

VERANDA

Rediscovering
the Riches of
MARRAKESH

THE
Instant
Heirloom
ISSUE

ENGLAND'S
AVANT-GARDE
Daring Twists on
Centuries of Tradition

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ABOVE: A custom lacquered screen by designer John Stedila RIGHT: Interior designer Steven Gambrel enlivened the front hall of his New York townhouse with glossy green walls.

James Lowther of the Lacquer Company, a New York- and London-based business which makes furnishings that honor the traditional Eastern techniques of lacquer, agrees. "From its creation, lacquer had a sense of importance," says Lowther. "It's amazing how a labor-intensive treatment for wood blossomed into this respected and practiced trade throughout the world."

Before long, these lacquered objects flooded shops and rooms throughout Europe and even garnered the attention of such prominent figures as Marie Antoinette. "In aristocratic palaces, nobles used lacquer cabinets to hold their exported porcelain treasures and even other lacquer pieces," explains Bincsik.

As demand continued into the 18th and 19th centuries, European artisans like Jean-Félix Watin developed and documented their own applications of lacquer and began applying it to larger surfaces such as walls and a wider range of furniture. Designers also began to introduce modern pigments within their resin mixture, expanding the classic black, white, and red palette.



Today, lacquer continually refreshes its air of distinction. Such high-profile works as British designer David Hicks' Manhattan apartment, with its glossy chocolate walls, made it a beloved finish of mid-20th-century interiors, with current style makers emphasizing contrast by pairing it with organic wood surfaces. "We still use the ancient layering techniques but infuse modern applications," says Lowther. "The fun is that we can play with these vibrant shades and designs while honoring their Asian heritage." ♦

Finishing School

Early artisans used the multi-layered art form as an entrée to more refined techniques.



← MAKI-E

This highly prized finish was developed during the Nara period (710–794) and uses gold or silver powder to create designs on a wet surface.



NASHIJI →

Named after its resemblance to the skin of a Japanese pear (nashi), the process involves sprinkling fine metal flakes over a half-dry lacquer base to produce a dark amber color.



← CARVED RELIEF

This distinctive Chinese form of decoration involves layers of thinly applied lacquer carved into three-dimensional designs.



QIANGJIN →

Perfected after the 10th century, the engraved gold technique applies lacquer over fine lines with gold foil or powdered gold pressed into the resulting grooves.



← MOTHER-OF-PEARL INLAY

Blue, pink, and white pieces of mother-of-pearl are layered into the lacquer for a beautiful contrast against black backgrounds.



TIANQI →

Colorful lacquer is inlaid into a carved, hardened, and often black lacquer.



BLUE LACQUER SCREEN, SIMON UPTON; GREEN HALLWAY, WILLIAM WALDRON/OTTO; MAKI-E LACQUER BOX, ROBERT OLSON CUSACK/LEMPERTZ; NASHIJI LACQUER TRAY, COURTESY OF NAGA ANTIQUES/NAGAANTIQUES.COM; CARVED BOWL, HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; INCENSE STAND, COURTESY OF SOTHEBY'S; DIAO TAN LACQUER BOX, COURTESY OF CASE ANTIQUES INC., KNOXVILLE, TN/CASEANTIQUES.COM