



Renowned interior designer Joanna Wood frequently works on projects in the United States, as well as for Americans living in the United Kingdom, such as this house in Eaton Square in London.



The enduring allure of BRITISH STYLE

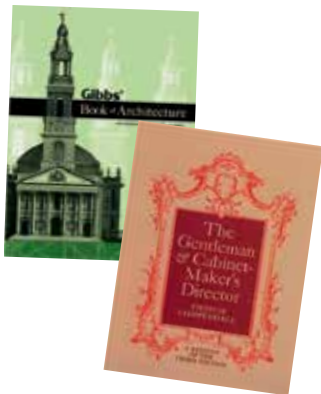
We explore the long-lasting appeal of British style for our friends 'across the pond', and showcase the finest brands captivating hearts and adorning homes

What do The Beatles, Hugh Laurie, and Colefax and Fowler all have in common? The answer is that they have each, in their own ways, conquered the United States. In this huge and diverse country there is a constancy about our 'special relationship' that endures, transcending the vagaries of politics and crossing over from pop music, film and television to fashion, architecture and interiors. "With its deep-seated heritage and quirky eccentricities, British style has romance and great stories which capture the imagination, along with an innate style that combines inherited pieces with contemporary design," says Alison Gore, licensing director for the Sanderson Group. "The Americans have also fallen in love with the Duchess of Cambridge; the effect of 'Princess Kate style' cannot be ignored. Neither can we ignore the role of *Downton Abbey*. Heritage, longevity, history – all are qualities that seem to be appreciated by this market."

SHARED HISTORY

According to design historian Freya Van Saun, tutor at the New York School of Interior Design, the British influence on American interiors goes back to colonial times. In the first English colonies, the furnishings would have tried to replicate the homes in the provincial towns and villages from which the settlers came. By the eighteenth century, early Georgian and Queen Anne styles were influential – thanks in part to Scottish architect James Gibbs' *A Book of Architecture*, published in 1728 – which became widely used throughout the American colonies – and Thomas Chippendale's *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director*, which was available only a year or two after its publication in England in 1754. "American style was a direct interpretation of what was going on in England," Van Saun explains. "At the time, we were a British colony, so it made sense. After the American Revolution, there was more of a split but English style was still a very big influence." ▶

BELOW *A Book of Architecture*, £12.99, James Gibbs; *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director*, £14.99, Thomas Chippendale





The very British style of Drummonds' products has become increasingly popular in the USA, leading to the opening of its first New York showroom in May this year. Double Ladybower basin, £8,340, Drummonds



"From the 1860s onwards, wealthy Americans began to travel to England – some of them marrying into landed families – and were so impressed by the English country houses they came across that they went home and copied them," says Van Saun. "Every major American family had a home in town and a big country house that was very much modelled on the historicism that came in at the end of the nineteenth century and ran through to the early twentieth century," she continues. "Lots of English antiques were shipped over, and eventually the look began to trickle down into more modest homes, too."

STYLISH RELATIONS

In the early twentieth century, as interior design became a profession in America and Britain, a few interior designers became influential in both countries. One of the most notable of these was Syrie Maugham, who was credited with designing the first all-white room and undertook projects for Bunny Mellon and Wallis Simpson amongst others. In a classic example of a design partnership between the two countries, American heiress Nancy Lancaster bought Sybil Colefax's business and shop in 1944 and, together with English decorator John Fowler, became renowned for bringing together the design elements of the English country-house look.

Today, a surprising number of British companies have significant business in the United States – whether through their own shops, distributors or websites that sell and ship internationally – and every area is covered, from beds and basin taps to paint and pendant lights. Well-established names include Jamb, Bennison, Hector Finch, Samuel Heath, Smallbone of Devizes, Beaudesert, Farrow & Ball, Turnstyle ▶



TOP LEFT Inspired by a nineteenth-century design, this bold wallpaper by Farrow & Ball is one of its most popular styles in the USA. Tessela wallpaper, £86 a roll ABOVE Cole & Son's business still employs many of the artisanal manufacturing techniques available in the UK for both its heritage and its contemporary designs. Great Vine wallpaper, Historic Royal Palaces collection, £95 a roll, Cole & Son



Nina Campbell, interior designer

"I take on many interior design commissions in the United States, and I think one of the reasons our design style is popular is because English interior designers tend to be more accommodating than some American designers; in a way, we're more global. The USA is a very big place and, of course, everywhere is different. The West Coast is a bit more beige, cream and neutral; in Miami and Palm Beach, interiors tend to be splashy and colourful; while in New York houses tend to be crisper. I think it is in the South that there is most English style – the houses of New Orleans, for example, are very elegant and can be more cluttered and eclectic."



ABOVE Annie Sloan's Chalk Paint has been sold in United States since 2010 and is made in the USA under company guidance. *Chalk Paint, £18.95 for 1 litre, Annie Sloane*

RIGHT In Lapidica's 5,000 square metre New York showroom the products are curated to underline the company's European heritage and craftsmanship. *Reclaimed Barr De Montpellier stone floor tiles, £594 a square metre, Lapidica*



Designs, Sanderson, and I&JL Brown – known in the United States as Fauld Furniture. Many of these companies have been selling in the United States for 20 years or so, and all enjoy a reputation for high quality, authenticity and timeless classicism, which goes down a storm with American customers. It does no harm to have a Royal connection, too, it must be said. As Sarah Large of Samuel Heath says, “Our traditional collections are most popular in America, and we find that one of our main selling points is the fact that we are made in England. Also, our Royal Crown Derby Collection, which was launched last year, has been well received in the United States as not only is it traditional, but it also features the word ‘Royal’, which our American customers love.”

TRANSATLANTIC ARRIVALS

In recent years there has been a surge of interest in British interior products, leading to a multitude of companies launching in the United States. In 2010, Vispring started exporting its beds and Annie Sloan started selling her Chalk Paint there, and in 2011, Abigail Edwards launched her collection virtually simultaneously in Britain and the United States. In 2014, Lapidica opened a New York showroom, after many years of working on United States-based projects from England and, in the same year, Lewis & Wood responded to demand by launching into a network of showrooms, whilst Christy – which has been trading in the United States for 20 years – decided to launch a website to sell directly to its American customers. ▶



ABOVE Lewis & Wood's big, bold prints are popular in the USA. Many of the designs work well with Turkish carpets for a particularly English look. *Curtain in Alhambra, Persian, £84 a metre, Lewis & Wood*

LEFT Colefax and Fowler values its North American customers enormously – indeed North America accounts for over 60% of the company's total fabric-division sales. *Curtains in Cordelia, Onyx, £139 a metre; chair upholstered in Cesario silver, £118 a metre, both Colefax and Fowler*

FAR LEFT Vispring is sold through key, high-end retailers across the USA including Chicago Luxury Beds, Vispring on Beverly, and ABC Carpet and Home in New York. *Vispring Regal Superb mattress with Prestige divan and Achilles headboard, £6,555, Vispring surround, £3,480*

Margaret Mintz, interior designer and tutor at the New York School of Interior Design

“Whether or not Americans like English style depends very much on their background. In Greenwich, where I live, there are some very traditional colonial homes and people use a lot of lovely colours, antiques, traditional dining tables and so on. But not everyone is so interested in the history, and I think younger people like more throwaway things. I would say it's more popular in suburban areas and in the South, where people are more traditional. What they like is the soft beauty, the patina of antiques, mixed with original rugs, porcelain, silver, chintz, sofas with rolled arms and soft backs, and the general layering of patterns. People appreciate the timelessness and the welcoming quality of English style.”



Joanna Wood, interior designer

“The English country-house style has enduring popularity in the United States. A quite eclectic and relaxed style is considered quintessentially English, and Americans always love antiques and reproduction furniture – which we make very well indeed. Our repair and restoration service is remarkably good, too. One of the big problems of working in the States is the cost of transporting goods. You have to plan ahead and get full-loads.

But in terms of working for American clients, going to New York is cheaper, quicker and more efficient than ever. And new technology, like computer-generated imaging, makes working abroad much easier than it used to be.”

This year alone has seen Blendworth relaunch – in partnership with an American fabric company, Plain English establish a design studio, Cabbages & Roses partner with an American agent, Drummonds open a New York showroom, and Original Style launch a new range specifically designed for the American market.

Whilst a strong sense of heritage is one reason why many British brands do so well ‘across the pond’, there is a forward-looking element at play, too: as Abigail Edwards points out: “The UK has a more creative, eccentric side than the US, and I think Americans appreciate that quirkiness; British design stands out.” Julie Engineer of Clarke & Clarke says: “We have a long history of mutual admiration. British style is cool and we have a pedigree of producing cutting-edge work, whether it’s art, fashion, interiors or music.”

ABOVE Original Style focuses on promoting The Winchester Tile Company in the USA. Marsh tiles, £124.95 a square metre

LEFT Sanderson is sold in the USA by its subsidiary ‘Style Library’. Curtains, Hadham, Amethyst/Linen, £102 a metre; chairs all covered in Sanderson fabric



Smallbone of Devizes' bespoke kitchens are found at prestigious addresses around the world, including this recent project in New York. Kitchens from £45,000, Smallbone of Devizes

Martin Cook, director of UK Trade and Investment in the USA for The Great Britain Campaign, adds: "Great Britain is held in high regard for its creativity and innovation, especially in design. Companies from across the United Kingdom are combining heritage, craft and innovative technology to produce unique products that are exciting the industry." He cites the British exhibitors at the recent International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) in New York as excellent examples of British companies succeeding overseas, and pointed out that many of them won prizes, including: Tala LED, which received an Innovation Award – Best Design for Social Good; Jude Cassidy, who received an International Furnishings & Design Association award for Best in Show – Textiles; and Innermost, which won an award for Best Lighting.

A blend of tradition, innovation and high quality is clearly a winning combination for British companies in the United States – and it is enduring. For Freya Van Saun, English style will never go out of fashion. "For us, it is symbolic; it's mixed in with our sense of what we are as a colonial nation," she says. "I don't think we will ever lose that." ■

LEFT MIDDLE
Turnstyle Designs
been selling in
America for nearly
20 years and ships its
products across the
Atlantic to a network
of 150 dealers.

BOTTOM LEFT
Max Rolitt sells
bespoke furniture
and antiques to
design professionals
in the US as well as
undertaking interior
design projects.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Hector Finch
lighting has a
network of agents in
the United States. Its
art deco designs are
particularly popular.
Balmoral wall light,
from £840



Paul Colley, president, Sanderson US

"There has been a recent clamouring for what may be seen as British style in the US. Because Americans are constantly on the go, their home is a space where they can come home to relax, but they also need the space to be efficient. We have noticed that, because of this, there has been an adoption of British design attributes. The days of fussy and formal seem to be in the past. The US market seems to want its home to be stylish, but comfort reigns supreme. Homes might be well appointed, but nothing looks overly 'done' or too staged. And transitional style that combines classic floral patterns with pops of bold colour has become extremely popular in the US. It allows Americans to blend things that have a personal history, such as antiques, with new touches, so the look feels fresh but also gives a nod to the past. Plus, the need for multi-functional pieces such as furniture with storage has become a necessity. So many of these design principles resonate with the British design style."

