

# MANSION GLOBAL



## Creating Elegance with Chinoiserie, the Iconic, European Design Style

Porcelain patterns, storied fabrics and hand-painted wallpaper can complement a contemporary home

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“Read any design book, blog post, or shelter magazine and you’ll quickly discover chinoiserie is one of the most loved design styles,” said Elle Cole of Elle Cole Interiors in Dallas.

“Chinoiserie,” derived from the French word “chinois,” translates to “Chinese,” but this Western interpretation of East Asian decor was actually established in Europe in the 17th century. These days, even in contemporary spaces, interior designers still gravitate toward chinoiserie, cleverly weaving pieces and patterns into every room in the house.

“Designers appreciate true craftsmanship, classic decor, and styles that lend themselves to the creation of effortless beauty,” Ms. Cole explained. “Chinoiserie is all those things and more. What makes it appealing is the immense artistry of hand-painted scenes, intricate carvings and inlaid details that have taken thousands of years to master.”

For ideas on how to flavor any interior with chinoiserie, Mansion Global turned to a select group of designers who shared their recommendations.



## Lace in Chinoiserie Furniture and Accessories

Certain chinoiserie furnishings and accessories do better in more traditional surroundings, but some pieces such as garden stools, dining chairs and ceramics are versatile and can be laced into a transitional or contemporary room with ease.

In a home with contemporary detailing and decor, Ms. Cole recommended trying a scholar's chair as well as Chinese porcelain. "Ginger jars in blue and white are perfect on mantels and make beautiful vases for floral arrangements," she explained. "These pieces complement a modern interior without being intrusive."

She also proposed layering in a pair of chinoiserie lamps to complement contemporary upholstered items such as a sofa, sectional, or a pair of club chairs. "This look will give your space depth and create thought-provoking conversation," Ms. Cole noted.

While classic blue and white wares are always a safe choice, there's an array of other decorative motifs floating around. One that comes to mind for Ms. Cole is Famille Rose, a porcelain glazed with enamels mainly in pink, green, white and yellow. "It has a beautiful way of playing well with all color palettes and has intricate patterns," she said. Try dressing up a dining table with Famille Rose dinnerware, hanging an odd number of decorative plates in varying sizes on a powder room wall, or placing small dishes as a catchall on an entry hall table, Ms. Cole suggested.

Designer Kelley Proxmire of Kelley Proxmire Inc. in Bethesda, Maryland, placed a red lacquered trunk end table, a blue and white porcelain lamp, and a small pagoda-shaped lantern, in the same room for a client, yet the result is subtle. "The key is to not go overboard with these elements," she said. A pair of French bergère chairs, a traditional skirted sofa, a modern Lucite coffee table and a contemporary piece of art balance those chinoiserie items.

For decorating novices, Ms. Rovai advises to start with small pieces of chinoiserie furniture and accessories. Try introducing a lacquered chinoiserie cocktail table or a singular unique article, to "mix it up and add more interest" to your existing décor.

Excellent sources for chinoiserie furniture and accoutrements include antique stores, flea markets, and brands like Etsy, 1stdibs and Chairish, all top picks for interior designers. "They're fabulous online marketplaces where we source beautiful vintage pieces for client projects," Ms. Cole remarked.

*Photo: Angie Seckinger*



## Add Punch to a Room With Chinoiserie Fabric

Ms. Proxmire often upholsters furniture in her projects with East Asian-inspired fabrics that tell a story. She said these textiles featuring a rainbow of colors can bring a lot of punch to a room.

"Unlike chinoiserie-inspired furniture which can be highly specific, chinoiserie fabrics easily blend with a variety of design aesthetics," Ms. Proxmire said. "They can be great 'lead' fabrics, which establish the palette for a room and act as the starting point for all other fabrics in a design."

She likes to incorporate chinoiserie fabrics on accent pillows—perfect for dressing up a sofa—dining chair backs and benches. Since chinoiserie patterns are typically scenes from everyday life and have wide repeats, the furniture needs to be the right scale to let the fabric tell its story, Ms. Proxmire explained. "Most of the patterns will feature images of artisans and tradesmen at work, or Asian motifs, such as pagodas, dragons, or cherry blossoms interpreted through a Western lens," she said.

The House of Scalamandre, F. Schumacher & Co., Brunswick & Fils, and Clarence House are top trade sources for chinoiserie-themed textiles. Patterns that Ms. Proxmire uses include Schumacher's "Yangtze River," Brunswick & Fils' "Xian Linen & Cotton Print" and Scalamandre's "Jardin de Chine." For rooms with a more modern approach, she prefers Schumacher's "Chiang Mai Dragon" and "Chinoiserie Moderne," as well as Clarence House's "The Vase," which she said "takes an almost pop art approach to Chinese porcelain."

Mingle large repeat chinoiserie fabrics with smaller-scale patterns, ranging from solids to stripes to checks to animal prints. And as for color, the tones you choose can potentially dictate how traditional or contemporary a room feels.

"As a general rule, you'll never go wrong with blues and greens since they tend to go with everything," she said. For one project, Ms. Proxmire recalls an instance when color made all the difference in how the room read. "For a showhouse, we once did a large round skirted table in a bold tangerine-colored chinoiserie-inspired toile—that was definitely less traditional."

*Photo: Kip Dawkins*

