

HABITAT THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

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Vintage Japanese fans, \$29 each, from Green Tea House, Subiaco.

Exotic infusion

From Japan and China to Mongolia and Tibet, our Asian neighbours have a lot to offer when it comes to injecting some oriental charm into our homes

West Australians have long had a love affair with all things Indonesian but there is also plenty of inspiration to be found by going a little further afield. Whether you like the simplicity of geometric lines of Japanese or prefer the ornate, colourful pieces inspired by China's Qing dynasty, incorporating a touch of the Orient into your decor is a great way to create an exotic atmosphere in any room of your home.

According to Keith Archer, owner of oriental wares retailer Pels on Whatley, in Maylands, every piece of furniture originating from Asia has a story. There are so many different styles to each style, whether it's from China, Tibet, Mongolia... because they have so much depth in their culture, every piece, whether it be a table, a chair, a lamp, how the wood is carved, how the handles are shaped, there's hidden meaning in every thing," he said.

"So it's not only a piece of furniture, it is also meant to bestow different things on every different household, whether it's longevity, wealth or health."

And the best part? Adding a touch of the Orient to your decor can be as simple as working

and slowly building the theme step-by-step. This would avoid ending up with a confused or cluttered look.

A simple way to incorporate an Asian touch was in an entrance hallway.

"A lot of people want that theme when you walk into the house with a beautiful big scroll (on the wall), an altar table and lamp," she said. "It's a lovely welcoming feeling when you walk in. It's very serene."

Interior designer Debbie Anastassiou, of Despina Design, agrees that working in a statement piece and smaller accessories is the ideal way to create an "east meets west" feel — and don't be afraid of the theme simply because you think your style of home won't suit the look.

Ms Anastassiou said modern homes suited the theme, with clean lines providing the perfect backdrop to allow a dramatic or ornate piece to really stand out. Japanese-inspired designs — geometrical lines, simple block colours and clean shapes — worked really well in contemporary Australian homes.

Using colour was another clever option to ensure an understated effect.

"Come up with a colour scheme and work off that," Ms Anastassiou said. "Incorporate an ethnic element and instead of carrying the style through the whole home, just make sure the colour scheme ties in with it."

For example, she suggests teaming the strong colours of Japanese elements — such as contrasting black and red, as well as combinations of grey and red or

background for black triangular designs or geometric-shaped furniture.

Mr Archer said that while red was a prominent colour for the good luck it bestowed, there were other options for those wanting to stick to a muted palette. Try working in plain timbers, such as cypress and elm, in different shades and weights, to complement neutral colour schemes.

Ms Anastassiou said Tibetan style, while not well known in Perth, was another theme that worked well in homes — things like handmade rugs, bright colours and rustic, organic finishes.

ChinaRed owner Lynne Poga said creating an Asian-inspired feel did not limit you to a single theme — different elements could be easily mixed and matched and worked into existing decors.

For example, Chinese-style

TIP: 'Chinese pottery is really defined and you can't mistake it, so put that on a chest of drawers or table ... or a feature wall with an Asian-themed wallpaper, that's all you need sometimes, or maybe a Chinese coffee table in a French living room, or a Chinese rug.'

furnishings paired well with French themes, and different styles from within the same theme could be mixed and matched to great effect.

For instance, Mongolian and Gansu Chinese furniture was big and heavy, made from old, solid timber, and was more simplistic in design but often with a painted finish.

Shanxi Chinese furniture, on the other hand, was lighter and much more ornate, typically black and gold or red and gold, and quite intricate in design.

"The idea is that you mix more highly carved or colourful, intricate pieces, with more contemporary or simplistic pieces," she said.

"Shanxi cabinets, which are very ornately decorated, are great with the simple, modern pieces."

"We've also done some beautiful rooms that have very streamlined leather lounges with quite ornate Tibetan pieces and they work because they complement each other as a style and a piece, and they don't compete."

For those after more of a quirky, eclectic look Ms Anastassiou said it was worthwhile seeking expert advice or doing some research into a region or period from which a piece originated.

This would help avoid an over-the-top, cluttered or confused end result.

As with all furniture shopping, Mr Archer said it was important to consider not just style but whether the proportions of a piece were right for your space.

"A lot of Asian furniture is huge, some of the beds are massive, and they are great, but realistically they don't fit into most Australian

Injecting some oriental charm into our homes

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"So it's not only a piece of furniture, it is also meant to bestow different things on every different household, whether it's longevity, wealth or health."

And the best part? Adding a touch of the Orient to your home can be as simple as working in a single key piece, according to Ms Grey, interior designer at ChinaRed in Cottesloe.

"You could just be bringing in a piece of art work rather than a piece of furniture. It's all about subtlety, which is very important," she said.

"It's just that little hint of exoticism that is brought in and it can be by just one piece of furniture with a lamp on it." While tapping into such a diverse world may seem daunting, Ms Grey helped to start by considering the space and existing furniture,

and slowly building the theme step-by-step. This would avoid ending up with a confused or cluttered look.

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INTERIOR DESIGNER
DEBBIE ANASTASSIOU

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Clean canvas: Contemporary interiors make the perfect backdrop for ornate exotic elements. Red Blossom wallpaper mural by Eijffinger, \$1398 (279x280cm).

