



Gold embroiderers at work (1873) British Library

# PASSAGE FROM INDIA

RICH AND SPLENDID DESIGNS FROM INDIA HAVE INFLUENCED DESIGNERS THROUGH THE AGES, CAROLINE PHILLIPS EXPLORES THE FESTIVAL OF INDIA AT THE V&A

**T**he impact of Indian fabric and jewellery design is ubiquitous. The reinterpretation of a Paisley design in one of the suites at Cliveden. The heavy brocade in the drawing room at Chewton Glen. The emerald on one guest's finger. The pashmina draped over another's shoulders...

Trade with India and the Far East has influenced the development of design in our homes and our fashions for centuries. Often what we consider traditional English style is in origin anything but.

The Victoria & Albert Museum's India Festival, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Museum's Nehru Gallery, displays the rich and varied culture of South Asia, with The Fabric of India exhibition the star of the show. This is the first major exhibition to explore the rich world of handmade

textiles from the sub-continent from the 3rd to the 21st century. Gasp-worthy pieces range from muslin embroidered with glittering green beetle wings, sequins and gold wire, to a vast wall hanging appliquéd with designs of elephants and geometrical patterns. There are 200 objects on display, including previously unseen treasures such as ancient ceremonial banners, sacred temple hangings and the tent used by Tipu Sultan, the famed ruler of Mysore.

Mario Nicolaou, Creative Director with London & Regional Properties and responsible for the interior refurbishment of Cliveden, explains India's influence on country house interiors, "India had a very special significance in 19th-century British fabric design following the Great Exhibition of 1851 with the introduction of intricate exotic



Houndstooth card by Abraham and Thakore



Wall hanging detail ©Gujarat



Tipu Tent ©National Trust

ALL THE MAIN FASHION DESIGNERS IN THE WORLD, FROM VALENTINO TO YVES ST LAURENT, HAVE ALL BEEN INFLUENCED BY INDIA.

Ajrakh-inspired jacket  
by Rajesh Pratap Singh

florals and the elongated leaf motif that is now commonly known as Paisley. Highly patterned silks and fabrics became the height of fashion and continue to be so today. I find they especially complement older, historic interiors.

"The interiors at Cliveden draw on the influence of the grand tours and beyond, although they are not specifically Indian in style. However Paisley is a design I love to use, mainly in cushions in a few of the suites, the Library bar and Great Hall."

Travel to India in Victorian times influenced various design elements in the home such as stained glass, mosaic tiled floors, ornate plasterwork, richly patterned rugs and elaborate, heavy curtains. It is worth flagging up, too, that textiles from India were widely consulted, notably by William Morris.

The global impact of Indian textiles has a rich history as Indian material has long been exported. In The Fabric of India exhibition there are three fragments of Indian fabric dating back as far as the 3rd century. The worldwide export

of Indian textiles became particularly evident in Europe between the 17th and 19th centuries through the popularity of chintzes. In the exhibition there is a grouping of beautiful wall hangings, bedcovers, robes and dresses featuring chintz patterns, and demonstrating how traditional Indian motifs and techniques were reinterpreted to appeal to European consumers.

There are also examples of simple bandanna handkerchiefs from Madras and Bengal - fashionable in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Middle East, West Africa and Britain, and these days seen around many a modish dog's neck!

According to Geraldine Larkin, a designer who specialises in hand embroidery for top interior designers and fashion houses, "The impact of India on global design is as infinite as the population of India. It is phenomenal. It is such a rich and never-ending culture whether in paintings, textiles, sculpture or jewellery... Think of all the main fashion designers in the world, from Valentino to



Diamond turban jewel made for the Maharaja of Nawanagar



Brooch set with emeralds, sapphires and diamonds, 1922, Cartier



Gold finial from Tipu Sultan's throne, Mysore



Arcot II diamond

THE IMPACT OF INDIA ON GLOBAL DESIGN IS AS INFINITE AS THE POPULATION OF INDIA. IT IS PHENOMENAL.

Yves St Laurent, they have all been influenced by India. "In interior décor it shows in the vast richness of embroidery right through to simple cotton napkins. As for jewellery, just think of Ambaji Shinde, erstwhile Head Designer of Harry Winston [the New York jeweller]. He blended the opulence of his Indian background with classic simplicity, making distinctive multi-million dollar pieces for Queen Elizabeth, Princess Diana and so on."

Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection is another major exhibition within the V&A's India Festival. This one presents 100 objects drawn from a private collection and showcasing jewellery and jewelled objects made in, or inspired by, India from the 17th century to the present day. It includes magnificent precious stones of the kind collected by Mughal Emperors in the 17th century and exquisite objects used in royal ceremonies. It reveals the influence of India on jewellery made by leading European houses in the early 20th century and displays contemporary pieces with an Indian theme made by modern masters.

Desirable pieces include: an Indian turban jewel made for the Maharaja of Nawanagar

set with large diamonds, a Golconda diamond given to Queen Charlotte in 1767, and a jade-hilted dagger that belonged to the 17th-century Emperor Shah Jahan who built the Taj Mahal.

The 'Modernity' section of Bejewelled Treasures introduces the transforming influence of India on jewellery design in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. The house of Cartier and individuals such as the Parisian designer Paul Iribe [Coco Chanel's lover and husband], reinterpreted traditional Indian forms in Art Deco style, and set Indian-cut emeralds next to sapphires in startling new colour combinations.

There are also contemporary pieces made by JAR of Paris, echoing Mughal architectural features, and Bhagat of Mumbai, featuring old-cut diamonds or sapphires as the centrepieces of new designs.

So, the bandanna around the dog's neck. The Indian jewellery reworked in modern idioms. The exotic designs at Cliveden. The rich fabrics at Chewton Glen. Look around and you will discover the impact of Indian design is ubiquitous.

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**THE INDIA FESTIVAL**  
 The Fabric of India,  
 3 October 2015-10 January 2016

Bejewelled Treasures,  
 21 November 2015-28 March 2016

Victoria and Albert Museum, London