

## Writing Assignment & Description

Each student was provided with a client description that included an interest in a style of furniture that was different from the other student assignments. Each student and the style of furniture that was given to us were based on his/her *dislike* for that style. We were asked to write down three styles that we liked and disliked. Then, we were given one style that we disliked.

This project provided me with a great opportunity to challenge myself as an interior design student and prospective interior designer. It allowed me to conduct a large amount of research about the style and help me to design a space based on a style that wouldn't be my first choice of style.

# ID 221: INTERIOR DESIGN III: RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

Interior Design Program

Montgomery College, 51 Mannakee Street, Rockville, MD 20850

**CLIENT: AMBASSADOR AND MRS. VON FREEM**

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First day of class: Review the list above and write down your three (3) personal "favorites" and your three (3) "least favorite" on the cards provided in class and submit before end of class.

ANCIENT GREEK, ROMAN, EGYPTIAN REVIVAL, BYZANTINE, MEDIEVAL, GOTHIC, RENAISSANCE (BY COUNTRY), BAROQUE (Italian, french, new england), golden age, REGENCY, ROCOCO, LOUIS PERIODS, GERMAN, QUEEN ANNE, GEORGIAN, CHIPPENDALE, NEO-CLASSICISM, HEPPLEWHITE, SHERATON, FEDERAL, EMPIRE, BIEDERMEIER, ASIAN/ORIENTAL, ARTS AND CRAFTS, ART NOUVEAU, ART DECO, SHAKER, DE STIJL, BAUHAUS, LE CORBUSIER, ALVAR AALTO, MEMPHIS, OTHER/S:

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STUDENT NAME: Amber Sions

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## Written Research Report:

Student is assigned topic for historic research, which is the furniture or period style favored by the von Freem client. The outline and collection of furnishings and design motifs is due September 9, 2009. The outline topics may include furniture, interior design elements, architecture, designers, fashions, art, history, influences, wall/floor/window/ceiling treatments, textiles, colors, patterns, lighting, and current adaptations. The written portion will be typed, double-spaced, 5 pages. Additional once cover page with "Student Name, Research Title, Fall 2009, ID 221, MC, IreY", abbreviated outline. Additional one page with bibliography to include three references in addition to the ID texts. At least three pages of illustrations, photos, sketches of the above-named items. Samples of wood, color, textiles and finishes. The report will be retained by the department, so make a copy for you to keep in your portfolio. 25 points Due 9/21/09.

**Presentation Project Description and Requirements:** Due 10/12/09. Ambassador and Mrs. Von Freem recently purchased a luxury penthouse apartment, now under construction, for their retiring years. They plan to continue to travel extensively and to entertain local and foreign visitors and dignitaries. The ambassador has made it clear that they are willing to pay for quality. Mrs. Von Freem was a one-time concert violinist and includes musicians, artists, dancers and other performers amongst their treasured friends and acquaintances. Many of their local activities include theater, concerts, ballet and formal dinners. They have acquired a large collection of musical instruments from around the world. They have also accumulated priceless antiques in a period or style, which they would like to have authentically duplicated in their new home.

The apartment's living area has an adjoining library and large foyer/gallery, which also leads into a separate formal dining area. It includes a master bedroom suite area, guest bedroom suite area, servant's quarters, kitchen, and service exit. The main window areas of the living and public spaces and the master bedroom spaces are southern-facing exposures. The unfinished construction is the bath areas. There is a large floor area adjoining the master bedroom, which

Johnson - 2 grown students  
No children

Amber Sions

Shaker

Fall 2009

ID 221

MC

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# Shaker Outline

Shaker: 1747-1850's

Thesis: The Shaker's were a religious group who focused on simplicity and functionality of furniture and decorating.

## A. History

1. Religion
2. Daily life of the Shakers'
3. Shaker Origins: Beginning

## B. Shaker Furniture

1. Simplicity and functionality
2. Design principles
3. Use of materials

## C. Shaker Design and Importance

1. Hand-made furniture
2. Rules and design use
3. Inspired architects and influences

Conclusion: Although this time period has passed, people still continue to admire the Shaker style and practice it in their homes, allowing craftsmen to continue the process of hand-made furniture. Modern society has taken over but people still look for simplicity and functionality in their spaces allowing the Shaker style to live.

Interior design is one career that can be very challenging and rewarding at the same time, at least at the end of a project. It also has a lot more to it than just designing a room, space planning, and/or decorating. There is also a lot more research involved when working in interior design. This particular research paper required specific information on a style of design that was popular at some point in time, even though certain aspects still remain in today's society. This paper allowed me to gain knowledge and design experience in creating a space that consisted of simplicity and functionality, made by skilled craftsmen during the times of Shaker and their religious sect. After having done all the research on this particular style, it made me realize how much of a challenge it would be to try and meet the client's needs, based on the style that they choose.

When designing a space most people think of bright and airy colors, grand furniture, flooring, and accessories. However, designing a space using Shaker furniture is very challenging, because not only did they only have white and creamy walls, they didn't use much color and everything was hand-made out of wood. Meaning, everything was specific to the Shaker people and how they lived their daily lives. Shaker furniture and the people who belonged to the sect have a lot more history than most people think.

The Shaker movement started in the early 1700's lasting through the 1900's. "It was a religious sect that was established by a small group of persecuted Protestants seeking freedom of religious expression, fleeing to England in 1706" (Burks and Rieman pg 15). This group of people had a strong passion for the Spirit of God, falling into "mystical trances and their bodies shook

with violent agitations” (pg 15). In 1747 a French couple by the name of James and Jane Wardley became the first leaders of the religious sect. In 1758 a woman named Ann Lees, who later was imprisoned for breaking Sabbath Laws in 1770, joined them. During her imprisonment she became more interested in Christ and his presence, transforming her self and her beliefs. “However, all writers agree that her momentous revelation was the long awaited Second Coming of Christ” (pg 15), becoming the turning point for the first Shakers’.

Ann Lee was known as the Shaker’s spiritual mentor, giving her the title of “Mother”. “The Shakers acknowledged that there had been a second revelation of the Gospel first prophesied by Jesus through a woman, raising the consciousness of Christ Spirit in them” (pg 16). Because of their beliefs, Ann Lee led seven followers to New York in 1774 to practice there religion since they suffered fines, beatings, and imprisonment in the homeland of England.

About six years after they arrived in America the Believers emerged into the public eye, making the Shaker community an object of interest. As the country was suffering the “Great Awakening” people began searching for a different religion, something more pure. So, Americans began to see the Shakers’ as a form of change. “Over a period of two years Mother Ann began traveling on missionary trips converting many congregations to their faith, laying a foundation for several Shaker villages to take place later on”(pg 18). Mother Ann died in 1784 before the first American Shaker community was established but it was taken over by James Whittaker who established the “New Lebanon community in 1787, which initiated the communal form of Shaker life” (pg 18).

“Shaker orthodoxy called for celibacy, physical separation from the world, confessions of sins, equality of the sexes, and pacifism” (pg 18). Shakers’ were able to practice the “purity of the mind and body, physical and spiritual order, plainness and simplicity, and humanity and kindness” (pg 18). In 1821 the society’s leadership took on another role, introducing “Orders and Rules of the Church at New Lebanon: Millennial Laws of Gospel Statutes & Ordinances” dealing with spiritual matters such as worship of God, confessions of sins, religious duties, and even daily activities. These laws were much in detail containing written details regarding design, construction, and care of the furniture. This type of lifestyle lasted through the late 1850’s changing the shape of the world.

The Shakers’ daily lives were much different than other people in America for many reasons; one was their obvious beliefs, the Shaker village, and their different levels of commitment to the Shaker faith. Shaker structures were arranged close together according to function, “Simple buildings were to be constructed in a linear arrangement with carefully tended walkways, roads, and fields” (National Register of Historic Places pg 1). Some of the major buildings were the “meeting house, office, and primary elders’ dwelling, located in the Church Family complex” (pg 2). Shaker buildings were built using masonry materials. Marble and granite were used as foundations for the brick buildings. The Shakers’ never really had experience or training in architectural design but they did manage to reflect their Shaker commitment to “celibacy, equality of the sexes, and communal living” (Burks and Rieman pg 34). The buildings were

dormitory structured with separate entrances, halls, and stairways for the retiring rooms (bedrooms). The Shaker's daily routine varied depending on the time of year. There were also the traditional duties of men and women. "The Shakers engaged in agriculture, textile-related activities, mechanical arts, and woodworking" (pg 38). When a child was born into a Shaker family they were part of the community but at age 21 they could either stay and fully practice in the religion or leave the community. School was also taught. "The boys were taught for three months in late fall and winter and the girls for three months in the early spring" (pg 41). The Shakers' did enjoy music and singing groups as well.

The surrounding cultural environment influenced much of the Shaker furniture. The Shakers' learned the cabinetmaking and craftsmen skills based on the trade they were in, working by what they knew and ideas. Since London was the center of fashionable furniture in their time, people found it harder to move away from the past and current styles. "Away from the elite cultural centers, individuals found the opportunity to choose, the independence to combine, and the freedom to introduce new ideas" (pg 44), especially in America. This allowed the Shakers' to incorporate their own way of furniture making. Their competition was Queen Anne and Chippendale patterns, making them want to take their woodwork a step further. They built cases of drawers (dressers), desks, built in cabinetry, chairs, and even specialized furniture, such as sewing desks. The Shaker design wasn't a huge deal at that time but it began to become more popular over the time.



Shaker furniture focused on simplicity and functionality. They liked the look of clean and simple lines. "Because of their religious beliefs, the Shakers frowned on decoration, so they stripped down classic furniture forms to the barest essentials" (Keno pg 1). They particularly paid attention to function, shape, size, scale, patterns, and proportions. These things allowed the furniture to be aesthetically pleasing as well.

Some of the design features that the Shakers' used in their furniture were bright colors such as: chrome yellow, ochre, and green. Darker colors were used more for religious areas. However, over the years their color choices and finishes changed, but nothing out of the ordinary. Shaker fabrics were kept to a minimum but they did use heavy damask patterns adding a touch of Victorian taste. Shakers' never focused on the decoration of the rooms. Their focus was on the natural and having an uncluttered space.

The Shakers' use of materials consisted of natural materials. They used some of the prettiest woods for their furniture such as: maple, birch, chestnut, butternut, and honey pine. "By 1820, the second generation of Shakers unencumbered by other 'worldly' influences, considering classic Shaker style—essential forms with clean lines, free of unnecessary detailing" (National Register of Historic Places pg. 3). This allowed the Shakers' to produce beautiful hand-made products. They used Venetian red or yellow ochre washes and whether the wood was left plain they treated it with a protective surface. Over the years they began introducing other design techniques as well, "interiors were further decorated by graining and marbleizing techniques" (Burks and Reiman pg. 63).

Some other natural materials that they used were cotton for quilting and they also used wool and silk as well.

Shaker furniture has a unique character because of the way it was and still is made. "Shaker tools and equipment, no matter how mundane, were characteristically made with as much care as if they were furniture..." (Stewart pg. 192). The Shakers' cabinet techniques were very important because they started making the furniture by hand and then they were introduced to machinery, allowing the craftsmen to be even more precise and detailed as they wanted. "An Englishman named Samuel Bentham patented several improvements for woodworking machinery in 1773, including planers, molders, and dovetail" (Burks and Reiman pg 68). The Shakers' also invented the circular saw in 1820 "transforming the production of furniture throughout the world..." (National Register of Historic Places pg. 4). All of the different types of resources gave the Shakers' more power to continue building strong and beautiful furniture.

The Shakers' began their journey by making the fundamental items such as: desks, cases of drawers, sewing tables, peg rails, tables, and beds. They also began working on classic pieces such as the ladder-back chair and rockers.

"In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Shakers" began mass-producing their ladder-back chair at Mount Lebanon...receiving a medal at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition for combining "strength, sprightliness, and modest beauty""(National Register of Historic Places pg 3). The ladder-back chair was so popular they got a US patent for their design to continue making the chair and

get profit for it. They also had other items that caught the public's attention as well, changing the world of design.

Shaker furniture was usually placed against the wall in the dwelling houses after it had been constructed. They also liked open floor space because they didn't believe in having a cluttered room. The wooden pegs were a feature in all rooms to hang garments, chairs, hats, baskets, etc on the walls. Shaker furniture was so important that they weren't even supposed to lean back on anything including walls so that they wouldn't destroy the furniture. Looking glass (mirrors) weren't even to be used by the Believers'. They had many other rules about their furniture to the colors and varnishes they used, use of the furniture, and even the placement of the furniture. All these rules may seem foolish in today's society but it is obvious that it lasted longer than other types of furniture.

Even to this day Shaker furniture still has a place in today's society.

People admire the Shakers' for their furniture and handcrafts. "Shakers were pioneers of the principles of form and function advocated later by architects and designers John Ruskin and Louis Sullivan" (National Register of Historic Places pg. 1). Louis Sullivan was an architect in Chicago who voiced the concept of "Form follows function" and that is what he believed. Both Louis Sullivan and John Ruskins' are known for their simplicity and beauty of their architecture, craftsmanship, products, and design. Shaker design has many influences not only American furniture makers, but European and Japanese makers as well. Shaker furniture also had a "strong influence on Danish Modern design as well

as other contemporary furniture styles” (Keno pg 1). Even the colors that were used on the woodwork could blend in with a collection of Folk art as well.

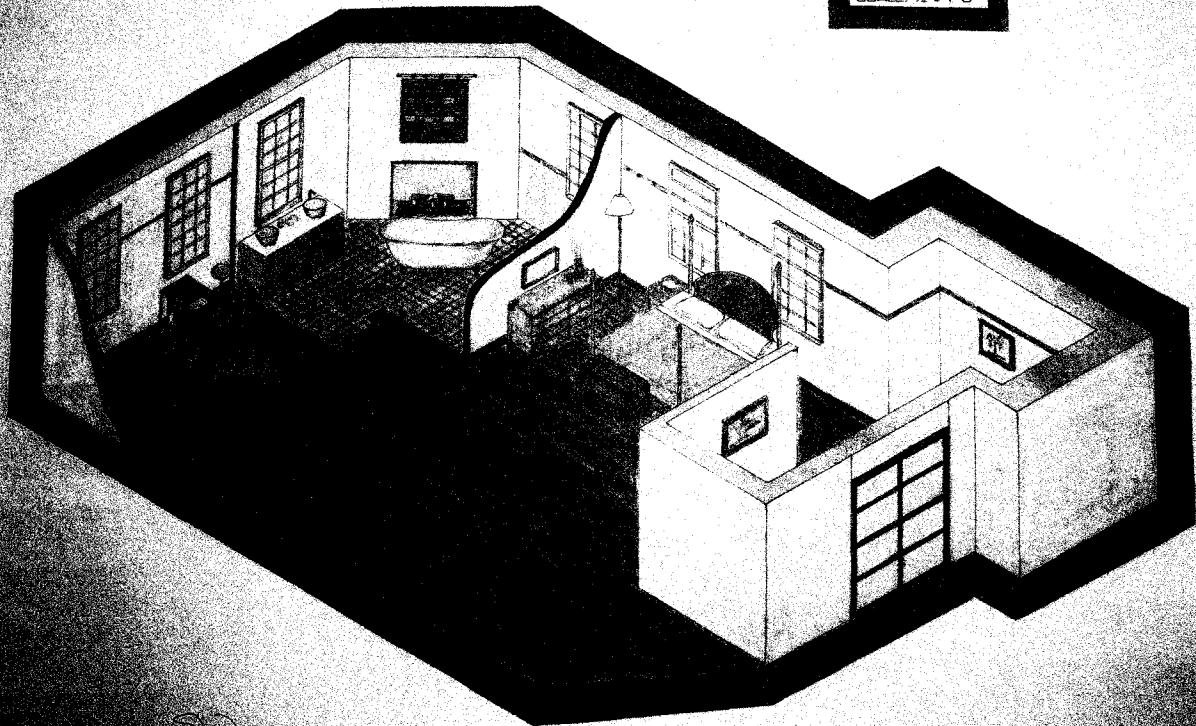
In conclusion, it would be fair to say that the Shakers’ weren’t just a group of people who built hand-made furniture; they are a group of people who lived in their own world. They followed their own religion, laws and rules, and their daily living to designing and constructing buildings and furniture. They are a group of people who stood up for their beliefs and made something out of it by building furniture based on functionality first rather than the details. Form and function will forever be the saying for this style. Although it is a style that doesn’t have a lot of color, detail, or particular excitement, people will continue to make this style of furniture and consumers will continue to purchase it. This style is worldly, it can be used in it regular traditional setting, contemporary setting, and many other settings because nothing is more important than quality furniture.

## Bibliography

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ELEVATION

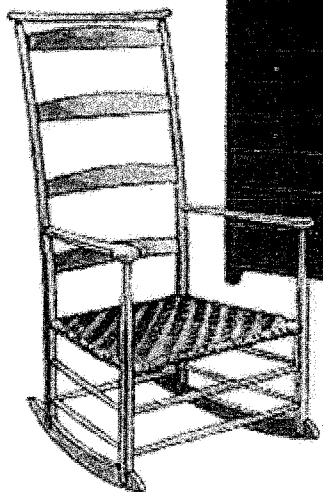
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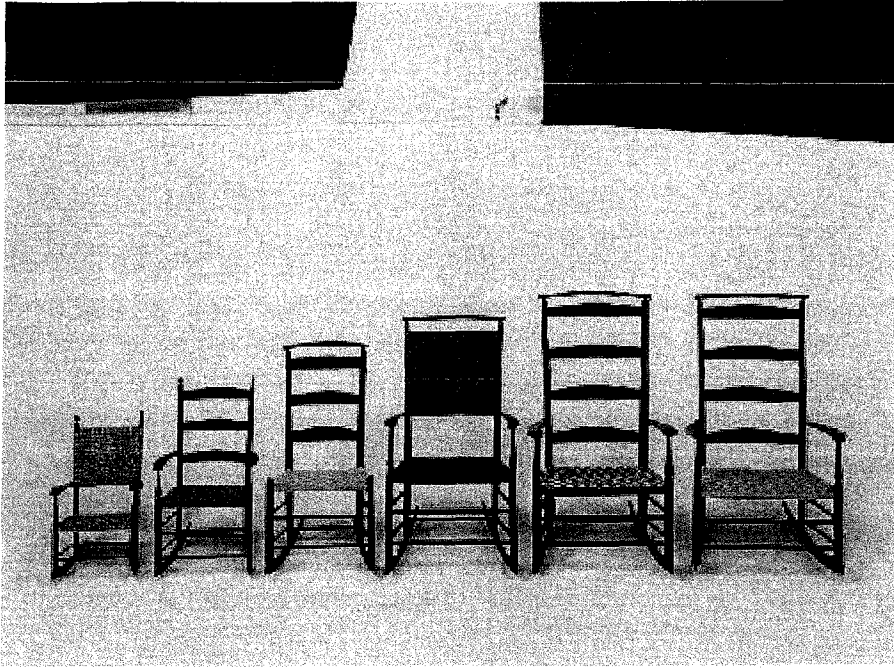
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**SHAKER**

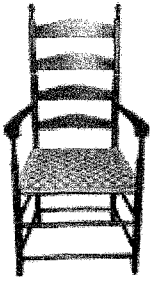
Chest with  
Cupboard (1840)



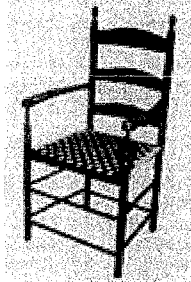
Slat-back  
Rocker (1830)



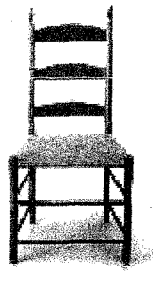




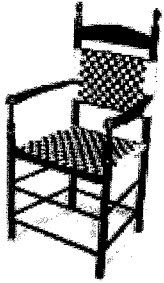
*Canterbury Four  
Slat Arm Chair*



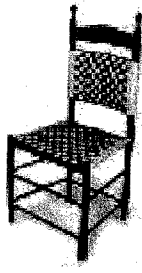
*Canterbury Arm Chair*



*Enfield Side Chair*



*Canterbury Paddedback  
Arm Chair*



*Canterbury Paddedback  
Side Chair*



*Enfield Paddedback  
Side Chair*

# SHAKER STYLE FURNITURE



Photo: Carol M. Ingerson

