

Spanish Style Mission Furniture

Most of us have seen that heavy-looking, plain, and very functional style of furniture known as the "mission style".

The story goes clear back to North America of the 1700s and 1800s when Spain was sending Catholic missionaries to convert the Native Americans to their faith.

These men brought the furnishings so unmistakably Spanish, yet suited to their lives of devotion and simplicity.

Upon landing in North America, they began to set up new colonies and religious societies.

The story of the Mallorcan Friar who set up the first missions appears on page 7 of this issue of Med. Living.

As the populations grew in the "Old West" so architecture and interior design incorporated the mission style. Particularly in states with high numbers of Spanish settlers, such as California, Texas, New Mexico, and Florida.



In fact, Spanish missionaries were the first to bring the infamous red tile roof and whitewashed walls, familiar sights in Moorish Spain, to the American West and Southwest and all through Latin America.

The furniture is built from unpolished wood that is stained rather than painted, with heavy-duty wrought iron handles and knobs.

Heavy and square, often with leather upholstery and accented with textiles of the Spanish colonial period, mission furniture blends easily with natural and rustic surroundings and is an ideal backdrop for bright colours in textiles and upholstery.

Today the full authentic mission interior design style, so called Sierra Rustic, incorporates artistic themes used in Native American art in the Southwest.

Thus, mission style is an unusual combination of influences borrowed from Spain and North Africa, along with the colour and design dependant on resources to hand for the native peoples of the Americas.

As the country grew and mission style furnishings and building designs spread to other regions, it went through various incarnations and was at its most popular from 1890 until the end of the first World War.

During these years hand-crafted items coupled with simple styles were very much in favour, and even today the basic mission style is still considered distinctive.

The mission style developed in a period when settlers worked with few resources and built furniture from very few nails and hardware pieces.

Mission furniture had to be simple and practical, which is a central aspect of its beauty.



Often, simple items like nails were not available in abundance and furniture-makers had to improvise.

One can easily picture these basic pieces in the earthen rooms inhabited by Spanish soldiers and priests.

The popularity of this concept in furnishing has ensured that complementary furniture is available to complete any room setting.

By way of example, although relatively modern this clock is modelled on a 1916 timepiece which in turn was an adaptation of a much earlier mission style clock, keeping the original style of furniture alive and ticking. (Oops sorry for the pun!...Ed.)



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