

ASIAN

THE EXOTIC APPEAL OF SLEEK,
SIMPLE ACCENTS FROM THE FAR EAST

FUSION



Take off your shoes and pull up a pillow in this Japanese-style living room. The wide Maru coffee table doubles as a low dining table—creating a wonderful place to gather for casual conversation or entertaining. The Mizuya cabinet, at 8 feet tall, is a real presence in any room. Photo courtesy Greentea Design.



An altar cabinet from the Shan-xi province of China, circa 1875, possesses the original painted finish and features two drawers and two cabinet doors.

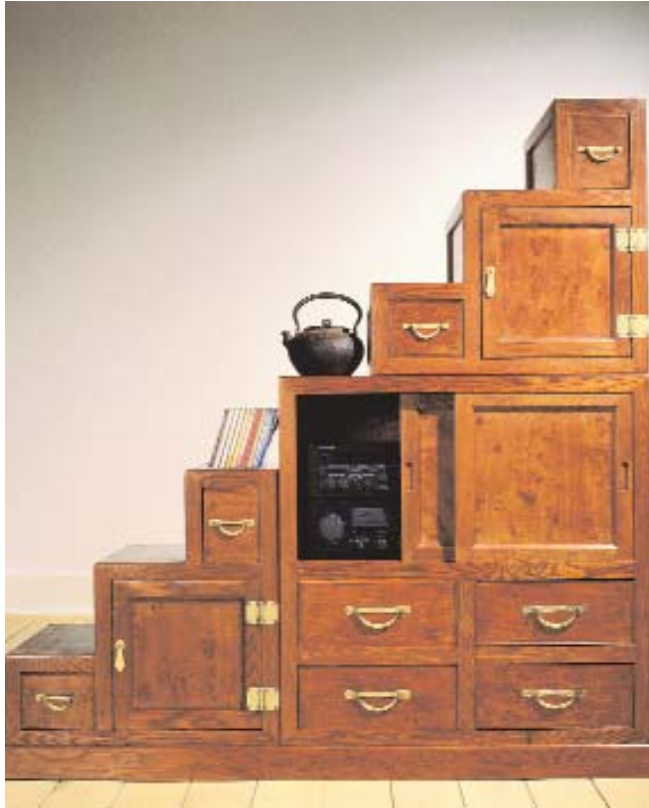
BY ELAINE ROGERS

A term initially coined in culinary circles, Asian fusion has spread to the home décor market and refers to the popularity of mixing Eastern aesthetics with Western functionality. With neutral colors and an emphasis on simple design components, it blends naturally into contemporary décors and is an increasingly popular decorating style with its simple yet exotic themes and soothing Zen-like touches.

While Oriental antiques and art have enjoyed a longstanding popularity, Asian fusion takes things further with its emphasis on Eastern minimalism and, these days, a plethora of contemporized Oriental home accessories are available from a wide variety of mainstream national retailers. For instance, Expo Design Center recently launched a new department dubbed Fusion Style Feng Shui to promote products such as streamlined floating glass appliances for the kitchen,



Built-in bookshelves in a residential setting showcase collections of oriental baskets and architectural pieces in stone, wood and jade. Photo by Miro Dvorscak.



The Elm Burl Step takes a contemporary twist on Asian design and function, with minimal hardware and a balance of drawers and sliding doors. By Greentea Design, the step-storage unit is available in custom sizes.

Below: Asian Fusion incorporates elements of the Far East into contemporary European decor. Pier One caters to the trend with furnishings like a Honshu entertainment center (left) and Nita table (right).

decorative square wall tiles for entries or living rooms and bamboo vanities and teak tubs for the bath.

“The Asian influence has always been strong,” says Lyndon Alexander, a buyer for Jaya Furniture of Dallas, a specialty retailer of antiques, decorative items and textiles from Southeast Asia, India and China. “But now it’s really hit the mainstream market.” Noting that reproductions of Indonesian artifacts, lacquered pieces and Asian-influenced accessories are very popular now, Alexander attributes the increasing interest to sheer versatility. “It works well with just about any décor,” she says. “Somehow, if you put modern stuff on an old, rustic village piece, it will look great.”

An essential aspect of Asian décor is a balance of the basic, life-sustaining elements of earth, water, wood and fire, and this pairs well with the concept of minimizing the clutter in a home and creating more serene spaces. Designers categorize the movement as blending this Asian-based sensitivity to nature with European-inspired sophistication and an American focus on function.

“It’s that simplified look with clean lines and a Zen-like feeling,” explains Christiane Rabinett of Pier One Imports. “It goes with the trend of getting rid of the clutter.”

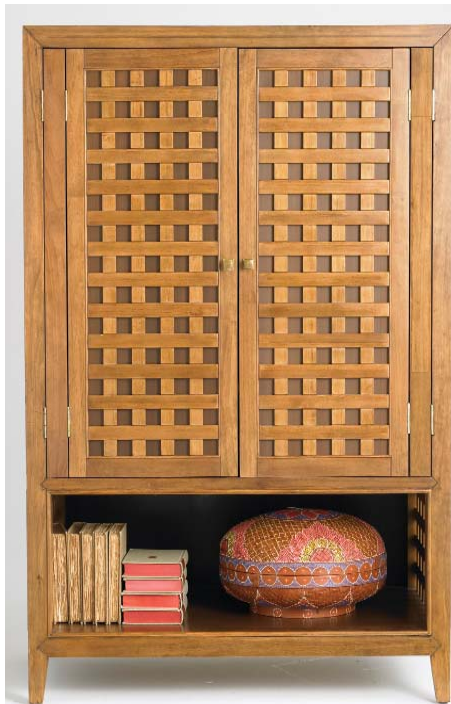
Expressions of this may range from stark, uncluttered displays of black candleholders with white candles or wooden baskets to stand-alone Buddha statues and dramatic placements of intricately patterned decorative enamel boxes.

In a dining environment, an Asian fusion tabletop might tout a monochromatic color palette accented by a vibrant pop of color like red or orange. Bamboo bread baskets and trays mix with embellished silk table runners, square-shaped white or celadon dinnerware and small tea lights or low vases with simple florals as centerpieces. Indonesian teakwood furniture or furnishings recreated in the style of the Ming dynasty marry form with function, often providing contrasting accents to contemporary or traditional seating in a living room. Spa-like indulgences in the bath are provided by Asian-inspired components such as simple vases and rattan baskets or votive candles, incense sets and bath salts placed on teakwood trays.

However, embracing the Asian influence in your own home doesn’t require “going all out,” Alexander cautions. “It is dramatic, so you don’t need to fill up the house with lots of pieces. One or two pieces in a whole house is really enough.”

“It’s something to do in small doses,” agrees Rabinett. “We import from 55 countries, but it’s not like everything has a Buddha head on it. You want to achieve more of a modern craftsman feel.”

Large or small, simple or ornate, Asian accents have a strong history of spicing up a bland backdrop and infusing a home with a worldly flair.



EXPRESSIONS OF THE ORIENT

BY SARAH NICHOLS

Exquisite Chinese porcelain, handsome lacquered boxes, emblematic furniture and intricately embroidered textiles have been decorating American residences since our country's colonization. As far back as the late 16th century, owning "a piece of Asia" was considered a status symbol in Europe, and the trend was quickly embraced in America as well.

Beyond being a fashion statement, Asian design simply was—and is—beautiful. Whether your home is contemporary or traditional, Far East style offers many possibilities. The sleek simplicity and square lines of designs from Northern China go well in contemporary homes, while the embellished carvings and greater detail of pieces from the southern region of China, including Hong Kong, work best when tastes tend toward the traditional.

Asian furniture doesn't have to go with anything else. Like a piano, it can be a stand-alone piece that adds drama and a sense of the exotic. Many designers believe that every formal room should include at least one Asian accessory. The piece might be as simple as a statue or porcelain vase or as grand as a carved armoire. Black or red lacquer makes an even bolder statement. It all depends on what the room dictates.

A deep respect for elders in the Asian culture has made altar tables a traditional feature of most Chinese homes. Found in a variety of styles and sizes, these furnishings give families a spot to honor their ancestors. Whether highly decorative with a shiny lacquer finish or worn and all but free of finish, altar tables are usually shallow, so they work well in hallways or at the top of the stairs. Figurines representing ancestral family members also reflect this ancestral reverence and are similarly popular with American collectors. Distinctive in their own right, figurines need not be restricted to an altar table, however. Like other exotic Asian pieces, they work well on shelves, consoles and in curio cabinets.

In some cases, Oriental antiques may be as affordable as newly constructed creations of the same design. Companies like Greentea Design (www.greenteadesign.com) market antiques from Japan, Korea and China, which can then be retrofitted by in-house carpenters, while Greentea artisans also create contemporary Asian-inspired furniture to fulfill Western practicalities.



A male temple figure sits on a throne where, below, a tortoise and a snake rest. The polychrome piece is from the Tung Chi period in China, circa 1865.