

Biedermeier furniture & design

Biedermeier was an influential style of furniture design from Germany during the years 1815-1848, based on utilitarian principles. The period extended later in Scandinavia.

Throughout the period emphasis was kept on clean lines and minimal ornamentality; as the period progressed, however, the style moved from the early rebellion against Romantic-era fussiness to increasingly flourished commissions by a rising middle class eager to show their newfound wealth. The idea of clean lines and utilitarian postures would resurface in the twentieth century, continuing to the present day. Middle- to late-Biedermeier work in furniture design represents the heralding towards historicism and revival eras long sought for. Social forces originating in France would change the artisan-patron system that achieved this period of design, first in the Germanic states and then into Scandinavia. Many Biedermeier designs owe their simplicity to Georgian lines of the 1800s, as the proliferation of design publications reached the loose Germanic states and the Austro-Hungarian empire.



The Biedermeier style was a simplified interpretation of the influential French Empire Style of Napoleon I. He introduced the romance of ancient Roman Empire styles, adapting these to modern early 19th century households. Biedermeier furniture grew out of the French Empire Period, but used locally available materials such as cherry, ash and oak woods rather than the expensive timbers such as fully imported mahogany. Much local cherry and pearwood was stained to imitate the more expensive timbers. Stylistically, the furniture was simple and elegant. Its construction utilised the ideal of truth through material, something that later influenced the Bauhaus and Art Deco periods.



Many unique designs were created in Vienna, because the young apprentice was examined on his use of material, construction, originality of design, and quality of cabinet work. Furniture from the earlier period (1815-1830) was the most severe and neoclassical in inspiration. It also supplied the most fantastic forms which the second half of the period (1830-1848) lacked, being influenced by the many style publications from England. Biedermeier furniture was the first style in the world that emanated from the growing middle class. It preceded Victoriana and influenced mainly Germanic-speaking countries.

Biedermeier furniture and lifestyle was a focus on exhibitions at the Vienna applied arts museum in 1896. The many visitors to this exhibition were so influenced by this fantasy style and its elegance that a new resurgence or revival period became popular amongst European cabinetmakers. This revival period lasted up until the Art Deco style was taken up. Biedermeier also influenced the various Bauhaus styles through their truth in material philosophy.

The original Biedermeier period changed with the political unrests of 1845-1848. With the revolutions in European historicism, furniture of the later years of the period took on a distinct Wilhelminian or Victorian style.

