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INTERIOR MOTIVES

Oriental influence adds sophistication



NAOMI STONE LEVY

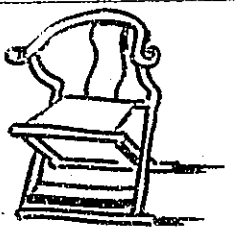
The sophistication of an Oriental influence is unmistakable. I enjoy adding this touch of glamor to some of my work.

It is essential to know that there existed Chinese dynasties. To explain them would occupy much more space than I am allowed. Dynasties spell

out periods of time, as exemplified by the Ming dynasty (1368-1643), followed by the Ching dynasty (1644-1912). The most usable for our purposes was the K'ang Hsi dynasty (1662-1722). There are many, many prestigious items available that are within the reach of some lucky buyers.

Their chairs were customarily fashioned of hardwood. Their introduction into the home changed domestic life in China. The yoko back rail or horseshoe shapes are probably the most easily recognized chairs. They each have a concave splat and splayed legs that produced an object that transcends the category of the decorative arts. (See illustration.) There is a direct relationship to the English Queen Anne chair. This chair arrived on the scene at least 150 years later, and leaves no doubt as to the derivation of its spoon-shaped splat.

Magnificent brocades and damasks, with gilt threads woven throughout, completely covered chairs for half the year as a protection against drafts in colder months. These fabrics also add-

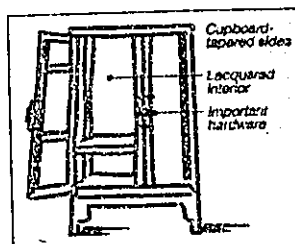


ed importance and splendor in honor of very special guests. Desirable and coveted pieces are still available. Often they are in the form of an incredible kimono.

Beds, either tattered or alcove, were so constructed that they could be assembled or dismantled easily. This permitted travel with an accompanying bed, only for the wealthy. To locate an antique bed would require research.

Couches, called Ch'uang, had pads about two inches thick so they didn't distort the proportions of the piece. There were also daybeds that were long and very narrow. Over the years most of the antique ones were converted into tables.

Chinese lacquered furniture tends to



be heavier and more ornate, and ever more exquisite. Altar coffers were often cinnabar lacquer. Singular fully lacquered antiques are spellbinding, and are unparalleled in a contemporary or traditional interior.

The original cupboards stored bedding and personal objects, probably 17th and 18th century innovations. The interiors of these were also often lacquered, perhaps red or dark green. These often have a fascinating silhouette with slightly tapered sides. (See illustration.) Some cabinets with a more architectural feeling are stacked in two or three sections. Currently we might observe one section incorporated into a distinguished and incredible television cabinet.

Desks appeared in the 17th century. They were also portable, easily disassembled for travel. Tables and high stands, wash stands, stools and gaming tables rounded out other Chinese furniture. Antique accessory boxes, mirrors and tiny chests made of camphorwood are still to be seen in shops.

Hardware was of vital importance, and always makes its own statement. Handsome brass banding thence came into existence. There were standard shapes of ball handles: stop ball, post and ball, and square. These had a considerable influence on the West. Ball and drop pulls arrived here in the 16th and 17th century on lacquer chests, imported by the East India Company. They relate to William and Mary, and Queen Anne drop pulls. It is interesting to note that when the Chinese bat-shaped backplates were turned upside down they became the backplates of the English Georgian period.

One of the interiors I did a good number of years ago, and of which I am very proud, involved custom-made black lacquer Coromandel screens. The home had a sizable entrance foyer, a large open living room and an open adjoining dining room. I wanted the three areas to open up into one super-space, in which the clients could entertain. It even involved dancing on their wonderful hardwood floors. This space was executed by folding back these inordinate screen panels. They were made to slide on tracks that were countersunk into the floor. Each side of the entrance opening,

See LEVY, 5