

Discover

Forget flat-pack
stylish Sweden

By Gabriel Roberts

The flat-pack world of modern Swedish furniture may be a blessing for thousands of home owners who crave affordable style.

But furniture giant Ikea does not have a monopoly on Swedish style. Interest is now emerging in 'Gustavian' style furniture, which was created in the 18th century when King Gustavus III of Sweden invited French craftsmen to create a new look.

The look is pretty and the colours are pale. It is decorative and yet unfussy, which fits in with the current trend away from ponderous furniture and fabrics.

The style may be about simple details but it is a world away from the starkness of minimalism.

Instead, think about pale coloured voiles fluttering in the window, gilded mirrors, chandeliers and fresh floral prints.

There is no doubt that the world of interior design has woken up to the influence of Swedish style. Open any magazine and no light and airy room appears complete without a piece of pale, painted furniture.

But living like a king is not the only path to follow. Try the look created by Carl and Karin Larsson for their famous house at Sundborn, Sweden.

Carl Larsson is Sweden's most popular artist. He and his wife Karin created a style of interior decoration recognised as truly Swedish.

The cottage can still be visited today, and attracts 60,000 visitors every year.

Carl and Karin's unpretentious, family-centred home was made up of small, light rooms economically furnished but enlivened with brilliant colours.

Their style of interior decoration was an imaginative and innovative blend of fin de siècle influences, including Japanese prints, Arts and Crafts ideas from Britain and colourful Swedish folk design.

"It had been something that I had been doing in my spare time so I decided to indulge my passion."

So, where to start for a modern British take on the classic Swedish look? Colour Blue does mail order furniture and accessories which are ideal when it comes to furnishing your home.

And Swedish style lends itself to both modern interiors and older properties. The Colour Blue Maximus tall cabinet is £995 and a useful addition to a kitchen or dining room. An attractive white shelf is £99.50 and a rustic wooden chair is £44.50.

Even if you cannot afford to spend much, it may be worth picking up a paintbrush to tackle some of your own furniture that could benefit from a new lease of life.

The new spring catalogue from McCord is packed full of painted furniture. A white-washed pine bookcase is £600 and pine cupboards, inspired by beach huts, start at £159. The real find must be the painted pine chests which start at £325.

Another company which specialises in the Swedish look is Nordic Style. Its furniture and accessories are graceful, elegant and entirely covetable. Other catalogues worth looking at to achieve the look are Argos and Next Interiors.

Lena Renkel Eriksson, who runs The Swedish Chair in Caterham, Surrey came to England in 1995 with her husband, and had been a psychotherapist in Sweden.

She explains: "It was hard to come to a new country and carrying on as psychotherapist was impossible because of the language problems. So I took the opportunity to work with furniture instead."

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Many of her customers are Swedish and she imports all the furniture from a company in Sweden. She also has a carpenter in Sweden who makes chairs to her specification.

She says: "If someone buys a table and chairs for the dining room then I might be asked to repaint the sideboard which might be from the 60s and a pretty awful colour."



GETTING THE LOOK

Simple painted furniture.

Light wooden floorboards.

Chalky paint colours with a matt finish for the walls.

Crisp white bedlinen.

Mixing elegant floral fabrics with fine stripes and checks.

Add cornices and mouldings to a plain room for that period feel.

STOCKISTS

Colour Blue - 0171 820 7700

McCord - 0870 908 7005

Nordic Style - 0171 351 1755