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Thomas Hope

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Ad Choices

1769 - 1831

Thomas Hope, a "gentleman of sofas", as Byron called him, had an enormous impact on the course of [English furniture](#) history, mainly in the time of [Regency furniture](#), moving into a decidedly antique direction, focusing it onto a cold, precise, archaeological interpretation of furniture design. Hope's furniture is not for those seeking cosy comfort, perhaps, but it is graceful, and decorative.

Biography

Son of a rich banking family Thomas Hope was born in 1769 in Amsterdam. In his youth he spent seven years travelling about Greece and other drenched-in-history Mediterranean spots and there acquired a taste for Greek art and architecture which he brought to London in 1796, settling there to escape the French invasion of Holland. Never one to stay put long Hope was soon travelling again, in 1799 he revisits old haunts in Athens, and in 1802 he is seen in Naples and Rome, all the while collecting antique specimens of art which he later decides to house permanently in England. To quote a contemporary, Hope was :

said to be the richest, but undoubtedly far from the most agreeable man in Europe. He is a great traveller and collector at any expense of virtue of all sorts...and has furnished his magnificent house....with a profusion of those things....

The house spoken of was likely in Duchess Street, London, a house built by [Robert Adam](#) in the 1770s. Later Hope was to reside in Deepdene, Surrey, in 1807, the place that is most associated with his name.

Publications

By 1800 Hope had cemented his role as a fashionable man about town by being elected to the Society of Dilettanti and in 1804 embarked on a publishing career with his "Observations on the Plans and Elevations designed by James Wyatt, Architects, for Downing College, Cambridge" in which he made the case for use of the Greek Doric style over the Roman version.



Cover of "Household Furniture and Decoration"

1807 saw the printing of his "**Household Furniture and Decoration**", this work firmly placing him as the most influential arbiter of style of the early 19th century. 1809 sees two volumes of "Costumes of the Ancients", and in 1812 "Designs of Modern Costume" comes along. A man of many talents Hope, in 1819, produces a best-selling literary novel, "Anastasius or Memoirs of a Greek written at the close of the Eighteenth Century". Other Hope works included tomes on philosophy and architecture which he kept up production of until his demise in 1831.

Furniture Designs

Hope was a rigorous designer, he insisted that furniture be based on historically and archaeologically correct foundations, and that the examples of ancient Egyptian and Greek furniture that had survived, whether in concrete form, or as pictured in wall or vase decoration, were the ideal starting, and finishing, points to guide the hand of the designer.

Historical Perspective

In the late Georgian era the **neoclassical furniture** style arose. Furniture design came to be greatly simplified and the designers of the time such as **Robert Adam**, **George Hepplewhite**, and **Thomas Sheraton** used the heritage of antique furniture as inspiration for their designs. For Thomas Hope, it seems apparent, this was not enough; his designs were, where possible, actual copies of antique Greek and Roman furniture. It is in this vein that we meet with the elegant and slender lines of Greek couches, and the beauty of the Greek kline chair.



Greek Revival Monopodium Table, 1805.

Mahogany, inlaid with ebony and silver, and carved in relief. The plinth of this table is decorated with scrolling anthemions (a motif based on the honeysuckle flower), which imitate the designs used on ancient Etruscan vases. You can see the original design for this table here: [Monopodium Table](#).

Where no depictions of such furniture existed, such as in sculpture or vase paintings, Hope was forced to resort to interpretation and invention, such as in the case of fireplace screens or long dressing mirrors, but all the while did so observing certain structural rules derived from classical architecture.

Egyptian Revival

Vivant Denon's "Voyage dans la basse et la haute Egypte" introduced Hope and many others to the, until recently, entombed world of ancient Egyptian art. For long classical Greek architectural principles had been thought to have derived from Egypt and consequently, it was surmised, the same might have occurred in furniture styles. Some use had previously been made of Egyptian symbols in furniture design, but in a rather "free", and haphazard way, and it devolved onto the shoulders of Thomas Hope the responsibility to make of this a near science, a dedicated rendering of real ancient Egyptian forms in furniture.



Egyptian Style Furniture.

Hope pounced on Denon's work and searched it eagerly for drawings of Egyptian furniture, derived from hieroglyphic paintings and carvings.

From such endeavour Hope was later to furnish whole rooms in the Egyptian style, replete with antique chairs, couches, and beds, and as a consequence of this the Egyptian revival movement was born and achieved some considerable popularity. Not all were enthused, however, as we note in one observer's portrait of the furnishing at Hope's home in Deepdene:

There is too much Egyptian ornament, Egyptian hieroglyphical figures, bronze and gilt, but all hideous. In one room there is a bed, a sofa bed wide enough for two aldermen, embossed gold hieroglyphic frights all pointing with their hands distorted backwards at an Osiris or a long-armed monster of some sort who sits after their fashion on her hams and heels and has the likeness of a globe of gold on her lapetted, scaly-lapetted head.



Egyptian Theme Room.

Interiors

As we have seen Hope had an interest in decorating entire rooms in one style, and he had particular rules for the use of color in interiors. A once dinner companion of Hope recalls a conversation on the topic where vociferous injunctions against the use of green are given:

He said it was the color of Nature's freshness and Nature disdained imitation. She showed it by having her green turn brown by candle-light. It was the color of all others to have where apartments were in accompaniment with outdoor scenery - as summer houses, and villas on the Thames - these intended only for enjoyment in the day.

Craftsmen and Reproductions



*Carved Mahogany Table, 1805.
Designed by Thomas Hope and carved by Thomas Bogaert.*

Hope used mainly French immigrant craftsmen to develop his careful designs into real world furniture. Alexis Decaix and Thomas Bogaert were the main two and what remains of their handiwork evinces great skill. Hope actually designed furniture principally for the furnishing of his own homes however he clearly had some interest in having an effect on the wider world of design.



*Hope Designed Vase, 1802. Made by Alexis Decaix.
Copper, treated to resemble bronze, with applied ormolu (gilt bronze) mounts.*

Many others came to copy, in usually modified form, and such copies as were made often lack something in their line and detail. Despite this Hope had a huge influence, specifically in the rise of historical revisionism and the practice of making accurate copies of antique furniture. His last years were spent on study of Gothic architecture and had Hope lived longer we may have witnessed a Gothic phase in his furniture designs. Alas not to be.

