



LEFT:
Blackthorn wallpaper in Autumn by Ben Pentreath for Morris & Co. envelops the designer's bedroom in Dorset, England.

It's a philosophy that still resonates, and has inspired a growing number of designers in today's world of fast furniture and fleeting decor trends. "We are in an era when integrity of making, and a sense of timelessness, are of particular value," says British designer Ben Pentreath, who frequently draws from the period for his projects. "Where have things come from, and how are they made? With what and by whom? These are the questions that the early Arts and Crafts [proponents] were asking every day. One hundred years on, those values feel pressing."

The furniture designs that defined the Arts and Crafts movement—as well as the American Craftsman and Mission styles that followed—were thoughtfully understated, masterfully crafted and emphasized the beauty of natural colors and motifs. "The British pieces are generally lighter and display more rounded edges, curves and carving; while Craftsman furniture, exemplified by the designs of [turn-of-the-century American manufacturer] Gustav Stickley, is much more massive in feel and footprint, with very simple, board-like profiles and exposed joinery," explains John Smirardo, president of Incollect, the online design, art and antiques marketplace behind the The Gallery at 200 Lex. While the styles varied across continents, key shared elements included rich earth-toned palettes, organic materials and dexterous details, ranging from hand-carved spindles to lathe-turned bobbin legs and mortise-and-tenon joinery.

At the center of the movement was a radical socialist named William Morris, an artist and textile designer who co-founded the decorative arts and furnishings company Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861 along with six of his fellow pre-Raphaelite friends, including painters Ford Madox Brown, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones. Their work ran counter to the prevailing items on the marketplace: "At that time in Britain, wealthy and middle-class homeowners tended to furnish their homes with overly ornamental, machine-made items," says Sidwell, who oversees the Morris & Co. archive, which is now owned by Sanderson. "Morris was frustrated that he wasn't able to buy the kinds of simple, hand-made furnishings that he wanted for his own home, which led him and his collaborators to design their own commercial furnishings."

The founders sought a simpler life and, more specifically, a return to hand-crafted decoration. In the early years, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. produced stained

On the Beat

Mission Accomplished

With an emphasis on sustainable materials and honesty in craftsmanship, the design elements and ethos of the late 19th-century Arts and Crafts movement continue to endure today.

BY CAROLINE BIGGS

Though simple in design, Arts and Crafts-style furnishings are wild in spirit. Born in response to the first-ever wave of mass-produced furniture that came to dominate the Victorian era, the British movement rose to prominence in the latter half of the 19th century with a mission to raise the standards for the decorative arts.

"For the pioneers of the Arts and Crafts movement, their work was largely in contrast to the machine-made home items of the industrial age," says Catherine Sidwell, senior archivist at British luxury furnishings company Sanderson Design Group. "They rejected heavy ornamentation and the imitation of materials."