

# Style Snapshot

A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history

by Anne Vazquez

**What style frame is this?** This is an example of an Eastlake frame. This style, which originated in America in the latter half of the 19th century, was influenced by the design elements discussed by English architect Charles Locke Eastlake in his 1868 book, “Hints on Household Taste and Furniture, Upholstery and other Details: The Classic Handbook of Victorian Interior Decoration.”

**From what time period is this frame?** While the frames and furnishings influenced by Eastlake’s writings began to appear on the market during the 1870s, this particular frame dates to the 1880s.

**What are the defining/common characteristics of this style?** Following what is often referred to as “The Gilded Age” of design in America during the 1860s, these frames reflect the trend toward simplification. There is an absence of applied and gilded compo ornamentation—a manufacturing process that Eastlake decried in his book.

Reflecting his thoughts on this, low relief carving, geometric patterns, incising on the surface, and sparse gilding are oft-seen features of an Eastlake frame.

The motifs found on this style are usually Gothic in origin. These frames were commonly made from ebonized wood; oak and other “rustic” woods were also utilized.

Another characteristic of many Eastlake frames is a frame profile that slopes back away from the artwork it houses. This followed Eastlake’s assertion that the frame should enhance, not overshadow, the image it housed.

**What furnishing/interior styles accompanied these style frames in their time?** The Eastlake style coincided with the Arts and Crafts design movement in America. In addition to furnishings influenced directly by Eastlake’s writings, many interiors featured natural wood finishes, with simple furnishings reflecting the designs of Gustav Stickley and others who preferred the move away from the gilded pleasures of a few decades earlier in America.

**Additional Comments:** It is interesting to note that while Eastlake aligned himself to some degree with Victorian thinking, he inspired a departure from the more ostentatious leanings of that style and considered good design to be that with a focus on both craftsmanship and functionality. Hence, the frame designs that bear his name reflect the move away from the “traditional” Victorian style that American society had been entrenched in during the mid- to latter portions of the 19th century. ■



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