

# Furniture Style Guide

## Furniture Styles Throughout History

Because of its very long history through time, any **Furniture Style Guide** that attempted to cover every development in detail could become unmanageably large. Our intent at Furniture From Home is to provide you with an overview of the important times that influenced furniture designs over the centuries as well as a quick look at the furniture styles commonly available today.

Skilled craftsmen have been constructing furniture since the Stone Age. Although actual pieces of furniture have not survived that long, evidence that furniture was in use are provided by surviving ancient artworks in pottery and frescos. The oldest known actual piece of furniture may date as far back as 3,000 BC. Early Egyptian furniture was placed in tombs and some of it has been recovered as it was preserved in a sealed environment. Additionally, some early Egyptian pieces have been recreated based on archaeological findings.

### Greek, Roman and Egyptian Influences

The Greek love of beauty and art extended to furniture design, which evolved from ancient Egyptian furniture and simple pieces of Greek furniture were considered works of art in many Greek households. The main items of Roman furniture found in the best houses were couches or beds (lectus), chairs and stools, tables and lamps. Since Romans treasured open space, the main focal points in Roman décor were centered on artworks and fountains used prominently in the home.

Greek, Roman and Egyptian decor was the inspiration for the neoclassical furniture styles popular in Europe and America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

### English and European Influences on American Furniture

American furniture styles were greatly influenced by the English as well as by the European immigrants who settled here. Over the past 400 years or so, styles of American furniture evolved through a number of important periods and influential eras. While it would be impractical to include all of the influences on American furniture styles and construction, an abridged summary is provided here in the hope that it may help give you a better idea of how furniture styles have evolved and useful information on the characteristics of certain styles that continue to be mimicked and admired today.

- **Jacobean (1600-1690)** – Much of American furniture in its early days was based on this medieval English style of furniture. Sturdy furniture with rather straight lines, dark finishes and ornate carvings are characteristic of Jacobean styles.
- **Early American (1640-1700)** – Based largely on English, French, Scandinavian and Spanish styles, Early American furniture in this period was built from readily available local furniture woods and built more for rugged comfort than refined elegance.
- **William and Mary (1690-1725)** – A tribute to royals William and Mary of England, furniture crafted in this style used ornately turned legs with a ball or Spanish foot at the end of each leg, as well as caned seats and beautiful Oriental lacquers. William and Mary styles later influenced Colonial furniture.
- **Queen Anne (1700-1755)** – Queen Anne styles are based on William and Mary period furniture with some refinements. Queen Anne furniture is moderately proportioned, often constructed from Walnut, and is characterized by a variety of feet, including claw and ball, scroll, spade and square feet, as well as wing back and fiddle-back chairs. Over time, the Queen Anne period evolved from the very ornate and decorative, appealing to the elite society, to refined and comfortable, yet delicate: equally appealing to a much broader base of society. Georgian furniture (1714-1760) also appeared during this time, and is considered a more ornate version of the Queen Anne style.
- **Colonial (1700-1780)** – American Colonial furniture styles were influenced by some of the style characteristics of the William and Mary and Queen Anne periods. During the mid to latter part of the Colonial era, designs were also influenced by the strength and simplicity of country made furniture designs by Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779) of England. In the United States, the Chippendale style was a more elaborate version of Queen Anne style with cabriole legs, ball-and-claw feet, and broken pediment scroll tops on taller pieces.
- **Georgian (1714-1760)** – Coinciding with the reign of Kings George I and George II of England from 1714-1760, in terms of furniture, works from this period can be described as more ornate versions of Queen Anne furniture, with heavier proportions, elaborate carvings and gilding.
- **Federal (1780-1820)** – It was during the Federal era, around the birth of an independent America, when some of the most beautiful and elegant antique furniture was produced. Federal era furniture in America was often constructed of cherry and sometimes red-stained walnut, unlike British Federal furniture, which was often mahogany. Many American Federal furniture works incorporated symbols of the new-found American freedom, like eagles and stars. Some of the important, influential furniture designers of this period included Duncan Phyfe, John Shaw, John Dolan and Samuel McIntire. The styles of English designers Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite also influenced American Federal design. Outstanding examples of American Federal furniture have been preserved and are on display in museums and historic homes in many of the historic districts around the nation's capital, such as Georgetown, Alexandria, and Rosslyn, Virginia.

- **Shaker (1820-1860)** – Shaker furniture represents a substantial contribution of the utilitarian lifestyle of the religious group, the United Society of Believers. Living in self-contained communities, Shaker craftsmen were responsible for creating “beauty through utility”. Shaker furniture was often constructed from maple, and sometimes cherry, birch, and walnut: furniture woods that were readily available within their communities. Shaker chairs, including side chairs used at meetings, and rocking chairs for the elderly, sewing rockers for Shaker women, made without arms to allow access to the sewing basket, are all important contributions to American furniture design. Shaker communities continue to exist today, where furniture craftsmen continue to construct beautifully practical, handmade furniture pieces in small numbers, with careful attention to detail. Shaker style is characterized by straight tapered legs (tilted legs on chairs, with ball and socket construction) and mushroom shaped wooden knobs.
- **Victorian (1840-1910)** – Extending for a period of 70 years during the reign of Queen Victoria, the Victorian era in England saw noted changes from its early days to late Victorian style. During its early years, no single style emerged as dominant. Instead, furniture was styled around influences from earlier periods, including Gothic, Tudor, Elizabethan, Renaissance, English Rococo, and Neo Classical. Ornamentation was extensive, and, in the opinion of some, a bit overdone. Mahogany and rosewood were often used, and, to a lesser extent, oak in furniture designed for the masses. Iron and paper maches were also used in some pieces. During the latter part of the Victorian era, the Arts and Crafts and the Aesthetic or Art Furniture movement were born. A number of antique styles were also revived. Late Victorian furniture was known for its straight lines and solid woods with dark stains and less upholstery than earlier Victorian pieces. Painted decorations replaced carvings. The Victorian period was the first furniture style to be mass produced.
- **Arts and Craft (1880-1910)** – Furniture from the Arts and Craft movement (also referred to as Mission style) is characterized by simple utilitarian design, and construction, just as Shaker design was centered on utility. William Morris and John Ruskin inspired the movement, which was in part meant to restore the craft of handmade furniture. Victorian Arts and Crafts style furniture in England was handmade in a country or farmhouse style and often looked good, but in some cases, was uncomfortable for sitting.

No Furniture Style Guide would be complete without mentioning at least a few other styles. For example, Pennsylvania Dutch style is a reflection of the Pennsylvania Dutch way of life - simple, utilitarian and focused on quality craftsmanship. It is characterized by colorful hand painted motifs, massive cupboards of walnut or cherry, sometimes also painted with fruit or floral decorations. Like the Shakers, Amish, Mennonite and Pennsylvania Dutch communities still exist today and the furnishings, rugs, quilts and other products they produce have retained their exceptional quality craftsmanship and beauty. Scandinavian Contemporary style originated from Danish and Swedish craftsmen. It emphasizes utility (function over form) with straight or sometimes gently curving lines and little to no ornamentation.

## Today’s Furniture Styles

### Traditional Furniture

Traditional is the most formal of furniture styles today. Rich, elegant and refined, traditional furnishings incorporate rich fabrics with darker furniture woods like mahogany and cherry. Traditional style gets its influences from some of the great eras in furniture history, including Victorian, Queen Anne and Chippendale and may incorporate design elements from different American and English historical eras.

### Traditional Furniture Style Example



Traditional Elegant Living Room Furniture Set

## Casual Furniture

Today's casual styles are a reflection of the more laid-back, less formal lifestyle that many Americans embrace today. Casual furniture styles include overstuffed sofas constructed of a variety of lush, easy-to-clean fabric covers. A variety of furniture woods are used, including maple, oak and pine, often with matte finishes. Colors are often neutral or earth-toned. Casual décor is cozy, comfortable and warm as well as designed for easy and unpretentious living.

### Casual Furniture Style Example



### [Casual Faux Leather Living Room Set](#)

Casual furniture styles may be further classified into Country Casual, Casual Contemporary, and Casual Traditional categories.

## Country Furniture

Home and hearth, that's what Country furniture is all about. Country gets its influences from American, European and even Mexican furniture. Country style is versatile - it may be rustic, like the décor of a log cabin, homey like a lakeside cottage, or it may use softer designs like those of America's first settlers where ruffled skirts were popular on upholstered pieces. Most frequently used furniture woods include pine, oak, maple and ash. Finishes may be intentionally distressed to add "character" or they may be painted; fabrics can run the gamut from soft denim, flowery chintz or linen and often include gingham checks or subtle plaids. Décor accessories may also evoke comfort, like oval braided rugs over hardwood stained or painted floors, needlework and beautiful quilts or antique bottles and American flags. Country style may also be labeled as Country Casual, although as a rule, Country style is inherently casual.

### Country Furniture Style Example





### Floral Country Living Room Furniture Set

## **Contemporary Furniture**

With Contemporary style, function is the primary focus. Designs are typically simple, without much ornamentation, sleek and streamlined. The simpler lines of the Shaker, Mission and Scandinavian may be incorporated into the furniture. The look is modern, fabrics may be bright and bold without much patterning. Contemporary furniture is usually mated with larger accessories and artwork to create a crisp, uncomplicated interior décor.

### **Contemporary Furniture Style Example**



### Contemporary Bedroom Furniture Set

Additional classifications of this style include Casual Contemporary and Modern Contemporary.

## **Modern Furniture**

Sharp and linear, clean and crisp, the Modern style goes one or more steps beyond Contemporary and may even include retro or Art Deco elements. Wood, chrome, steel and glass may all play a role in the decor of the Modern home. Upholstery fabrics are mostly simple but may be textured or tightly woven. Splashes of bold color work or blacks and grays work well with the Modern style, as does the timeless look of leather.

### **Modern Furniture Style Example**



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## [Modern Living Room Sectional Sofa Set](#)

### **Mixed Furniture Styles**

Not all of today's furniture or home décor fits neatly into one style category. A hybrid of mixed styles will often grace American homes to meet the wide variety of consumer style preferences.

#### **Casual Contemporary**

Contemporary style with a casual flair can make for a comfortable home in which the furnishings are functional and relaxed, yet up to date in appearance. Furniture wood and finishes may be light like maple or birch, mid-range in Oak, or darkly stained in coffee or espresso shades. The Arts and Craft influence of Mission furniture, leather or microfiber-covered sofas and chairs all fit in the Casual Contemporary home.

#### **Casual Contemporary Furniture Style Example**



#### [Casual Contemporary Dining Room Furniture Set](#)

#### **Casual Traditional**

A blend of Casual and Traditional styles in the home may feature handsomely carved but comfortable furniture for a lived-in look with touches of style elegance. Fabrics may be softly neutral but with a trim, tailored look. Many of today's furniture for use in a home theater, like handsome leather recliners and sofas, along with solid wood entertainment centers work well with the Casual Traditional style.

#### **Casual Traditional Furniture Style Example**





### [Traditional Cherry Wood Casual Dining Room Set](#)

#### **Eclectic**

Interiors that mix compatible or complementary styles in order to achieve a unique and individual look are said to be Eclectic – in that they strive to use the best of what may be several styles. Eclectic décor often includes collectors' items from across the globe or unique works of art and pottery. Furniture woods and upholstery fabrics may run the full range of available choices, textures and colors. In fact, color is often used to create harmony in the design of a room.

We hope you have enjoyed this **Furniture Style Guide**, that you've found it useful and that you'll pass it on to friends and relatives. Furniture From Home offers an outstanding selection of quality furniture no matter what style you prefer. And, except where specifically noted otherwise, all of our furniture includes FREE white glove delivery!