CHAPTER 7

Italianate, Renaissance Revival
1830s–1870s

Italy provides the models for Italianate and Renaissance Revival architecture, interiors, and furnishings beginning in the 1830s. Various titles describe this architectural style, including Italianate, Renaissance Revival, Palazzo Style, and Italian Villa Style. Public and private buildings rely on two Italian building types: formal, classical urban palaces; and picturesque, asymmetrical farmhouses or other vernacular structures. Renaissance Revival interiors and furniture are highly eclectic, mixing characteristics from various periods and countries in addition to Renaissance Italy. The style goes by many names, such as Henri IV, Louis XIII, François I, Tudor, and Free Renaissance, the latter in Great Britain.

There is also far greater latitude and variety in the ornaments of the different modes of the Italian architecture . . . than in the purely classical style. It addresses itself more to the feelings and the senses, and less to the reason or judgment, than the Grecian style, and it is also capable of a variety of expression quite unknown to the architecture of the five orders. Hence, we think it far better suited to symbolize the variety of refined culture and accomplishment which belongs to modern civilization than almost any other style.

Andrew Jackson Downing,
The Architecture of Country Houses, 1850

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL

- Italian Renaissance (14th–16th centuries). Italianate and Renaissance Revival of the 19th century look back to the Renaissance, the rebirth of interest in classical antiquity that appears first in Italian literature, and then in culture and art in the 14th century. Arising from the study of ancient texts and structures, Greek and Roman forms and details reappear in architecture during the 1420s in Florence, Italy. Writers, architects, artists, and sculptors create the style for powerful, prosperous families in Florence that possess the wealth and leisure to commission fine homes and great works of art. Italian Renaissance compositions derive from but do not copy classical antiquity. Designers, seeking a classical approach in their work, adopt the elements, forms, and attributes of the art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome. Classical elements and attributes are less evident in interiors and furniture because little is known about them. However, the Renaissance establishes the principle of unity in decoration and furnishings in interiors. Renaissance furniture exhibits architectural details and proportions instead of copying
ancient examples. Warfare, travel, and books spread Italian concepts to France, Spain, and England where they first appear as decorative elements grafted onto Gothic and indigenous forms. Each country gradually assimilates Renaissance design principles, but its interpretation of them is unique.

- **Italianate or Italian Villa Style.** In the early 19th century, the Picturesque Movement inspires English designers to explore alternatives to classicism, Gothic, and other styles of the Middle Ages. Some turn to Italian vernacular farmhouses whose asymmetry, irregularity, and rambling forms are appealing and picturesque, yet Italian. By the 1830s, Italian Villa–style country houses and train stations become more common in England. In the 1840s, the style is given royal approval by Osbourne House (Fig. 7-12), a seaside home for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enlarged in the style beginning in 1845.

Publications spread the Italianate style to North America, with the first examples appearing in the late 1830s. During the early 1840s, its use increases after writer and design critic Andrew Jackson Downing begins to advocate the style as a rural alternative to classical and Gothic. He publishes examples by Alexander Jackson Davis of what he calls Italian Villas, Italianate, Tuscan Villas, Lombard Style, or the Bracketed style in several of his books beginning with *Cottage Residences* (1842). Although he regards Italianate as somewhat inferior to Gothic, Downing nevertheless praises it for its interesting appearance, freedom in planning, and refined cultural ties.

- **Renaissance Revival.** In the early 1830s, Sir Charles Barry initiates the Renaissance Revival (or Palazzo Style) in England by turning to Italian Renaissance urban palaces for inspiration. By the end of the decade, High Renaissance palaces define gentlemen’s clubs, a few country houses, banks, and commercial buildings across England. The style spreads to North America during the 1840s where it soon is used mainly for public buildings and commercial structures.

### CONCEPTS

The Italian Renaissance offers new inspiration for designers, who are weary of the Neoclassical columns and porticoes and are searching for a richer, more plastic alternative to the spare Greek Revival. High Renaissance Roman, Florentine, and Venetian urban palaces become models for the Italianate or Palazzo Style in England and Renaissance Revival in America, collectively known as Renaissance Revival. In contrast to earlier, architects are not primarily interested in the order, harmony, and proportions of Italian examples. Instead, they view the style as an expression of Italian refinement and culture as well as wealth and luxury. Renaissance Italy further appeals because it is nearer to their homelands and time than the remote, somewhat obscure, classical antiquity.

In contrast to the more formal and classical Renaissance Revival, the Italianate and the Italian Villa styles derive from vernacular Italian farmhouses, villas, and churches. Primarily residential, this picturesque style is an alternative to Gothic Revival, offering asymmetry and freedom in design without the religious or moral overtones of Gothic.

Renaissance Revival interiors and furniture draw upon Italian, French, German, English, and Northern European Renaissance and Mannerist forms and motifs. Like architecture, they express refinement and culture. Designers adapt and reuse forms and motifs, not to replicate past glories, but to create something new and uniquely of the period.

### DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

Although both are derived from Italian models, Italianate is asymmetrical and picturesque, whereas Renaissance Revival is classical, symmetrical, and refined. Both
Italianate or Italian Villa Style. Definitive characteristics for Italianate and the Italian Villa style include brackets beneath the low-pitched roof and individual and/or groups of round arched windows surmounted with pediments or hood moldings. Also common is a tower, usually asymmetrically placed. Other characteristics include asymmetrical massing, bay windows, balconies, porches or verandas, and round arched doorways. Interiors usually are revival styles, such as Rococo Revival and Renaissance Revival.

Renaissance Revival. Structures closely resemble Italian urban palaces, particularly those of the High Renaissance. The rectangular box-like forms usually have no columns or protruding porticoes, porches, or bay windows. Lower stories may be rusticated, and quoins are common. Windows have pediments, lintels, or aedicula. A prominent cornice defines the roofline. Interiors often have bold classical details and may be Renaissance Revival or other revival styles.

Renaissance Revival interiors exhibit classical or Mannerist architectural details, deep moldings, beamed or compartmented ceilings, rich and warm colors, numerous heavy textures, and fashionable patterns on walls, floors, and window treatments. Similarly, ornament comes from Renaissance and Mannerist sources. Interiors are highly eclectic, drawing from many sources. Renaissance Revival furniture has massive proportions, a rectangular or jagged
 outline, architectural details, dark woods, rich carving, and contrasts of form and materials.

- **Motifs.** Classical motifs in architecture and interiors include pediments, stringcourses, quoins, hood moldings, brackets, columns on porches or verandas, swags, acanthus, arabesques, and round arches (Fig. 7-3, 7-4, 7-5, 7-7, 7-11, 7-14, 7-15, 7-20, 7-22). Additional motifs (Fig. 7-2, 7-26) for interiors and furniture are fruit, game, animals, masks, strapwork, Greek key, sphinxes, roundels, cabochons, pendants, and applied bosses or lozenges.

**ARCHITECTURE**

As an outgrowth of a search for alternatives to classicism and Gothic, the Italianate or Italian Villa style originates in England with John Nash’s Cronkhill in Shropshire (1802). Evoking images of Italian vernacular buildings, Cronkhill’s picturesque, rambling forms highlight an asymmetry in which additions are added where needed with little thought to symmetry or overall design. The style soon defines other country houses as well as public buildings.

During the 1830s and 1840s, the Italianate Style spreads across England, and then to North America. The first Italian Villa in the United States is a residence designed in 1837 by John Notman for Rt. Rev. George Washington Doane in New Jersey. After A. J. Downing praises the style for country residences, American examples interpret the Italian Villa style in wood like the Greek Revival or Gothic Revival. There are a few urban examples in masonry. By the 1860s and 1870s, the robust, highly embellished masonry of Italian Villa expresses wealth for the newly arrived captains of industry. Italianate is enormously popular in the United States because of its adaptability. Variations are endless.

The first example of Renaissance Revival in England is the Travellers Club in London (1831; Fig. 7-4) which is modeled after the Palazzo Farnese (1517–1589) in Rome. Barry chooses it as a sophisticated and cultured alternative to Neoclassical and a more embellished image than the plain Greek Revival. Thus, he maintains a classical style but a different, novel appearance. A gathering place for those returning from Grand Tours, the choice of Italian Renaissance carries associations of Italy, culture, wealth, and leisure, highly appropriate for a men’s club. Barry continues to design in the style as do others for banks and commercial buildings. As the 19th century progresses and tastes change, architects turn to the more embellished and three-dimensional Northern Italian and Venetian examples, such as the Library of Saint Mark’s (begun 1537; Venice). Publications spread the style.

As in England, the Renaissance Revival in North America recalls Italian Renaissance palaces and defines gentlemen’s clubs, and government and commercial buildings. In the 1830s, the United States introduces Renaissance Revival cast-iron façades modeled on Venetian palaces for commercial buildings and department stores. Units are individually cast and bolted together to form entire front façades. Inside, a structural cast-iron skeleton eliminates the need for thick masonry walls and allows larger windows. (See Chapter 1, “Industrial Revolution.”) This commercial image expresses Italian culture, wealth, taste, and a regard for the past yet a modern, progressive attitude. The Venetian style rarely affects houses until the 1890s.

**Public Buildings**

- **Types.** First used for gentlemen’s clubs (Fig. 7-4, 7-5), Renaissance Revival delineates many building types, including offices, department stores, warehouses, mills, factories, post offices, custom houses, city halls, train
**DESIGN SPOTLIGHT**

**Architecture:** Reform Club and door detail, Pall Mall, 1837–1841; London, England; Sir Charles Barry. Palazzo style or Renaissance Revival. Inspired by the High Renaissance Palazzo Farnese (begun 1517; redesigned 1534, 1541, 1546; completed 1589) in Rome, the Reform Club is a rectangular block with three stories separated by bold stringcourses. Quoins highlight the building’s corners. Smooth stone walls form backgrounds for the crisp details. Lower-story windows have lintels, while those on the second story have aedicula to identify the piano nobile or main floor. Attic windows are small rectangles framed with astragal moldings. A bold frieze and cornice cap the composition. The symmetrical floor plan centers on a central two-story saloon instead of the typical Italian cortile. This building and the Travellers Club are the first buildings of the Renaissance Revival in England and inspire similar examples in other countries.

![Reform Club and door detail, Pall Mall; London.](image)

**Key Details:**
- Bold cornice
- Frieze
- Astragal molding frames window
- Plain smooth walls
- Aedicula
- Second level defined as a piano nobile (main floor)
- Quoins at building corners
- Lintels
- Entry door framed with classical detailing
- Classical balustrade

▲ 7-5. Reform Club and door detail, Pall Mall; London.
ITALIANATE, RENAISSANCE REVIVAL

IMPORTANT BUILDINGS AND INTERIORS

- **Baden, Ontario, Canada:**
  - Castle Kilbride, 1877. Italianate.

- **Bristol, England:**

- **Buckinghamshire, England:**
  - Cliveden House, 1850; Sir Charles Barry. Renaissance Revival.

- **Dresden, Germany:**
  - Art Gallery, 1847–1854; Gottfried Semper.

- **Dublin, Ireland:**
  - Trinity College Museum, 1852–1857; Thomas Deane and Benjamin Woodward. Renaissance Revival.

- **Isle of Wight, England:**
  - Osborne House, 1845–1851; Thomas Cubitt with Prince Albert. Italianate.

- **Janesville, Wisconsin:**

- **Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania:**
  - Asa Packer Mansion, 1861. Italianate.

- **London, England:**
  - Carlton Club, 1854–1856; Sidney Smirk. Renaissance Revival.
  - King’s Cross Station, 1850–1852; Lewis Cubitt.
  - Reform Club, Pall Mall, 1837–1841; Sir Charles Barry. Palazzo or Renaissance Revival.
  - Royal Albert Hall, c. 1871. Renaissance Revival.

- **Macon, Georgia:**
  - Johnston–Felton–Hay House, 1855–1860; Thomas Thomas and Son. Italianate or Palazzo Style.

- **Manchester, England:**
  - Free Trade Hall, 1853–1854; Edward Walters. Palazzo Style.

- **Memphis, Tennessee:**
  - Mallory-Neely House, c. 1852, 1883.

- **New York City, New York:**
  - Tiffany and Company, c. 1870s. Northern Renaissance Revival or Venetian Style.

- **Paris, France:**
  - Palais des Études, École des Beaux-Arts, designed in 1832–1834, built 1834–1839; Félix Louis Jacques Duban.
  - Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, designed 1842, built 1843–1850; Henri Labrouste.

- **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:**

- **Portland, Maine:**
  - Morse-Libby House (Victoria Mansion), 1858–1860; Henry Austin. Italian Villa.

- **Potsdam, Germany:**

- **Providence, Rhode Island:**

- **San Francisco, California:**
  - Evans House, 1883. Italianate.

- **Savannah, Georgia:**
  - Mercer House, 1860–1866; plans by Muller and Bruyn. Italianate.

- **Shrewsbury, England:**
  - Cronkhill, 1802; John Nash. Italian Villa.

- **Springfield, Massachusetts:**

- **Staffordshire, England:**
  - Trentham Hall, 1834–1849; Sir Charles Barry. Palazzo Style or Renaissance Revival.

- **Vienna, Austria:**
  - Museum of Applied Art, 1871; Vienna, Austria; Heinrich Ferstel. Renaissance Revival.

- **Washington, D.C.:**
  - Custom House, 1857; Ammi B. Young. Renaissance Revival.

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stations, and theaters (Fig. 7-8). Some commercial buildings in the United States are Italianate (Fig. 7-9). A few train stations and town halls display the towers, round arches, and bracketed roofs of the Italian Villa style (Fig. 7-10). Site Orientation. Most buildings occupy large portions of a city block and seldom are a part of a city plan. They appear as large rectangular blocks with no protrusions such as porches or entryways.
Sir Charles Barry (1795–1860) initiates the Renaissance Revival style in England with his designs for gentlemen’s clubs. His Grand Tour, in which he studies in Florence and Rome, helps solidify his preference of working in a classical mode, although he designs in various styles. However, his best-known building and the one that earns him his knighthood is the New Palace of Westminster that is in a picturesque Gothic Revival style.

John Notman (1810–1865) designs the first Italianate residence in the United States, Riverside in New Jersey in 1839. Probably inspired by Barry, he also designs the Renaissance style Athenaeum in Philadelphia. Born in Scotland, he emigrates to the United States in 1831. In addition to the Italian styles, Notman works in the Greek, Gothic, and Egyptian Revivals.

Alexander Roux (1813–1886) is a French cabinetmaker in New York City who works in Rococo, Gothic, and Renaissance Revival styles. He also decorates interiors and sells mantels and interior architectural details. After opening his own shop in 1837, he capitalizes on the popularity of French taste in America and soon has a very successful business.

Floor Plans. Barry’s plan for the Reform Club in London (Fig. 7-6), derived from Italian precedents, is the model for many subsequent buildings. In these cases, symmetry and an open central courtyard or cortile are characteristic. Other plans are symmetrical, developing from the function of the building.

Materials. Materials are chosen to emphasize heaviness and give rich texture and contrast. Structures are of brick,
Façades. Façades resemble or directly imitate Italian High Renaissance palaces (Fig. 7-4, 7-5, 7-7, 7-11). Lower stories may be rusticated. Quoins delineate corners. As in the prototypes, the most important floor is the largest and usually on the second level, while on successive stories the room height may diminish. A large cornice, usually with modillions, separates walls and roof. Walls typically serve as backgrounds for windows, doors, and other details. Balconies or loggias are common. In commercial structures, wall space is greatly reduced to allow larger windows for display and more light in the interiors. Façades based on Northern Italian or Venetian models are more embellished. Round arches, pilasters or engaged columns, swags, acanthus leaves, arabesques, and other classical ornament define these façades. Italian Villa style buildings have one or two towers, individual or groups of fenestration with round arches, and brackets beneath the roof (Fig. 7-10).

Windows. Bold details surrounding windows and doors give three-dimensionality, contrast, and a richness not found in Greek Revival (Fig. 7-8). Windows may diminish in size on each story and have simpler treatments on successive stories (Fig. 7-5, 7-7). Lintels, pediments, or aedicula demarcate windows, depending on the story. Second-story windows usually are the largest and have the boldest surrounds. Stringcourses often form bases for windows, which alternatively may rest on brackets or consoles. Earlier examples feature the rectangular windows of Roman palaces, while later ones exhibit the stone, or cast iron. Because smooth wall surfaces are desirable, façades may be stuccoed for a flat appearance (Fig. 7-4, 7-5). Details may be of different materials.

Commercial buildings, c. 1870s–1880s; Pennsylvania and Tennessee. Renaissance Revival.
round-topped windows typical of Northern Italian or Venetian modes. Italian Villa buildings usually have hood moldings or pediments over the windows, which may be round or rectangular (Fig. 7-10).
**DESIGN SPOTLIGHT**

**Architecture:** Morse-Libby House (Victoria Mansion), 1858–1860; Portland, Maine; Henry Austin. Italian Villa. In contrast to earlier and simpler examples, this house expresses richness and wealth with its masonry building materials, abundance of textures, and robust details. The asymmetrical façade is composed of geometric forms and has a marked verticality that is emphasized by the tower. Rusticated quoins and deep hood moldings and pediments stand out against the smooth walls and create strong light and dark contrasts. Large ornamental brackets beneath the roof and round-arched windows and doorway complete the Italian Villa motifs.

As is typical in many homes, the interiors display several styles, including Renaissance Revival in the parlor, Rococo Revival in the music room (see Chapter 8, “Second Empire, Rococo Revival”), and Gothic Revival in the library (see Chapter 6, “Gothic Revival”). Like the exteriors, the owner’s wealth is evident in the bold architectural details, painted and gilded wall and ceiling decorations, costly materials, lavish textiles, and furniture in rich finishes.

![Morse-Libby House (Victoria Mansion); Portland, Maine.](image)

- **Doors.** Doors, of paneled wood, are often centered on the main façade to signal their importance. They usually have rounded tops. Doorway surrounds may include pilasters or engaged columns carrying an entablature or pediment (Fig. 7-4).

- **Roofs.** Downplayed as in the originals, roofs may be flat or low pitched. Some examples have balustrades (Fig. 7-11). Tower roofs are hipped or gabled and low pitched. Brackets beneath the roof identify the Italian Villa style.

- **Later Interpretations.** In the late 19th century, Italian Renaissance palaces again become models for contemporary public and private buildings, particularly for the wealthy. Although both derive from similar models, the scale of the NeoRenaissance buildings is far larger than the earlier ones (See Chapter 12, “Classical Eclecticism.”)

**Private Buildings**

- **Types.** Mansions, row houses, and urban villas are usually Renaissance Revival in both England and the United States, whereas villas, country houses, and cottages may be Italian Villa style or Italianate (Fig. 7-12, 7-13, 7-15).
■ Site Orientation. Rural examples usually have surrounding lawns and gardens that combine formal and informal areas. In the 1840s, architects begin to plan Italianate and Renaissance Revival row houses as long units of repetitive and uniform designs that form streetscapes (Fig. 7-18).

■ Floor Plans. Floor plans do not change much with the style, although some asymmetry may be evident. Many houses maintain the traditional double-pile or Georgian plan of a central hall flanked by two rooms on each floor. Square, formal plans are typical for Renaissance Revival, but projecting rooms, porches, and verandas help break up strict symmetry in Italianate or Italian Villas (Fig. 7-13). Townhouses have side hall plans (Fig. 7-18). Staircases often are curvilinear.

■ Materials. Houses are built of stone, brick, brownstone, or wood (Fig. 7-12, 7-13). Wood and brick may be stuccoed and scored to resemble stone. A cheaper substitute is a painted finish mixed with sand, which suggests stone. In the United States, polychrome of three or more colors is common with a lighter body and darker details. The individual components within architectural details also may contrast in color to create highlights and shadows for more three-dimensionality. Typical colors include buff, straw, or stone, brown, red, olive, gold, green, and blue. One often recommended color scheme includes a buff body, light olive trim, reddish-brown sashes, and green shutters. Some residences have painted cast-iron hood moldings, brackets, porches, and other details.

■ Façades. Façade design varies from close depictions of Italian High Renaissance palaces to asymmetrical examples that are boldly decorated with classical and nonclassical
details. Renaissance Revival examples in England or Germany closely resemble Italian prototypes and are formal, symmetrical rectangular blocks (Fig. 7-18). Heights of stories diminish. Rustication, when present, is confined to lower stories and quoins. Bold details, such as lintels or triangular or segmental pediments, emphasize rectangular windows and doorways. In both England and America, Italianate houses may have a centered gable or
be a rectangular block with a cupola (Fig. 7-14). Italian Villas have a tall, rectangular tower on one corner or occasionally two corners to emphasize verticality (Fig. 7-15). In both versions, wall surfaces are smooth to provide a neutral background for windows and doors, and there may be loggias or balconies. Verandas or porches are common. A large cornice and heavy brackets emphasize the roofline. Italianate row houses have rounded windows with or without hood moldings, rounded doorways, and bracketed cornices (Fig. 7-18).

- **Windows.** Rectangular windows with lintels or triangular and/or segmental pediments above them characterize Renaissance Revival houses. Some windows have stained glass in them. Italianate and Italian Villa styles feature round-arched two-over-two windows; some homes may have only rectangular windows or mix round-arched windows (Fig. 7-15, 7-17). Some residences have bay windows. Windows may be single or in groups with and without shutters or blinds. Hood moldings or pediments over windows are a definitive characteristic of the Italianate and Italian Villa styles.

- **Doors.** Like windows, doors often have round-arched tops. Surrounds may have pilasters or engaged columns carrying a lintel or pediment or boldly carved surrounds (Fig. 7-18). Doors are wooden with panels and may be single or double. Some may be grained to imitate more expensive woods. A few have glass in the upper portions.

- **Roofs.** Low-pitched gable or hipped roofs are most used. Grand houses may have a cupola instead of a tower (Fig. 7-14).

- **Later Interpretations.** In the late 19th century, the Renaissance again defines some residences (see Chapter 12, “Classical Eclecticism”). Some early-20th-century homes, such as four-squares, reflect Italianate characteristics, such as brackets beneath the roof or hood moldings. In the late 20th century, contemporary townhouses in some historic areas of European cities imitate the character of commercial and residential buildings nearby (Fig. 7-19).

### INTERIORS

Italianate or Renaissance Revival public buildings feature interiors with Renaissance or classical architectural details. Following Barry’s design of the Reform Club, many English public buildings center on two-story halls with superimposed columns defining floors and with skylights above. Renaissance Revival rooms, particularly important or public ones, have bold architectural details, rich textures, a variety of materials, and lavish classical and naturalistic ornament derived from Renaissance and...
Mannerist sources. In contrast, houses may have rooms decorated in Rococo Revival, Gothic Revival, and/or Renaissance Revival.

Although the Renaissance heritage of a country often defines the style of that country, eclecticism prevails. Interior decoration and furnishings are chosen as symbols of wealth, taste, and civilization, and the Renaissance styles imply a long, genteel, sophisticated heritage. Displays of wealth frequently characterize Renaissance Revival interiors in public and private buildings.

Public and Private Buildings

- Types. Renaissance Revival defines a wide variety of public rooms, usually those of importance such as entry halls, atriums, courtrooms, or legislative chambers (Fig. 7-20, 7-21, 7-22). In residential buildings, entry halls, parlors, dining rooms, and bedrooms may display Renaissance Revival or Italianate characteristics (Fig. 7-27, 7-28, 7-29, 7-30, 7-31).


▲ 7-22. Atrium hall, Palace Hotel, view as of 1906; San Francisco, California; Carleton E. Watkins.

▲ 7-23. Floor tiles, 1860s–1880s; Virginta (top row) and from Homestead Architecture by Samuel Sloan (bottom row).
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▲ 7-25. Window Treatments: Examples from Beautiful Homes, 1878 (top right); Morse-Libby House, 1860s (bottom left); and Godey’s Lady’s Book, 1870–1890 (bottom right).
**Italianate, Renaissance Revival**

**Interiors:** Renaissance Revival parlor, Jedediah Wilcox House, 1870; Meriden, Connecticut (now located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art). Like the other rooms in the Wilcox mansion, the rear parlor is designed en suite, that is, the mantel, over-mantel mirror, window cornices, light fixtures, and furniture match. The white marble mantel has paneled columns, acanthus leaf carving, rosettes, and a cartouche in the center. The mirror above the mantel and the door surrounds have similar details. The carpet is typical of the period in color and its scrolling geometric motifs recall Renaissance arabesques. It is a reproduction of a carpet from Paris found in a New York City house. Window treatments of boldly shaped lambrequins hang from ebonized cornices that match the mirror. The painted ceiling has flowers and rosettes. Made by John Jelliff and Co. of Newark, New Jersey, the Renaissance Revival parlor suite features similar details to the room’s architecture. It is made of rosewood with mother-of-pearl medallions.

The exterior of the house is Second Empire and displays the style’s characteristics of mansard roofs on the house and its tower, brackets supporting the roof, dormers, and round-arched windows with hood moldings (see Chapter 8, “Second Empire, Rococo Revival”). An 1870 newspaper description of the house called the style Franco-Italian and noted that the architect was Augustus Truesdell.

![Chimneypieces, c. 1870s–1880s; England, Rhode Island, Maine, and Missouri.](image)

![Renaissance Revival parlor, Jedediah Wilcox House; Meriden, Connecticut.](image)
- **Relationships.** Furniture may still line the walls in rooms in public buildings as well as the entry hall and important rooms in homes. A particularly impressive piece of furniture may dominate a room, such as the center table in the parlor, the hallstand in the entry hall, and the sideboard in the dining room.

- **Color.** Renaissance Revival palettes are warm and rich. Crimson is favored, particularly for dining rooms, followed by green, brown, gold, and blue. Gilding may highlight details. Wood trim and paneling are stained a rich brown. Ceilings are white or a lighter tint of the wall color.

- **Lighting.** As in other styles of the period, candles, oil lamps, and gas fixtures light both Renaissance Revival and Italianate interiors (Fig. 7-28, 7-29, 7-30, 7-32, 7-34). Unlike Gothic Revival or Rococo Revival, only a few feature distinctive Renaissance forms or motifs. Some forms copy ancient Greek vases or have classical motifs.

- **Floors.** Floors may be of wood planks, parquet, marble, terrazzo, or tiles in colorful patterns (Fig. 7-20, 7-23, 7-29, 7-31). Masonry floors are common in public buildings and domestic entry halls. Carpets and rugs cover floors in both public and private buildings (Fig. 7-27). Floor cloths or oil cloths, as they are called in America, still appear in less-formal rooms. Patterns imitate carpet or masonry.

- **Carpets.** Brussels, Wilton, or tapestry carpets in large-scale floral or geometric patterns with naturalistic shading are common in Renaissance style rooms. Typical colors are maroon, red, olive, brown, cream, and blue.
Interior and ceiling details, Castle Kilbride, 1877; Baden, Ontario, Canada. Italianate.

Stair halls and details, 1860s–1870s; Minnesota, Georgia, and Maine. Renaissance Revival and Italianate.
Although the jacquard mechanism and steam-powered loom increase carpet production, Brussels and Wilton remain expensive because their construction methods demand a great deal of wool yarn. Less expensive tapestry carpets use preprinted wool warp threads on the surface and less expensive threads for the body. Because an unlimited number of colors can be printed onto surface threads, tapestry carpets exhibit great details and realistic shading. Ingrain carpets, used in less important rooms, have large scrolled or circular patterns in green, red, brown, and white. Plain and patterned grass matting usually replaces carpet in summer.

Wallpapers. Wallpapers with Renaissance motifs may cover walls although there are fewer Renaissance patterns than other styles. Patterns include textile imitations, flock designs, fresco styles that imitate moldings, and gilded elements and motifs. Leather in embossed and gilded designs often is used in dining rooms because it is thought that leather will not absorb smells.

Chimneypieces. Mantels are commonly of slate or marble, with white the preferred color. Other colors are black, gray, rose, brown, dark green, or two colors such as black and white. Most mantels are rectangular with an arched opening and a shaped shelf above (Fig. 7-24, 7-26, 7-27). Heavy or decorative moldings surround the opening, and a centered keystone carved with shells, fruit, acanthus leaves, or scrolls accents it. Moldings and carvings may decorate the spaces over the opening and the sides. Rectangular mantels may be carved with cartouches, tablets, brackets, caryatids, or columns. Plainer mantels are used in less important rooms.

Staircases. Staircases may be straight, rectangular, or curved with a mahogany handrail (Fig. 7-31). The large and prominent newel post may be polygonal or baluster shaped. In wealthy homes, staircases may have niches for sculpture. Some staircases are lit from above with skylights.

Window Treatments. Deep lambrequins or pelmets hanging from gilded cornices replace the complicated swagged drapery of earlier (Fig. 7-24, 7-25, 7-27, 7-32). Lambrequins often have complex shapes and fringe trim. Beneath them hang symmetrical fabric panels and muslin or lace curtains next to the glass. Curtains may be tied or looped back over cloak or curtain pins during the day. Plain panels hanging from rings on rods are a simpler treatment for less important rooms. Heavy plain or patterned fabrics are usual for lambrequins and curtains. Also common are roller blinds in linen or brown Holland cloth painted with scenes or designs.

Doors. Doors may be arched or rectangular and are generally paneled in dark mahogany, walnut, or rosewood (Fig. 7-28, 7-29). Sliding or pocket doors in double parlors may have frosted or etched glass panels. Robust moldings, pediments, or entablatures surmount doors in public buildings or important rooms in homes. Doorknobs may be white or decorated porcelain, glass, silver plate, or solid silver.

Ceilings. Flat ceilings may be plain with a plaster rosette, have beams, or be compartmentalized with strapwork, pendants, bosses, or other patterns inside them (Fig. 7-24, 7-29, 7-32, 7-33). Some ceilings are painted to imitate compartments (Fig. 7-30). Gas fixtures hang from plaster rosettes (Fig. 7-33, 7-34).

Later Interpretations. In the late 19th century, Renaissance architectural details, paneling, and other elements again define interiors in wealthy homes (see Chapter 12, “Classical Eclecticism,” and Chapter 30, “Modern Historicism.”) These
ITALIANATE, RENAISSANCE REVIVAL


7-33. Ceiling details, 1860s–1870s; Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Missouri.
versions are more correct because the Renaissance is better understood in the previous revival styles. Wealthy Americans import entire Renaissance rooms or specific architectural details from Europe and install them in their homes (Fig. 7-35). In the 20th century, there is less direct importation of rooms and more reinvention of stylistic features. As an example, various hotels incorporate designs based on Renaissance Revival influences (Fig. 7-36).

![Lighting: Gasoliers from Rhode Island, Indiana, Hawaii.](image)

![Later Interpretation: Entrance hall, Villard Houses, 1882–1885; New York City, New York; McKim, Mead, and White. Neo-Renaissance.](image)
Renaissance Revival furniture gains popularity in nearly all European countries and North America beginning in the 1860s. Nationalist motivations are particularly strong in Germany and Italy, but less so in England and North America. Each country interprets the style in light of its own past. Nevertheless, certain features are common, including massive proportions, an irregular silhouette, architectural motifs, opulence, and Renaissance or Baroque motifs from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. The style does not seek to copy Renaissance forms or motifs, but instead adapts and reinvents them to create a new style in keeping with contemporary tastes that are suitable for contemporary rooms. Renaissance Revival furniture is common in gentlemen’s clubs, smoking rooms, dining rooms, libraries, and entrance halls as well as the parlors and bedrooms of wealthier homes.

Neo-Grec, New Greek, or Modern Greek is a variation of Renaissance Revival that the French introduce in the Great London Exposition in 1862. More two-dimensional than its counterpart, Neo-Grec features less carving, more incising, and Greek, Roman, and especially Egyptian motifs.

Public and Private Buildings

■ Types. All types of furniture may be Renaissance Revival. Particularly characteristic are sideboards, pedestals, easels, wall pockets, and hanging cabinets.

■ Distinctive Features. Distinctive to Renaissance Revival is an uneven outline, competing elements instead of a unified whole, architectural details, heavy cresting often in the form of a pediment, tapered legs, and carved or applied ornament (Fig. 7-28, 7-32, 7-38, 7-43). Finials, drops, or pendents highlight tops, legs, and other features.

■ Relationships. Architectural motifs establish a relationship with exteriors and some interiors.

■ Materials. Walnut, mahogany, and oak are the most common woods. Veneer, marquetry, inlay, ormolu, gilding, or porcelain may embellish pieces. Burl veneer contrasting with plainer veneer is a frequent characteristic. Neo-Grec pieces usually are ebonized and have incising highlighted with gilding. Carving on more expensive pieces may be excessive and in high relief. Applied ornament, such as bosses, is common on cheaper furniture. Drawer pulls may be turned or teardrop pendents. More expensive pieces have large brass and ebony pendents for pulls. Cabinet tops are often marble or scagliola.

■ Seating. Like other styles, Renaissance Revival seating comes in sets and shows great variety in form and details (Fig. 7-27, 7-28, 7-37). Some seating is large and richly carved and ornamented, while other examples have simple forms with turned legs, ladder backs, and caned seats. Legs are usually turned with a large ring at the top that tapers to a smaller ring. Most have casters. Some legs are modified cabriole shapes. Back legs are commonly reversed cabrioles like Rococo Revival. Neo-Grec pieces may have saber, klismos, or curule legs and hoof or paw feet. The round or trapezoidal seats of parlor or dining chairs are upholstered, whereas hall chairs have wooden seats suitable for their less important users. Backs are rectangular with a wooden frame that flares out at the top, forming ears and a large crest, usually in a pediment shape. Common embellishments include incising, carving, finials, and applied ornament such as pendents. Sofas may have double or tripartite backs. Unlike Rococo Revival, each part is treated separately and does not blend into a unified whole. Backs and seats often are deeply tufted to add to the opulence and appearance of comfort.

■ Tables. Like seating, Renaissance Revival tables take many forms (Fig. 7-27, 7-28, 7-32). Tops may be round, oval, oblong, or rectangular. Most tops are of marble, but expensive tables may have inlay or marquetry. Bases and legs form complicated shapes and silhouettes. Turning, animal forms, lyres, urns, brackets, or a combination are typical for legs and bases. Pendents, finials, drops, incising, and carving add interest and complexity. Extension dining tables with one or more pedestals replace the drop-leaf tables of earlier. In the hall or parlor, large pedestals...
and plant stands resembling columns decorated with Renaissance motifs hold sculpture, flowers, or plants.

Storage. Hallstands dominate the hall. Their form and embellishment are designed to create an impression of wealth and refinement for visitors. Formal and massive, they may be 6 to 10 feet tall. Characterized by a complicated silhouette topped by a pediment, the hallstand has knobs for hanging outwear, a mirror to check one's appearance before entering the parlor, an umbrella stand, and a marble top on which to leave calling cards, a common social ritual.

Similarly, the massive sideboard dominates the dining room and is lavishly embellished with carving, ormolu, porcelain, marble, marquetry, inlay, and gilding (Fig. 7-28, 7-29, 7-38). Its main function is to display the family's wealth, culture, and good taste. The basic form features a plinth or block base with three or four doors or drawers above, a marble top, and a large wooden back with shelves and a mirror. Capped by a large pediment with finials, the sideboard may have realistic carvings of food, game, or hunting motifs. Cabinetmaking firms commission impressive Renaissance Revival sideboards,
large cabinets, and pianofortes with much carving and complex iconographies as exhibition pieces for expositions (Fig. 7-38, 7-42). Dressers and wardrobes for smaller houses may imitate these concepts, but are often simpler in design (Fig. 7-39, 7-40). Renaissance Revival étagères show marked verticality, undulating forms, unusual cutouts, mirrors, shelves, pediments, cartouches, and other embellishment.

▲ 7-38. (continued)


▲ 7-40. Dresser with mirror, mid-19th century; Texas.
Wooten Desk. The Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia featured a new cabinet secretary called a Wooten desk (Fig. 7-41; see also Chapter 1, “Industrial Revolution”). An example of ingenious patent furniture, it becomes a symbol of status and orderliness for the prosperous businessman. It features numerous drawers, files, and pigeonholes inside to assist with paper organization. The functional design emphasizes efficiency, flexibility, and practicality. The doors can be closed when not in use. Made in four models with varying prices, customs forms are also available. The invention of the typewriter and other forms of office equipment render Wooten desks less functional.

Beds. Renaissance Revival beds also have massive proportions (Fig. 7-32, 7-43). Headboards may be up to eight feet
Elaborate canopy or tester
Ornate bed hangings
Fringe
Tassels
Medallion
Classical composition for headboard with classical motifs and pediment
Straight lines dominate design
Pilaster
Classical composition for footboard with classical motifs
Pilaster

![7-43. Beds, 1850s-1870s; Belgium, England, and the United States. Renaissance Revival.](image)

Tall and often resemble Renaissance church façades or are capped with a tall pediment. Panels have carvings of fruit, flowers, and Renaissance motifs. Not to be outdone, the lower footboards also have carved panels. Canopies are largely out of fashion, but when present, they have deep moldings and applied ornament. Bed drapery is complicated in form and lavishly trimmed with fringe and tassels. Matching night tables, dressers, gentleman’s chests, wardrobes, wash stands, shaving stands, boot jacks, and towel racks complete the bedroom suite. All match the bed in size and details.
Upholstery. There are few distinctive Renaissance Revival textiles, although damasks may have large repeats in undulating patterns with naturalistic flowers and leaves. In the 1850s, textiles emulate the arabesques and grotesques of Rome and the Renaissance. Upholstery fabrics include damasks, moreen, horsehair, leather, and velvet, plain and patterned. Bed drapery may be of damask, velvet, satin, or moreen.

Decorative Arts. Classical figures, busts, and urns stand on pedestals, mantels, and in niches in Renaissance Revival interiors (Fig. 7-20, 7-29). Pictures are important. Rarely from the Renaissance, subjects vary from classical to contemporary themes. Revived Italian majolica with Italian, French, and Flemish motifs is especially popular. Glass and porcelain objects may decorate mantels and tables (Fig. 7-32, 7-44). Large mirrors hang over fireplaces or between windows (Fig. 7-25). Frames may be stained, ebonized, and gilded wood and are carved with Renaissance motifs. Wall pockets, hanging cabinets, canterburies to hold magazines, all in Renaissance forms, commonly accessorize interiors.

Later Interpretations. There are very few interpretations of Renaissance Revival furniture in later developments. Some furniture manufacturers produce variations called Italian or Tuscan for residential furniture during the 1920s (Fig. 7-45) and again in the late 20th century. (see Chapter 30, “Modern Historicism.”)