

### **Chapter 3: The influence of Art Deco on the decoration and design of china tableware**

...the Paris Exhibition exposed the imperviousness of the ceramic industry in incorporating the more modern Art Deco style, but it also served as a much needed impetus for change. Consequently, the industry took heed of advice and new trends began to infiltrate the design workshops and many firms began to adopt the stylised florals and later the more modernistic, futuristic motifs and by the early 1930s the shapes of wares had also become susceptible to Art Deco influence. It is therefore the aim of this chapter to consider this influence on the applied decoration and design of china from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s vis-a-vis the traditional designs which were more prominent during this time and which satisfied the demands of the majority. This will not only reveal the extent of the Art Deco style, but also the length to which the industrial artist and designer were prepared to go in order to satisfy the minority demand. Such analysis will be achieved by referring to the pattern books of one company in particular, Royal Stafford, because they reflect changes in design trends and are thus a reliable source representing the work of other firms. However, other companies' designs will be mentioned in the course of the chapter, where necessary, in order to substantiate the argument or discussion under review. It is imperative to note that the following account relates to the work of a small china firm employing about 600 people which produced inexpensive wares to suit a wide market.

It is impossible to give an exclusive account of every type of pattern emerging during the 1920s and 1930s but it is possible to generalise them into three main categories – reproductive, such as the traditional and those employing an oriental theme; derivative, which were those derived from the reproductive designs but given a new arrangement; and the modern – the new designs never tried before. The Art Deco motifs fell into the last two categories. The traditional designs, however, were by far the more popular of all the styles at this time. Perhaps the following quote by Mr W A Thorpe who was assistant keeper of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum during the 1930s, shows why this is so: 'Tradition is a kind of conservatism from each period of what has been successfully achieved in that period and conversion of this into a kind of instinct.'

The traditional motifs ranged from highly ornate patterns to the simpler, reserved panelling motifs. The former were characterised by a number of features, including rococo scrolls, festoons, clusters of foliage and very detailed, naturally coloured flowers, which were applied in conjunction with the lavish use of gold.

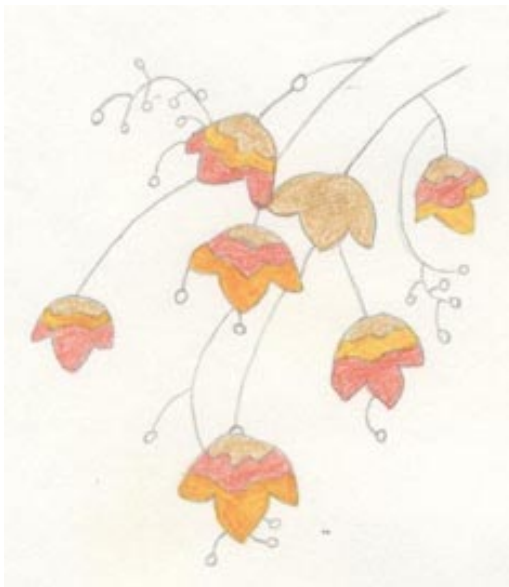
The Art Deco style initially made its impact at this time by absorbing the themes and subjects of such traditional patterns, discarding the extraneous ornament and stylising the flowers. Thus, the

popular rosebud, still recognisable as such, was transformed in shape and given a brighter application of colour:



Royal Stafford, Litho print c1927

Therefore, naturalism was gradually giving way to abstraction, a definite consequence of Art Deco influence. Such trends were already apparent in other industries, such as wallpaper design. Nevertheless, as ceramic designers became more adventurous, the traditional, florid motifs were changed even further, becoming so stylised and boldly coloured that they completely lost their links with naturalism. The result was a freshness of style and colour:



Royal Stafford 'Print and enamel' technique, printed in fish-scale brown. c1930



Royal Stafford c1930. Freehand enamelling.



Royal Stafford, freehand enamelling, c 1928

The decorative method of combining florid motifs and banding was particularly popular during the late 1920s. Later on, the plain banded ware came into vogue.



Royal Stafford 'Print and enamel' c1929

It is also evident that the Art Deco style greatly affected the positioning or draughtsmanship of the designs. For instance, the traditional, conventional motifs were generally placed at regular intervals around the ware, within a reserved panel or as part of an undulating band:



Royal Stafford



Royal Doulton

but the more modern Art Deco motifs were treated in a different way and arranged in a less consistent fashion:



This pattern was produced by Royal Stafford. It was applied using the freehand enamelling technique.  
c1932

This type of positioning reveals the influence of cubism – not only are the motifs themselves triangulated, but also the way in which they are placed. This was a popular method of treating the new designs as well as cutting down production costs.

It is also evident that the Art Deco style influenced the design of neo-classical motifs. These were a series of patterns which were well established and which satisfied the more conservative taste. These comprised Adam motifs:



Royal Stafford, transfer print  
c1935

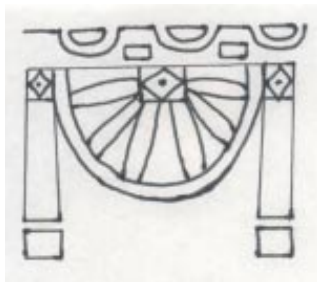


Royal Stafford,  
under-glaze brown  
print with green  
enamelled band.  
c1932

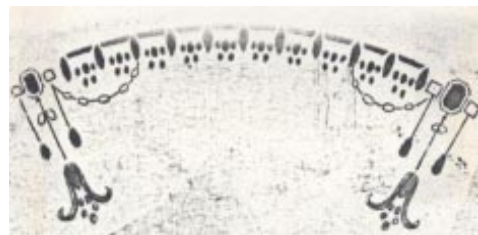
and various classical borders such as Greek key, geometric and the band and bead border:



Parallels from these can be drawn from a number of Art Deco motifs which took the themes and altered them to suit their own style and characteristics. For example, the festoon motif was drastically transformed via the influence of cubism and although the Art Deco style rarely affected the classical border designs, evidence shows that the band and bead motif was given more modern treatment:



Royal Stafford, entered into the pattern book as 'Beabridges new pattern in dark blue print.'  
Date unknown.



Royal Stafford, late 1920s

and the geometric pattern realised a different type of positioning:



Royal Stafford c1934

Turning now to other conventional, best-selling designs, those derived from oriental themes, it is apparent that one of the most popular was the 'Indian Tree, based on oriental flowers and chintz. This was a long established pattern, having first been introduced at Coalport in about 1800 and was still a pleasing design in the 1920s and 1930s. Other Oriental themes also still in production at this time were the Kakiemon and Imari. Kakiemon, which featured the prunus tree and peonies motif, was originally derived from a 17th century Japanese potter. Imari designs originated from Arita, Japan and together with Kakiemon, was incorporated into the pattern books of the English factories during the 18th century. There too were still fashionable in the production of 20th century wares.

The predominant motifs of the Imari family were the highly coloured 'Japan-Derby' designs popularised by the Crown Derby Porcelain Company. Such 'Derbies', as they were called, were characterised by the interchanging motifs of diaper pattern, flowers and gold tracing and rich colouring of blues, reds, oranges and sometimes green.



Royal Stafford c1925  
 'Crown Derby style'.  
 The pattern book entry  
 states: 'all red done by  
 hand' and that best gold  
 was used for the tracing  
 and edging.

The great amount of work exercised in  
 the decoration of this type of ware made  
 it very expensive to produce.

This alternation of motifs, characteristic of the Japanese style, was also at work in other  
 patterns:



Litho print: Universal no 7049



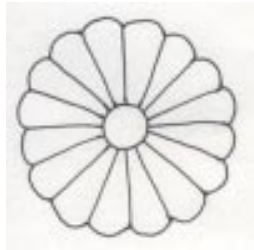
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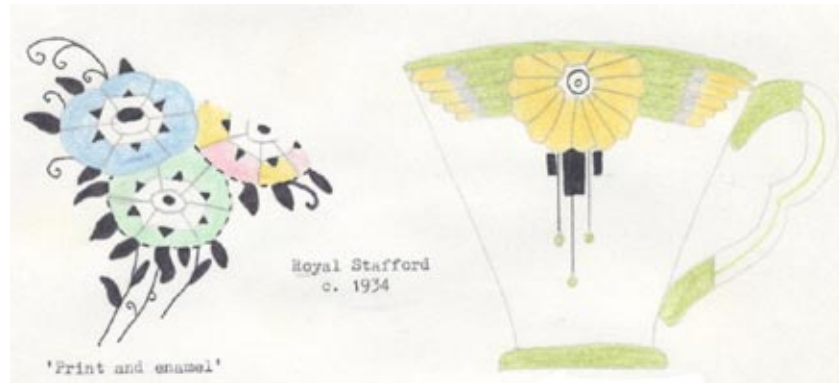
Litho print: c1931



Although the Art Deco style rarely influenced the design elements of the Kakiemon and Imari motifs, it did adopt the Japanese Kikumon flower often featured in the 19th century brocaded Imaris. The Kikumon was a conventional chrysanthemum set in the form of a wheel and used to symbolise Japanese Imperial power and was stylised following Art Deco adaptation:



Conventional  
Kikumon



Art Deco treatment of Kikumon

It is also evident from the Royal Stafford pattern books that other 'Oriental' themes, including the chinoiserie designs, the 'Willow Pattern' and the Chinese Dragon motifs were absorbed and adapted by the Art Deco style, for example, the traditional cobalt-blue Willow Pattern theme was taken and altered:



Royal Stafford, freehand  
enamelling, c1933

Popular Chinese Dragon and cloud motifs, particularly good selling patterns during the 1920s and 1930s, were also subject to Art Deco treatment through their positioning. These new trends influenced the draughtsmanship of motifs and consequently, the placing of this particular design was simplified.

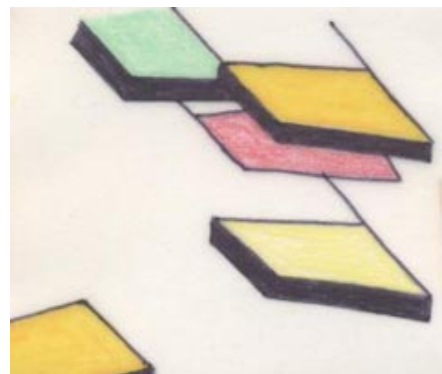
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...Cubism began to emerge as a powerful force behind tableware pattern design during the early 1930s and as the following motifs show, its angular, geometric characteristics were particularly evident. It is also clear that ceramic designers took hold of the bold, often

outrageous and gaudy colours associated with cubism and other modern art trends. These motifs were entered into the Royal Stafford pattern books in around 1934:



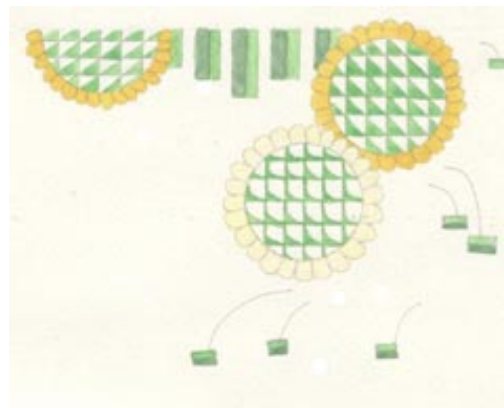
All these designs were painted by hand.



The cubist ideals of representing forms on a flat plane, without any perspective, expressing them in terms of their geometric components, are also manifest in these motifs and patterns:



Royal Stafford 'Print and enamel'



Royal Stafford, 'Print and enamel' c1933



Royal Stafford, 'freehand enamel' c1934