

# AESTHETIC INTERIORS 1872–1889

THE MOVEMENT INFLUENCED BRITISH DESIGN AND AMERICAN TASTE. *By Patricia Poore*

➔ A precursor to British Arts & Crafts reform, the Aesthetic Movement embraced Japonisme, an important coda manifested in the Anglo-Japanese furniture of E.W. Godwin and the decorative designs of Walter Crane and James McNeil Whistler. Popular motifs include the stork, sunflower, and lily. The trend was perpetuated by Liberty & Co. in London and by all fashionable decorators throughout the 1880s.

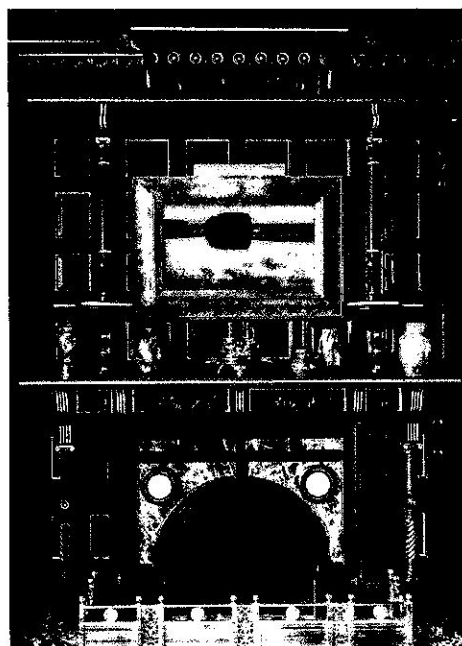
NAMES ONCE AGAIN FAMOUS are associated with this reaction to mid-Victorian "bad taste," not only William Morris but also ceramist William De Morgan, designer C.R. Ashbee, and tastemaker Bruce J. Talbert. They suggested that the line between the fine and applied arts was false—that the design and manufacture of furniture, ceramics, metalwork, and textiles should rise for the sake of beauty in everyday life. Although Morris often sought to distance himself from the much-parodied Aesthetic Movement (see the operettas of Gilbert & Sullivan), his popular designs actually helped extend its influence in the U.S. By 1870 Morris's wallpapers were on sale in Boston, and two years later *Hints on Household Taste* by

**RIGHT** A Hunzinger sofa centers a Manhattan parlor featuring Aesthetic furniture; the table and elaborate cabinets are by the Herter Brothers. **OPPOSITE** A pen-and-ink drawing by Steve Bauer of Bradbury & Bradbury Wallpapers illustrates the perfect Aesthetic room.



## the HALLMARKS

- STYLIZED, ABSTRACTED** ornament was preferred in carving, on walls, and for textiles—flat ornament for flat surfaces. The shaded, realistic depictions of fauna and flora as seen in the mid-Victorian period were out of fashion.
- MOTIFS** in the Anglo-Japanese style were popular ca. 1875–1885: cranes, swallows, bamboo, and cherry blossoms. Motifs and palettes were based, too, on medieval and Gothic designs. An alternate name for Aesthetic and Eastlake is Reformed or Modern Gothic.
- WALL TREATMENTS** embraced the tripartite division of dado, fill, and frieze. The fill was kept simple—even done in one color in the Japanese fashion—to set off framed prints hung from the picture rail. Wall and ceiling papers often had oriental motifs.
- TERTIARY COLORS**—olive and sage, ochre, terracotta and russet, peacock blue—were favored, a palette influenced by William Morris's revival of medieval formulas, and by the subdued but clear tones of Japanese woodblock prints.
- EXOTIC TASTES** An Exotic Revival was a sub-theme peaking around 1880 with the American fascination for Arabesque ornament. Moorish tiles, Persian furniture, and Turkish smoking rooms were all the rage.



**ABOVE** In the Connecticut Queen Anne, wall decoration of 1882 was re-created for an Anglo-Japanese room with rare furniture by British architect Thomas Jeckyll; the new mantel is in his style.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Eastlake interiors were the geometric, wood-rich variant of Aesthetic in the U.S. • Japanesque frieze and faux bamboo furniture in a Queen Anne in rural New York. • Owls and the moon, cherry blossoms, and nasturtiums figure in Anglo-Japanese goods. • In an 1882 Connecticut Queen Anne, the sophisticated music room has ebonized woodwork recalling lacquer.

Charles Locke Eastlake was published in an American edition. The 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia followed, bringing thousands of Americans in contact with the “reform movements” in England. Then Oscar Wilde made his famous lecture tour of the U.S. in 1882–83.

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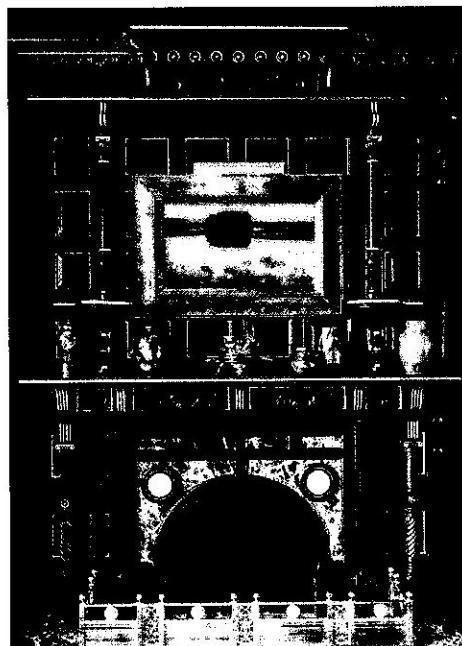
own version of Anglo-Japanese style by the mid-1880s. Ceramics and silver were widely available in the Aesthetic taste. The Japanesque was of course propelled by the “opening of Japan” by Commodore Perry’s celebrated visit in 1853. Westerners were fascinated by this newly discovered society, uncorrupted by modern machines.

The flat planes, stylized designs, and nature-inspired motifs of the Anglo-Japanese style included storks and owls carved in the backs of chairs, beetles and spiders crawling up the handles of silverware, dragonflies lighting on silver teapots by Tiffany and Gorham, and cherry blossoms in stained glass.

The reformed taste worked especially well in house styles based on vernacular medievalism and the Modern Gothic: Stick Style (called Eastlake in San Francisco), Queen Anne, the Shingle Style, and late Victorian Tudor and Jacobean Revivals. Nevertheless, Italianate and Second Empire houses built in the 1860s and ’70s often were redecorated in the popular Aesthetic taste.

The Aesthetic Movement morphed into Arts & Crafts in England and Art Nouveau on the Continent. In America the craze faded away by 1890, and that last decade of the 19th century saw a nostalgic turn back toward the Rococo, cabbage roses, and mauve. The Japanese influence would continue, more authentically, in the work of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright and their Prairie School designs, and in the bungalows designed by Greene and Greene.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DOUGLAS KEISTER, ERIC ROTH, COURTNEY JOHN BURROWS, EDWARD ADDEO (ABOVE)



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