

CHINOISERIE: ANCIENT CHARM. MODERN CHIC.

Asian-inspired chinoiserie has been a symbol of luxury in interior design for centuries. A look at the style's origins, motifs, and influences reveals its timeless appeal.

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Chinoiserie (pronounced shen-wah-seh-ree) is a French word meaning "Chinese-like." The style is ancient, with an ageless appeal that continues to add drama and elegance to even the most modern interiors.

Chinoiserie began in the 17th century when wealthy Europeans became fascinated with Eastern cultures. At the time, trade was limited and actual artifacts were rare, so artists created their own versions of traditional Asian design, altering the scale and proportion to better suit their European taste. The result was the first East-meets-West design style.

Monarchs including King Louis XV of France and Britain's King George IV decorated their palaces and castles with chinoiserie; its highly ornamental accents blended well with their rococo style. Tea drinking added to the style's appeal, as aristocratic ladies collected exotic porcelain to display during tea.

Chinoiserie peaked around the middle of the 18th century as rising trade with China and East Asia brought Chinese and Indian goods into Europe. It enjoyed a renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s when it was combined with Art Deco to create a fusion of exoticism.



Clockwise from top left:

Brighton Pavillion by Miles Redd for Schumacher / www.fschumacher.com

Sadler Brass Counter Stool / \$950 / www.worldsaway.com

Society Social Pagoda Pet Bed / \$510 / www.shopsocietysocial.com

Barry Dixon for Arteriors Pagoda Console / \$3,150 / www.arteriorshome.com

Made Goods Robin Pagoda / \$400 / www.madegoods.com



Interior Design by Phoebe Howard / www.phoebehoward.net

Blue-and-white porcelain was one of the main exports. The images found in that blue underglaze were the only available depictions of China and inspired European designers' first chinoiserie patterns.

Père Francois d'Entrecolles, a French Jesuit priest serving in China, made an important contribution to chinoiserie in 1712 when he wrote letters detailing the porcelain making he observed – a process held secret from foreigners.

Rococo artists Antoine Watteau and Francois Boucher were also influential, incorporating Chinese themes into their oil paintings. Architect Sir William Chambers constructed several chinoiserie-style pagodas in the Kew Gardens outside of London. Cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale's mahogany tea tables and china cabinets were embellished with fretwork glazing

and railings, providing a guide for intricate furniture and its decoration.

Centuries later, the style has endured because it is so adaptable. Interior designers love the key elements of chinoiserie's classic designs. The blue-and-white porcelain, lacquered tables, foo dogs, and intricate patterns mix easily with modern pieces to add whimsy and liven up neutral decor.

The style's staying power lives on through acclaimed interior designers and textile powerhouses including Darryl Carter, Barry Dixon, and Schumacher who embrace the luxury and glamour of chinoiserie with a new approach. They are reinventing the style in fresh colors, proportions, and materials to make it as relevant today as it was centuries ago.

Clockwise from top left:

De Gournay Hand-Painted Coco Coromandel Chinoiserie Four Panelled Folding Screen / \$14,250 / www.degournay.com

Selamat Bamboo Candle Stands / \$245.17 / www.selamatdesigns.com

Bungalow 5 Brighton Table Lamp / \$678 / www.bungalow5.com

Lillian August Oliver Cocktail Table / \$3,795 / www.goodshomefurnishings.com



KEY ELEMENTS:

Foo Dogs are actually Chinese guardian lions, which stand outside palaces and temples as symbols of protection. They are seen in pairs, male and female, to represent harmony and the balance of yin and yang.

Pagodas are integral in Eastern architecture, though they originated in India until the spread of Buddhism brought them to China.

Nature scenes, lush gardens, and sprawling floral motifs are featured in the hand-painted wallpaper, which grew popular among the European upper class.

Dragons are a symbol of strength and good luck, prominent in Chinese mythology and are found on ceramics, silk screens, works of art, and clothing.

Lacquered wood and faux bamboo are some of the most popular materials for chinoiserie furnishings.

Ceramics may be the most recognizable element of chinoiserie. Ginger jars were originally used for storage containers for spices in ancient China. When imported to Europe, they took on an aesthetic purpose and eventually becoming a decor classic.

Clockwise from top left:
Interior Design by Mark Phelps / www.markphelpsinteriors.com
Darryl Carter for Milling Road Pagoda Etagere / \$3,525 / www.bakerfurniture.com

Noir Chloe Chair / \$1,080 / www.noirfurniturela.com
Truex American Furniture Pagoda Table / \$2,275 / www.truexstyle.com
Ethan Allen Gold Chinoiserie Mirror / \$1,079 / www.ethanallen.com