

The Flipping Ninja
Furniture Styles Guide



Classic, Mid-century, Country, Industrial; Transitional; these are just a few of the many types of furniture styles you can find on the market. It's easy to get lost in all the genres, and to figure out what you like the best. I'll break down some of the most common furniture styles and terms, so that as you furniture shop you can identify what style you're looking at.

Antique Vs Vintage

Antique furniture is an heirloom piece from the past. A real authentic antique, by definition, is at least 100 years old. Often times antiques are associated as one of a kind or rare; and they often have a price tag that will reflect that. The price is usually defined by the condition the piece is in, repairs, its history and detail. Antiques can be high value, they are an investment and it is good to research when purchasing an antique.

Vintage furniture can also be very aged; however it doesn't necessarily make it an antique. A vintage piece can be a surviving piece from a mass market line of furniture. What vintage really means is that the piece reflects a certain design style of an era. Like a 1950's style stove, or a 70's style shag carpet art piece. They are clear reflections of that time period's design trends.

Traditional Vs. Rustic

Traditional furniture is based off of formal furniture from the Victorian period of history. It often is elaborately decorated with carvings and embellishments, it exudes decadence in furniture. Portions of the furniture can have graceful flowing lines that eventually taper into the legs of a chair that again are decadent either in carving or in inlay work. Traditional pieces are inviting and elegant set in a rich color scheme; think plush velvets, elegant sheen fabrics, overstuffed for luxury.

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Rustic furniture design has taken bits and pieces from other styles, and the end result is a piece that is natural, not very flashy, but exudes natural comfort. Rustic pieces are often made of natural warm timber that can be crafted or left with imperfections. The textiles used are natural fiber like cotton or linen, or animal hide. Rustic can be associated with relaxed furniture; like taking the basics nature provided for a craftsman and creating furniture from it. Your quintessential “cabin” vibe.

Art Deco Vs Retro.

Art Deco might be considered “flashy” furniture. It utilizes metal, chrome, shapes, and angles to make defined frame lines, like triangles. This style uses a lot of imagery for visual interest. It will have shiny fabrics, use mirrors, pictures of buildings, planes, cities, skyscrapers. It is very stylized furniture.

Retro furniture can also be “art deco”, but it has a blurry line making it harder to define. Retro furniture you think of egg shaped chairs, round, plastic, with contrasting color combos, like pea green, orange and mud brown, ‘ALA your favorite 70’s Nick and Night sitcom set background. To put retro in terms that is easily understood, but less than glamorous, it means that it is furniture that reflects what once was modern design aesthetic, but is now considered unfashionable and no longer trendy.

Shabby Chic Vs French Provincial

Shabby Chic is romantic and can be feminine influenced style. It can be slightly distressed, but is made to look refreshed and new, like it has been cared for and up-cycled to look its best with a personal touch. This style is often used in country style homes, and would give off the idea that it has been there for a while.

French Provincial is exactly what you think of when you hear that name. It is furniture based on the style originated in the French provinces in the 17th and 18th centuries. It very similarly is like shabby chic furniture for its country feel, but it also has a classic feel. It utilizes high backs, woven seats, simple design, which simple embellishments and shapes (like scallops). The furniture will be very simple, but a key design is that it will have some sort of embellished molding work. This style is often seen in large armoires and doesn’t seem to try too hard to be beautiful.

Modern Vs Contemporary

Modern furniture has been a big furniture movement with some big name designers that have risen within it (Hans Knoll, Ray Earnes, and several more), one only needs to Google “modern furniture designers” to find those who have influenced the movement the most. Modern furniture is often showcased in designer homes and design magazines. Modern style originated under the modernist movement in the 1900’s. Original pieces will sell for big money, but less expensive replica pieces are on the market for the lover of modern furniture on a budget. Modern design can vary, but it often has a sleek and simple statement, or serves some dual purpose, it is craft furniture made with beauty and function in mind.

Contemporary furniture can include modern furniture, but it isn’t doesn’t confine itself to just the “modern” title; think of contemporary style as modern furniture’s more inclusive friend. Contemporary really refers to furniture that is trendy and desired in the current market, that could mean the designer modern furniture, or it could mean the trending furniture you see being advertised at Target or at Ikea. That same side table that all your friends own is a contemporary piece of furniture.

Hopefully this helped to define the difference between furniture styles. The more you look at furniture, the more the style lines will become clearer about which section a piece falls into. Happy flipping!