

# A brief history of interior design

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Credit for the birth of interior design is most often given to the Ancient Egyptians, who decorated their humble mud huts with simple furniture enhanced by animal skins or textiles, as well as murals, sculptures, and painted vases. Beautiful gold ornaments found in Egyptian tombs (such as that of King Tutankhamen) revealed the importance of more lavish decoration for wealthier and powerful Egyptians. The Roman and Greek civilizations built upon the Egyptian art of interior decorating and accessorizing.

Both cultures celebrated civic pride through their development of domed-roof public buildings. In the home, elaborate Greek wooden furniture had ivory and silver ornamentation. The Romans placed special emphasis on combining beauty and comfort, and home interiors reflected wealth and status. Roman furniture made of stone, wood, or bronze was accented by cushions and tapestries. Both the Romans and Greeks used vases, mosaic floors, and wall paintings or frescoes to beautify interior spaces.

From this period of splendor and ornamentation, there was a sudden movement to austerity, brought on by the constant wars of Medieval Europe and the rise of the Christian church. The “ Dark Ages” were a time of somber wood paneling, minimal furniture, and stone-slab floors. Even the wealthier individuals of the time, who added decorative touches like wall fabrics and stone carvings, stuck to muted colors and simple textiles. Coming out of the Dark Ages, Europeans once again introduced color and ornamentation to their homes.

In the 12th century, the creative Gothic style was noted for its use of open interiors and windows to capture natural light. In the 15th and 16th

centuries, the French Renaissance (“rebirth”) led to a renewed focus on art and beauty in interior design. Architects created spaces with elaborate decorative elements such as marble floors, inlaid woodwork, paintings, and furniture made of the finest woods. The best examples of Renaissance interior design are found in the royal palaces, villas, and chapels of Europe. Following the Renaissance, the ornate Italian Baroque style became popular throughout Europe.

As exemplified in the Palace of Versailles in France, Baroque made use of such interior design elements as colored marble, stained glass, painted ceilings, and twisted columns. In the mid-18th century, European interior designers began favoring the Rococo style, showing particular appreciation for Asian porcelain, flower designs, and furniture inlaid with elegant materials like mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell. The late 18th century Neoclassical look, an offshoot of the classical design of ancient Rome, made heavy use of bronze, silk, satin, and velvet.

From the early 1800s on, however, in Europe and America, a trend had also started towards more freedom and eclecticism in interior design. Over the next two centuries, a number of innovative and modern interior design styles would come and go into fashion – including Art Deco, Art Nouveau, the minimalist look, and the industrial Bauhaus style. Another 19th century trend was the popularization of interior design. While once reserved for royal palaces or the homes of wealthy citizens, interior design in the 1800s began to reach the masses.

By the 20th century, the near-universal presence of home appliances such as stoves, washing machines, televisions, and telephones produced a new

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challenge for interior designers, who had to plan spaces not only for aesthetic purposes, but also for functionality. The field of interior design has come a long way from the mud and brick days of the ancient Egyptians. Designers today have access to both man-made and synthetic materials, and they can draw upon the influences of past generations while also continually striving to create new design trends.