

HOME

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Teddy DeWitt photo

Paulette Peden, owner of New Preston-based Dawn Hill Antiques, illustrates how Swedish style can complement virtually any interior design style. Here, she created a vignette which pairs Swedish painted folk art bowls and a Swedish mirror (a portion of which is visible in this photo) with an Italian painted chest. Below, a circa 1800 Swedish painted Gustavian style gateleg table, with its original hinges and hardware, is available through Modern Antiquarian in Ridgefield.

Simply Swedish

by Andrea Valluzzo

Whether one is looking at the exuberantly decorated furniture of the rococo period (early 1700s) or the subdued Gustavian style that followed in the late 1700s, Swedish design continues to resonate today and holds widespread appeal.

The Gustavian period, whose legacy still influences contemporary design, was largely due to the influence

of Sweden's King Gustav III (1746-92), who directed the master craftsmen of the Stockholm Guild to create timeless furniture with simple lines and elegant styling that continues to delight today.

Rhonda Eleish and Edie van Breems of Eleish Van Breems Home in Westport are celebrated for creating an inviting aesthetic in their interior design work. While they design everything from traditional to modern spaces, the Swedish look has long been in line with their tastes and

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Simply Swedish

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offers homeowners ways to create a timeless and classic look from formal and country Swedish antiques to bold textiles and modern accessories.

There are many reasons to explain the popularity of Swedish design, not the least of which is its ability to mix with both antiques and modern items as well as marry well with different decor styles.

“Swedish furnishings and accessories are, for the most part, so beautifully designed that we find they can stand alone almost as sculpture and artwork in any setting. The eclectic layering of pieces from many different periods is how most Swedes live and why their interiors look so elegant and sophisticated is not only this mix but their use of light, symmetry and negative space,” says van Breems. “A wonderful way to add a Swedish piece into your existing space is to bring it in to add a deliberate contrast,” Eleish adds. “If you have a sleek and hard-edged modern hallway, for example, a Swedish rococo mirror, given lots of room to be noticed as ‘art,’ adds interest, light and subtle warmth.”

“It is a clean style that uses natural materials — wood, metal, stone, cotton and wool. I think it’s attractive to people exactly because of its simplicity. It’s not overly cluttered, but comfortable, inviting and relaxed,” says Marianne Beresford, owner of Scandinavian Butik in Norwalk. The store carries a wide array of home fashion products (visit the shop’s website for purchasing details), including dishes, glassware, table runners, dish towels, serving trays and bowls, pitchers, coasters, candlesticks, paper napkins, and children’s dishware. Gourmet food, sweets, and chocolate are also available.

Swedish style looks deceptively simple but is multilayered and complex, van Breems says. “There is a perception that all Swedish interiors are white but the reality is that there are many other colors and types of white in a Swedish interior.” It is the layering of all of these colors, ranging from grays to whites (to even black contrasting with whites) that gives the impression of the white Swedish room. It is the sophisticated mixing of patinas and paints that gives the Swedish interiors their special quality.

Form meets function perfectly here where the restrained decoration, functionality, and clean lines are at the heart of Swedish design philosophy. “Historically, things were designed from the highest available materials to last and living space was at a premium, so items were designed with great thought and care. Furniture often served many multiple uses and this concern with practicality continues into the present day,” Eleish says.

Paulette Peden, owner of Dawn Hill Antiques in New Preston, explains that the natural environment of Sweden says much about why Swedish furniture favors light hues, especially apropos before homes had electricity and where days are very short in winter. “Plain wood floors, instead of heavy carpets, added to the lightness of the rooms, and the Swedes, of course, celebrated the precious months of summer when it stays light well into the night,” she says. “Swedish design is lighthearted and airy, and this aesthetic is carried through in both the design of the rooms and the furniture, as well.”

If you want to decorate in this style, you might consider starting with a statement piece, such as a Mora clock with its iconic figure-eight shape. “The thing about Swedish pieces, and particularly a clock, is that you can put a Swedish clock in almost any room with dark furniture and it would just be a bright beacon of light,” Peden says.

Swedish Gustavian design has such a universal appeal, which is why one sees it used by so many designers and in so many different styles of homes and spaces, declares Margaret Schwartz, a longtime antiques dealer in New Canaan, who now runs Modern Antiquarian in Ridgefield. “The classic Gustavian shapes and colors are almost chameleons in how easily they can be incorporated in traditional and modern settings.”

Each piece and material complements the others and truly lets the eye travel and take in the room as a whole, she says, adding: “Buying Swedish antiques can be expensive, but they are a good investment.”



Landino photo



Teddy DeWitt photo

Interior designers Rhonda Eleish and Edie van Breems, owners of Eleish Van Breems Home in Westport, combined elements of both country and modern Swedish style to create this seating area with a fireplace (photo top) and this warm, inviting dining space (right). A display (above) at Dawn Hill Antiques in New Preston features a painted panel depicting wall paintings typically found in 18th century Swedish rooms, a Gustavian period Swedish mirror, a Swedish painted Mora clock, and a Swedish chandelier; the two chairs are a pair of Swedish Lindome dining chairs, circa 1790.



Landino photo

A tall cupboard, useful for storing dishes or DVDs, as well as a chest of drawers, functional both in the bedroom or in the living room as a sideboard, are other good multifunctional pieces with which to start, Peden says, adding, “One of my favorite types of Swedish tables is a slagbord drop-leaf table. It has long leaves that go to the floor and sort of a narrow center, about 12 to 15 inches, so they are very versatile.”

While Gustavian-style pieces, which are still being made today, have eclipsed the rococo style, Peden declares that Swedish rococo furniture was equally fabulous and came in wonderful colors, from pale blue to green.

Another important consideration when buying antique furniture, Peden says, is its patina. “What we look for at Dawn Hill are pieces that either have their original first paint or have been what they call ‘dry-scraped’ down to first layers of paint,” she explains.

The long heritage of fabulous and fun textile design adds cheer to the Swedish interior, says van Breems: “Winters being so long and light being at a premium, decorative textiles added warmth as well as much-needed color to historic interiors.”

Eleish concludes, “Sweden is still known internationally as a leader of innovative and bold textile and rug designs.”