Interior design history and timeline

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Abstract

Interior Design history and timeline offer fascinating explorations of the evolution of design practices across various civilizations and epochs. This paper, delves into the rich heritage of interior design, tracing its trajectory from Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt to contemporary global trends. Drawing upon the interdisciplinary insights from Art History, Architecture, Sociology, and Technology studies, the study examines the cultural, social, and technological factors that have shaped interior design over time. Key themes include the influence of cultural contexts, the role of historical legacies, and the impact of technological advancements on design evolution. Through qualitative inquiry and comprehensive literature reviews, the research elucidates the enduring relevance and dynamic nature of Interior Design, providing valuable insights for contemporary designers and scholars.

Keywords: Interior Design; History; Timeline; Evolution; Cultural Influences; Technological Advancements; Interdisciplinary Study; Contemporary Practice

1. Introduction

Interior Design history and timeline is a systematic documentation and exploration of the development, evolution, and significant milestones in the field of interior design over different periods of time. It is a dynamic and multifaceted field, continually shaped by a complex interplay of cultural influences, historical legacies, and technological innovations. From the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the contemporary design studios of today, the evolution of interior design reflects not only shifts in aesthetic preferences but also broader societal changes and technological advancements. Despite the ubiquity of interior design in our daily lives, there remains a pressing need for a comprehensive understanding of its history and development, encompassing diverse cultural contexts and historical epochs.

This paper embarks on a journey through the annals of interior design history, seeking to unravel the intricate tapestry of influences that have shaped the discipline over the millennia. By delving into the rich heritage of interior design, across different civilizations and epochs, it aims to shed more light on the underlying trends, innovations, and paradigm shifts that have defined the field. Drawing upon insights from art history, architecture, sociology, and technology studies, our interdisciplinary approach seeks to provide a holistic perspective on the evolution of interior design.

At the heart of our inquiry lies a fundamental research question; How has Interior Design evolved over time, considering the cultural, historical, and technological factors, and what insights can this provide for contemporary designers and practitioners? By interrogating this question, we endeavor to uncover the underlying narratives and trajectories that have shaped interior design practice, from its nascent origins to its current manifestations.

Through a systematic analysis of interior design histories and timelines, we aim to trace the evolution of key design principles, spatial concepts, and stylistic trends across different cultural contexts and historical periods. By elucidating
the connections between past developments and present-day practices, our research seeks to offer valuable insights and perspectives for designers, educators, and stakeholders in the interior design industry.

Furthermore, we embark on a captivating journey through the corridors of time, exploring the fascinating world of interior design history and its enduring relevance in shaping the built environment of today and tomorrow.

1.1. Statement of the problem
The Interior Design industry is rapidly evolving, driven by technological advancements, changing consumer preferences, and emerging design trends. Despite the abundance of resources and information available, there remains a gap in understanding the holistic evolution of interior design, particularly in the context of cultural influences, historical developments, and technological innovations. This lack of comprehensive insight hinders designers, educators, and enthusiasts from fully appreciating the rich tapestry of interior design history and its implications for contemporary practice.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from art history, architecture, sociology, and technology studies, this study seeks to uncover the underlying trends, influences, and paradigm shifts that have shaped the field of interior design. By elucidating the connections between past developments and present-day practices, this research endeavors to offer valuable insights and perspectives for designers, educators, and stakeholders in the interior design industry.

2. Literature review
Interior Design principles and elements are fundamental concepts in design theory that act as tools and guidelines for creating and evaluating the quality of a design. These concepts among others, encompass proportion, rhythm, emphasis, balance, scale, and harmony, as outlined by Brooker and Weinthal (2013). Before the advent of interior design academies or educational institutions, the history of interior design was characterized by a diverse array of experiences and apprenticeships, intricately woven with cultural, social, and technological influences.

2.1. Interior design history and timeline
The exploration of interior design histories and timeline brings to light the intersection of interior design with other disciplines, such as architecture, art, psychology, and sociology, emphasizing the importance of understanding the theoretical underpinnings of design, including concepts of space, form, function, and aesthetics.

2.1.1. Ancient civilizations
By tracing the evolution of interior design from antiquity to the present day, Pile (2013) highlights the development through various historical periods, examining the cultural, social, and technological factors that had influenced its trajectory.

Edwards (2012) offers a detailed exploration of interior design, delving into its historical evolution, theoretical foundations, and contemporary practices. Through detailed analysis, Edwards highlights how socio-cultural factors have influenced design trends and spatial arrangements throughout history. These cultures adorned their spaces with ornate furnishings, colourful murals, and intricate mosaics, reflecting their beliefs and societal structures (Pile, 2013).

Fiell and Fiell (2010) provides a rather comprehensive exploration of the history of interior design and its timeline, going further back in time spanning from prehistoric times to the contemporary era. By examining early design manifestations in the Paleolithic period, the authors elucidate how design, even in its nascent stages, played a crucial role in fulfilling human needs and aspirations, emphasizing the fusion of function and artistic expression in tools, utensils, and cave paintings.
Pile (2013) examines and underscores the significance of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome in interior design, emphasizing their use of architectural and decorative elements such as murals, mosaics, and furnishings to craft visually intricate and symbolically significant interiors unique to each culture.

This manifestation of interior design served as a representation of civic pride, reflecting the prosperity, social status, and political power of civilizations like the Egyptians, who adorned their spaces with animal skins, biographical and spiritual murals, sculptures, and painted urns. Similarly, the Greeks and Romans embraced the use of vases and created captivating mosaic floors, wall paintings, and frescoes, showcasing a fusion of beauty and comfort in their living spaces.
2.1.2. Dark ages

Following an era marked by lavish ornamentation, there arose a notable transition towards austere and dour interior expression, prompted by the persistent conflicts in Medieval Europe and the increasing influence of the Christian church. Dubbed The "Dark Ages," this period witnessed interior design characterized by sombre wooden panelling, minimalistic and functional furnishings, and flooring crafted from stone slabs (Decoraid, 2024).

Even the wealthiest patrons of this era preferred muted, understated hues when incorporating decorative elements like tapestries and stonework. Fiell and Fiell (2010) delve into the intricate relationship between design and cultural, social, and technological advancements; exploring the monumental shifts in design during key historical periods, such as the Middle Ages and Renaissance, where a renewed appreciation for classical aesthetics and innovation flourished, impacting art, architecture, and everyday objects.

2.1.3. Middle ages

During the Middle Ages, interior design in Europe was heavily influenced by the Gothic style (Fiell & Fiell, 2010), characterized by pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and elaborate religious motifs. Castles and cathedrals featured grand interiors adorned with tapestries, stained glass windows, and wooden furniture.
This renewed focus on art and craftsmanship into interior design lead to the reintroduction of colour and decorative ornamentation in buildings, signalling the coming of a new era of enlightenment hence, the Renaissance (Gura and Pile, 2020).

2.1.4. Renaissance

The Renaissance period witnessed a revival of classical aesthetics and a focus on symmetry, proportion, and perspective in shaping interior spaces (Gura & Pile, 2020). The developments in architecture, sculpture, painting, and decorative arts and craftsmanship, as well as the transformative impact of humanism and scientific inquiry revealed the interconnectedness of design disciplines during this period (Fiell & Fiell, 2010). The influence of religion, societal values, royalty and power dynamics, commerce, saw the emergence of new design typologies in medieval design. Italian Renaissance palaces showcased lavish interiors with frescoes, marble sculptures, and elegant furnishings, reflecting the wealth and sophistication of the era.
Not unlike the Italian Renaissance, the French Renaissance ushered in a renewed emphasis on artistic expression and originality in the realm of interior design, notably in the 15th and 16th centuries (Decoraid, 2024). An observation of the grand palaces, rural manors, Château and religious edifices of the time unquestionably reveals the quintessence of Renaissance interior design excellence.

2.1.5. Baroque and rococo
The Baroque and Rococo styles emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, characterized by opulence, drama, and elaborate ornamentation, drawing attention to the influence of European monarchies and cultural exchange (Pile, 2013). Interiors were adorned with gilded furniture, ornate mirrors, and intricate stucco decorations, creating lavish and theatrical spaces, reflecting a renewed interest in simplicity and order. An illustration of this can be seen in the Palace of Versailles in France, which skillfully integrated Baroque interior design elements such as colourful marble and stone, stained glass, intricately painted ceilings, and spiral columns (Decoraid, 2024).

![Figure 7 Interior Design of The Baroque Style](https://www.dogtas.com/barocco-style-furniture (2024)).

As the 18th century progressed, interior designers across Europe played a significant role in popularizing the Rococo style, incorporating influences from Asian pottery, floral motifs, and furniture featuring elaborate details like ivory and mother-of-pearl inlay.

![Figure 8 Interior Design of The Rococo Style](https://algedra.com.tr/en/blog/rococo (2024)).
2.1.6. Neoclassicism

Neoclassical interior design, inspired by classical antiquity, emerged in the late 18th century (Fiell & Fiell, 2010) as a reaction to the extravagance of the Baroque and Rococo styles. Interiors featured clean lines, muted colours, and classical motifs, reflecting a renewed interest in simplicity and order.

![Figure 9 Interior Design of The Neoclassical Style](https://www.decorilla.com/online-decorating/neoclassical-interior-design-style/ (2024)).

2.1.7. Victorian era

The Victorian era in the 19th century saw a resurgence of ornamentation and eclecticism in interior design (Edwards, 2012). Homes were filled with dark wood furniture, heavy draperies, and decorative objects, reflecting the prosperity and social aspirations of the period.

![Figure 10 Interior Design of The Neoclassical Style](https://foyr.com/learn/best-victorian-interior-design-ideas/ (2024)).
2.1.8. Arts and crafts movement
In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Arts and Crafts Movement rebelled against the mass production and excesses of the Victorian era (Gura & Pile, 2020).

![Figure 11 Interior Design of The Arts And Crafts Movement](https://exhibitions.lib.umd.edu/williammorris/morris-influence/arts-and-crafts-movement)

Advocating for craftsmanship, simplicity, and natural materials, Arts and Crafts interiors emphasized handmade furniture, earthy colors, and folk-inspired motifs.

2.1.9. Modernism
The 20th century brought the rise of Modernism (Edwards, 2012), characterized by simplicity, functionality, and a rejection of ornamentation.

![Figure 12 Interior Design of The Modernist Period](https://cgifurniture.com/modern-interior-design-6-styles)

Pioneered by designers like Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright, Modernist interiors featured clean lines, open spaces, and an emphasis on light and form.
2.1.10. Postmodernism

Postmodern interior design emerged in the late 20th century (Pile, 2013) as a reaction against the perceived rigidity of Modernism. Playful, eclectic, and often ironic, Postmodern interiors combined historical references, bold colors, and eclectic furnishings to create visually dynamic spaces.


**Figure 13** Interior Design of The Post Modernist Period

2.1.11. Contemporary trends

In the 21st century, interior design trends continue to evolve (Fiell & Fiell, 2010), embracing sustainability, technology, and cultural diversity.

![Contemporary Interior Design](https://www.magicbricks.com/blog/living-room-design-ideas/130752.html (2024).

**Figure 14** Interior Design of Contemporary Trends

Contemporary interiors range from minimalist and Scandinavian-inspired to maximalist and globally influenced, reflecting the diverse tastes and lifestyles of today's society.
2.2. The interior design history of asian civilization

It is important to note that the interior design timeline and histories varies completely with each continent, as can be noted with that of Asian civilisations.

The interior design philosophy of Asian civilizations is deeply rooted in cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and architectural principles that have evolved over millennia. Each civilization has its unique approach to interior design, influenced by factors such as religion, climate, geography, and social norms.

2.2.1. India

With a heritage spanning thousands of years, Indian interior design reflects the diverse cultural, religious, and regional identities that characterize the country.

From the ancient civilizations of the Indus Valley to the modern era, Indian interior design has evolved through various historical periods, each leaving its distinct mark on the aesthetic fabric of the nation. Ancient Indian civilizations, such as the Harappan and Vedic cultures, laid the groundwork for indigenous architectural and design practices (Possehl, 2002), like the cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE, which featured sophisticated urban planning, and evidence of early interior design elements infused with their designs.

Central to India’s interior design history are its sacred spaces, including temples, mosques, and caves, which serve as repositories of spiritual and artistic expression. The influence of Buddhism and Jainism during the Maurya and Gupta periods (3rd century BCE – 6th century CE) contributed to the development of cave architecture and rock-cut temples adorned with intricate carvings and paintings (Michell, 2008).

Michell (2008) provides insights into the significance of Hindu temple architecture, elucidating the intricate symbolism and forms embedded within these structures. The Ajanta and Ellora Caves, as explored by Michell, offer a glimpse into the fusion of architectural form and artistic expression, spiritual iconography, with their elaborate carvings and paintings creating immersive interior environments that transcend time.


**Figure 15** Jataka StoryImages in Ajanta Caves

The medieval period witnessed the flourishing of Islamic architecture in India, particularly during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire (12th century – 18th century). Mughal emperors like Akbar, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb commissioned grand palaces, mosques, and forts adorned with exquisite marble, intricate carvings, and Persian-inspired motifs (Asher, 1992).
The fusion of Persian, Central Asian, and Indian design elements resulted in the creation of opulent interiors characterized by domes, arches, and ornate decorations. These architectural marvels not only reflected the grandeur of Mughal rulers but also showcased a synthesis of cultural aesthetics.

The journey of Indian interior design reflects a narrative of cultural continuity and adaptation. Llewellyn-Jones (2007) highlights the contributions of modern architects in integrating traditional design principles with sustainable practices, emphasizing the importance of preserving India's architectural heritage in the face of rapid urbanization.
2.2. Japan

The same can be seen in the architectural and design traditions of several influential cultures across the continent. Like the Japanese, whose interior design was influenced by Shinto and Buddhist traditions, as well as by the principles of simplicity and minimalism. Traditional Japanese interiors featured tatami mats, sliding doors (fusuma), and paper screens (shoji) to create flexible, multifunctional spaces, and zen gardens defining traditional architectural spaces (Nitschke, 2005), all of which embodied principles of simplicity, tranquility, and respect for nature.

The use of natural materials such as wood, bamboo, and paper fostered a sense of connection with the natural world. The evolution of Japanese interior design is a testament to the enduring influence of tradition, the adaptability of culture, and the quest for harmony in human habitation.

Feudal period

Japan's feudal period (12th to 19th centuries), interior design reflected the hierarchical structure of society, with castles, temples, and samurai residences showcasing elaborate craftmanship and decorative motifs (Black and Murata, 2000).
The concept of "ma," or empty space, became integral to Japanese design philosophy, emphasizing the importance of negative space in creating a sense of tranquility and elegance (Bognar, 2001).

Figure 20 The Concept of "Ma," or Empty Space

Edo period
The Edo period (17th to 19th centuries) witnessed the flourishing of Japanese arts and culture, leading to the refinement of interior design aesthetics (Brown, 2020). Traditional tea houses, characterized by minimalist interiors and meticulously curated tea utensils, exemplified the principles of wabi-sabi, embracing imperfection and impermanence as essential elements of beauty (Andrew, 2011).

Figure 21 Japanese Tea Houses

Meiji restoration
The Meiji Restoration (late 19th century) brought about significant changes in Japanese society, including the adoption of Western technology and design influences (Black and Murata, 2000). This period saw the integration of Western
architectural styles and furnishings into Japanese interiors, leading to a fusion of traditional and modern elements (Nishi and Hozumi, 2012).

![Figure 22 Fusion of Japanese and Western-style interiors](https://centrip-japan.com/article/863.html)

**Modernization and globalization**

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Japanese interior design evolved in response to modernization and globalization, with architects and designers exploring innovative approaches to space, materials, and technology. Contemporary Japanese interiors embrace minimalist aesthetics, sustainable practices, and cutting-edge design solutions, reflecting a blend of tradition and innovation (Steele, 2017).

![Figure 23 Contemporary Japanese interiors](https://www.home-designing.com/modern-japanese-interiors-with-a-sense-of-serenity)

**Source:** https://centrip-japan.com/article/863.html (2024)

Cultural revival

Despite the influence of global trends, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional Japanese design principles, with architects and designers reinterpreting ancient techniques for contemporary living (Pollock, 2020). Concepts such as "mottainai" (avoiding waste) and "shizen" (harmony with nature) inform sustainable design practices that honor Japan's cultural heritage (Takashina, 2016).

![Shizen Inspired Japanese Interior](https://shizentravel.com/japanese-interior-design/)

**Figure 24** Shizen Inspired Japanese Interior

2.2.3. China

Chinese interior design was influenced by Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophies, emphasizing harmony with nature, the balance of yin and yang, and Feng Shui principles, creating serene and harmonious living environments (Steinhardt, 2019). Traditional Chinese interiors featured intricate wooden furniture, silk textiles, and decorative objects such as porcelain vases and screens.


**Figure 25** Traditional Chinese-Style Rooms

The use of auspicious symbols and motifs, such as dragons and phoenixes, added symbolic meaning to interior spaces. Chinese interior design has undergone significant transformations, reflecting the country's diverse traditions and evolving tastes.
Imperial china

During the imperial era, particularly under dynasties like the Tang, Song, and Ming, Chinese interior design reached new heights of sophistication and elegance. The Forbidden City in Beijing, with its grand palaces, halls, and pavilions, exemplified the opulence and architectural mastery of this period (Steinhardt, 2015). Elaborate woodcarvings, lacquerware, silk textiles, and porcelain vases adorned imperial residences, reflecting the wealth and cultural refinement of the ruling elite.


Figure 26 Ming Dynasty Interior Design

Influence of feng shui

Feng Shui, the ancient Chinese practice of harmonizing one's environment with natural elements and energy flows, has had a profound influence on Chinese interior design.


Figure 27 Feng Shui Inspired Chinese Interior

The arrangement of furniture, the orientation of buildings, and the use of auspicious symbols are all guided by Feng Shui principles to promote harmony, prosperity, and well-being (Madeddu and Zhang, 2021).
In the modern era, Chinese interior design has witnessed a fusion of traditional elements with contemporary aesthetics and global influences. Rapid urbanization, economic growth, and exposure to Western design trends have led to the emergence of diverse styles and approaches in Chinese interior design (Gao & Zhang, 2018).

Despite the passage of time, the interior design history of the Asiatic continent continues to evolve, blending tradition with modernity and reflecting the cultural exchange and hybridization that defined it. From the Indo-Saracenic style of the British Raj to the colonial influences in Southeast Asia, resulting in a fusion of indigenous and European architectural styles (Reid, 1999).

3. Research methodology

The methodology employed in this research aligns with qualitative inquiry, which facilitates an in-depth exploration of historical contexts and cultural evolution. Through a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and primary sources, the study delves into the intricacies of interior design histories across various Asian civilizations. By analyzing textual, visual, and archival materials, the research aims to unearth the underlying philosophies, aesthetic principles, and socio-cultural influences that have shaped interior design practices over time. This qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted evolution of interior design in Asia, highlighting its significance within broader historical and cultural frameworks.

4. Discussion

The exploration of interior design history unveils a rich tapestry of cultural, social, and technological influences that have shaped the discipline over centuries. Our journey through the annals of time has revealed a multitude of insights into the evolution of interior design, underscoring its dynamic nature and enduring relevance in shaping human environments.

One of the central themes that emerged from our analysis is the profound impact of cultural contexts on interior design practices. Across different civilizations and historical epochs, we observed how cultural values, beliefs, and traditions have manifested in the built environment, influencing architectural forms, decorative motifs, and spatial arrangements. For instance, the minimalist aesthetics of Japanese interior design reflect the Zen Buddhist philosophy of simplicity and harmony, while the opulent ornamentation of Mughal architecture in India reflects the cultural synthesis of Persian, Indian, and Islamic traditions.

Moreover, our investigation highlighted the pivotal role of historical legacies in shaping contemporary design practices. By tracing the lineage of design principles, spatial concepts, and stylistic trends from ancient civilizations to modern...
times, we gained a deeper understanding of the enduring legacy of past innovations. For example, the principles of proportion and harmony espoused by ancient Greek architects continue to inform contemporary design approaches, albeit in a modern context.

Furthermore, our analysis underscored the transformative impact of technological advancements on interior design evolution. From the advent of new materials and construction techniques to the proliferation of digital tools and simulation technologies, we witnessed how innovations have revolutionized design processes and expanded the creative possibilities for designers. The integration of sustainable practices and smart technologies in contemporary interior design reflects a concerted effort to address pressing societal challenges and embrace the ethos of environmental stewardship.

In conclusion, our exploration of interior design history has illuminated the multifaceted nature of the discipline, showcasing its resilience, adaptability, and enduring relevance in shaping human experiences. By delving into the rich heritage of interior design across different civilizations and epochs, we have gained valuable insights that can inform and inspire contemporary design practice. As we navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world, the lessons gleaned from the past serve as guiding beacons, illuminating pathways towards a more sustainable, inclusive, and aesthetically enriching built environment.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of interior design histories and timelines reveals a captivating journey through the evolution of the discipline across diverse civilizations and epochs. From the prehistoric periods and the ancient civilisations to the contemporary design landscapes of today, interior design reflects a dynamic interplay of cultural influences, historical legacies, and technological advancements. This history underscores its enduring relevance and multifaceted nature in shaping human experiences and environments. By delving into the intricate narratives and influences that have shaped the discipline over time, valuable insights is gained, which will help inform and guide contemporary practice and scholarship. As we navigate towards a sustainable and inclusive future, the lessons gleaned from interior design history serve as guiding beacons, illuminating pathways towards a more enriching built environment.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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