.

"Decorative elements such as lyres, pineapples and lion claws were combined with curved lines to achieve massive proportions. The legs frequently curved outward, arms of chairs swept downward in a graceful curve."

The cockle-shell ornamental carving, used to decorate the crest of chairbacks, the knee of cabriole legs and the center of drawers, distinguishes Queen Anne furniture.

"The graceful S-curve is found on chairbacks, mirrors and even table tops," says Burak. "To complement the elegant silhouette, furniture sur-

faces were kept simple. Veneering and lacquers were used to add detail to the sophisticated designs.

The furniture of Queen Anne's time reflect a refinement in grace and comfort. "To provide comfort, chairbacks were shaped to contour to the body. The upholstered wing chair made its debut during this era, and is one of Pennsylvania House's most popular styles today," ex-

plains Burak. Thomas Chippendale's style offers richly carved surfaces with gracefully proportioned curves, according to Burak. "The claw-and-ball foot, used with cabriole legs, is one of the most characteristic motifs.

"Acanthus leaves, knotted ribbons and elaborate fretwork are borrowed from the Oriental, Gothic and Queen Anne

styles and incorporated into distinctive, easily identified designs."

Pennsylvania House's Philadelphia Highboy is inspired by an original Chippendale design, Burak adds.

Masters of cabinetmaking and inlay, Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite followed classic lines to create restrained, dignified pieces.

"Perpendicular lines and graceful sweeping curves were characteristic," says Burak. "Oval shapes, lyres and latticework were used with delicately turned legs and careful inlays and veneers. Adaptations of antique Sheraton and Hepplewhite pieces are scaled down to suit today's smaller spaces in Pennsylvania House's new 18th Century Cherry Collection.

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