

Queen Anne

Styling elements in table designs

by Franklin H. Gottshall

The Queen Anne style is generally the most popular of all the good English styles of the 18th century and is a good choice for craftsmen wishing to put together their own period design. The style's popularity is due to the fact that in the beginning it was distinguished for its clean lines, beautiful curved elements and restraint in the use of ornament.

Queen Anne's short reign (1702-1714) was not distinguished for any personal influence she gave to the progress of fashion in her day, and so it must be assumed that the craftsmen themselves were largely responsible for the changes and improvements in furniture design during her reign. The happy result was that craftsmen, who understood both the practical possibilities as well as the limitations of their craft, were largely free of the domination by patrons whose wealth and position did not necessarily reflect good taste. Thus, at least in its early stages, the style was relatively free of the excesses in form, embellishment and elaboration so prevalent immediately preceding this style, and in those which followed.

Cupboards, cabinets, chairs and tables became less elaborate and fussy, and were designed with a view to their function rather than to ostentation and display. Technical

improvements in both design and construction were made with pleasing results. The changes brought about by these factors, as well as an improvement of the economy in England during this period, made it possible for more people to share in the amenities which had previously been largely reserved for the privileged few.

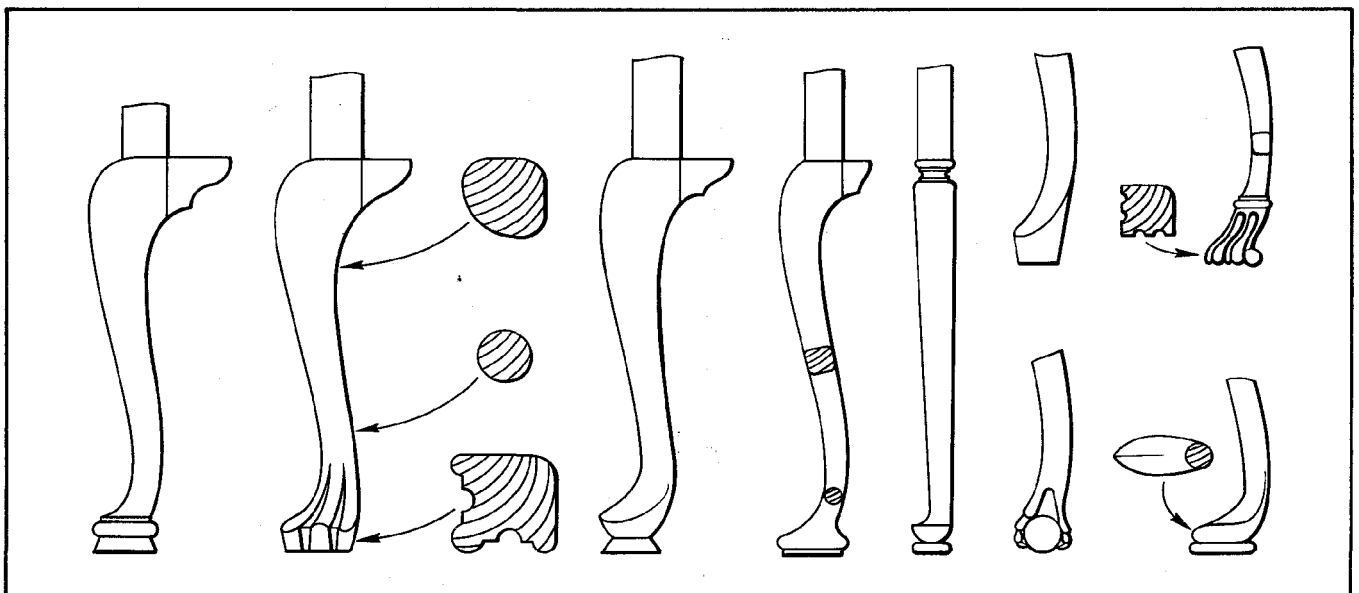
While the Queen Anne style came into being during the very beginning of the 18th century, its influence, once it was well established, continued well into the latter part of the century. Artists like William Hogarth greatly influenced design at this time, especially the employment of the reverse curve, both structurally and decoratively. Also sometimes called the cyma curve, it is used consistently and with good effect in Queen Anne style.

On a portrait of himself, which now hangs in the National Gallery of London, Hogarth painted a palette on which appears a reverse curve with the caption "The line of beauty and grace." This aroused so much discussion that an explanation was demanded of him. He explained it by saying that "a beautiful curve by its serpentine, flamelike waving and winding simultaneously in different directions leads the eye in a pleasing manner from one end to the other." He sought to explain it further by saying that the principles involved were "fitness, variety, uniformity, simplicity, intricacy, and quantity — all of which cooperate in the production of beauty, mutually correcting and restraining each other occasionally.

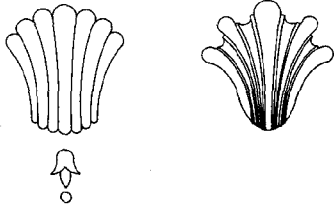
In addition to this, he portrayed Queen Anne furniture in many of his paintings, which enjoyed wide distribution during the first half of the 18th century.

The American colonies not only imported a great deal of furniture, once trade was well established, but they also made reproductions and adapted the styles to their own requirements. Fortunately, in the majority of cases, their adaptations reflected the simple, clean-cut lines and attributes by which we identify the style in America today.

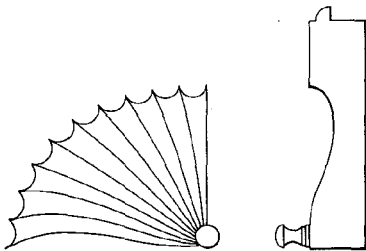
Some styles of legs and feet found on Queen Anne furniture. Among the most widely used were the trifid (three-toed) webbed foot (second from left, also shown in cross section) and the padfoot (third from left). The ball-and-claw (second from right, below) later became a Chippendale hallmark. The Spanish foot is shown at right (above).



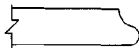
Some Queen Anne Styling Elements



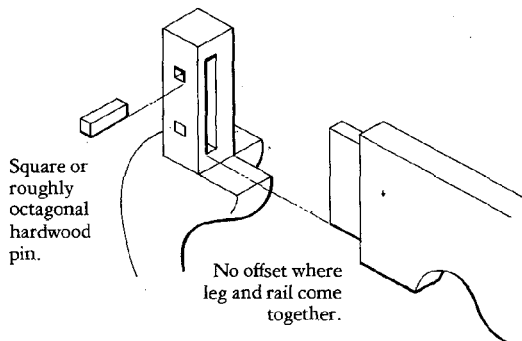
Shell carvings for knees of legs.
Also used for aprons of tables and lowboys.



Sunburst carving on drawer.

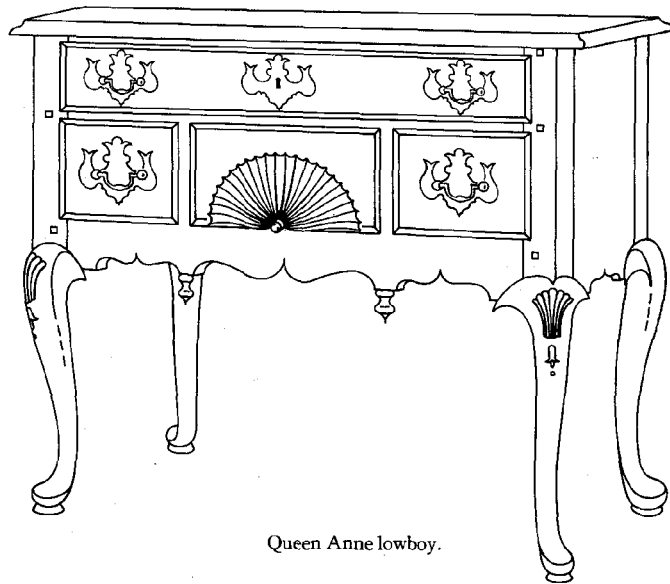


Molding around top of lowboy.



Square or
roughly
octagonal
hardwood
pin.

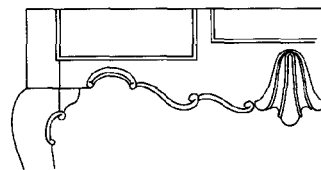
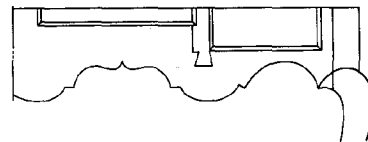
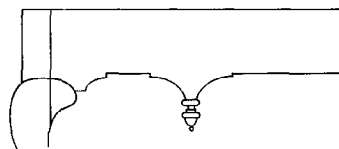
No offset where
leg and rail come
together.



Queen Anne lowboy.



Brass drawer pulls (good ones always
have carefully beveled outlines).



Aprons which may be adapted
to lowboys, tables, etc.

At present, good American Queen Anne furniture is more highly prized by American collectors of antiques than its English counterparts. Among the reasons for this are that skillful cabinetmakers like William Savery and others did notable work in the style, basing their work on the early, simple, clean-cut patterns imported from Europe. They used walnut rather consistently because it was available and plentiful in the areas where they worked. Maple, a wood not native to the mother country, was also used; so was poplar as a secondary wood for drawer sides and like members.

About 1720 and thereafter there was a gradual substitution from walnut to mahogany in England, but this change did not take place in America to any great extent until a long time later, because mahogany was more expensive and no great improvement over the native walnut.

One of the most appealing developments of the Queen Anne style was the small dressing table or "lowboy," so-named to distinguish it from the "highboy," a similar piece with a chest of drawers on top. Lowboys are about table height, rarely exceeding 30 inches. (An antique purporting to be a lowboy which is much taller, or wider than the example shown, is probably a converted highboy and worth a lot less.)

As the Queen Anne style metamorphosed into Chippendale, ornament became more and more elaborate, often featuring quarter columns and other refinements. But the best (and most highly prized) furniture of the Queen Anne style is characterized by the minimal decoration, simple outlines, beautifully formed curves and sound, sturdy construction of the early period. The modern craftsman would do well to adhere to these principles.

