

Park Cities People

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The Swedish Revival in America The Interior Monologue



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In the last five years, I have seen a huge interest in the revival of the Swedish aesthetic, including furniture styles, tile, paint colors, and wall paper. The trend is to embrace the Swedish practice of simplifying a room's interior design and brighten the interior.

A little history: The period of the 1700s through the 1800s was the most prolific artistic endeavor of the Swedes. They were traveling to France, Italy, and later, England and China, but were mainly interested in the French décor, which you can see throughout their palaces, manor homes, and cottages.

The Swedes put a different twist on what they saw in France, tending to simplify their interpretations and make the style their own. Maybe it's because they didn't have the large budgets to do the residences so lavishly. They did capture the essence in their own subtle way, some choosing very elegant and regal settings, which became very eclectic and mixing into other styles. Others chose very country.

People who like country English or country French will like the Swedish style. It has a lot of charm and character to it, but could be characterized as almost the beginning of contemporary — very sparse, simple, but very classical.

The Swedish style: Let's begin with hand-painted walls. Almost every room in the house was hand-painted canvas or painted directly onto the walls. Artisans were imported from France to paint murals, panels on linen, and burlap then glue them to the walls. Swedes were the inventors of the first hand-blocked wall covering. Maybe that is how they came up with the idea for wallpaper.

They also loved tapestries, though could not afford them, so the artisans would paint designs on burlap that resembled the tapestries seen in France and hang them on their walls.

Winters were so cold and gloomy, they tended to want their homes light and bright. Swedes accomplished that by using white plaster ceilings, wide oak plank floors, and large windows with light sheer fabric draped to soften the harshness and let in all the natural light.

Sizeable crystal chandeliers were a favorite because when all the many candles were lit, they reflected in the large gilt mirrors, literally lighting up the room.



Courtesy Photo
You can use fabric draped on walls to capture the Swedish style.

One thing the Swedes were known for during the Gustavian period was their magnificent large tile stoves, many of them manufactured in the Mariberg Faience Factory. Almost every room in a large manor home would have one, though few exist today.

You can definitely see the French influence in the lines and design of Swedish furniture, especially the chairs. Their furniture tended to be painted white, yellow or gray, unlike the dark, heavy woods usually found in French furniture. Rarely did Swedes use quality woods to stain or gilt. Many times they slip-covered their furniture in cotton and linen to protect the silk from sun damage.

Blue and white Chinese export porcelains and Delft pottery fascinated them, so much so that artisans were commissioned to paint whole rooms in blue and white as though it were an entire vessel. It was quite stimulating to the eye.

There is a love for creamware with no decoration on it, making it more beautifully embossed. The decoration was more on the piece than painted on it. They also used a lot of pewter, though not quite as elegant and fancy as what you'd find in France.

Today: Interiors have gotten so much simpler. People want less clutter. The height of clutter was Mario Buatta, the Prince of Chintz, whose rooms were covered with tapestries, brocades, damasks, and had art hanging from bows. It was just packed.

When you look at Swedish interiors, you see classic furniture, French, pared down almost to the bare bones. The necessities of life. People are longing for the sleeker look of traditional but not the harsh cold lines of contemporary. And the materials are considered contemporary: a lot of glass, lucite, lacquered furniture. The Swedes favorite fabrics were cottons, linens, damask, stripes, checks, lightweight floral patterns; almost like it's summer. Light and bright.

The idea of less is more appeals even to people today who want traditional. They want more space around furniture, not crammed in tightly with other furniture.

I find it fascinating that Swedish style was hardly even a small topic of discussion in my years of study of the history of interior design in college, though now Swedish style has become so very popular, that I see fields of Swedish furniture at Round Top Antique Show.

Showrooms in Dallas such as Leslie Taylor's have devoted almost half their entire showroom to Swedish style. You can see Swedish rooms in Verandah and Southern Accents. A lot more painted furniture and fewer accessories is key. It's light, bright, crisp, and uplifting. I think the Swedish look is very restful. It has a charm about it. It may be because Swedish style is like a breath of fresh air.

For inspiration, you might like *The Swedish Room* by Lars Sjöberg and Ursula Sjöberg or *Swedish Interiors* by Rhonda Eleish and Edie Van Breems.

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