

Triangle

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2018

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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.

Written by Nancy Atkinson
Produced by Ashley Hotham Cox

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:

Dana Gibson Bamboo Lantern / \$495 / www.danagibson.com
Worlds Away Molly Bamboo Sconce / \$347.50 / www.worldsaway.com
Chamberlain Etagere / \$1,503.20 / www.shopcandelabra.com
Frontgate Ming Ginger Vases and Jars / \$59- \$349 / www.frontgate.com
Ballard Designs Dayna Side Chairs / \$449 / www.ballarddesigns.com
Wisteria Hao White Stool / \$178.97 / www.wisteria.com





Interior Design by Phoebe Howard

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 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 Paneled Folding Screen / \$14,250 / www.degournay.com

Salamat Bamboo Candle Stands / \$245.17 / www.selematdesigns.com

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

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