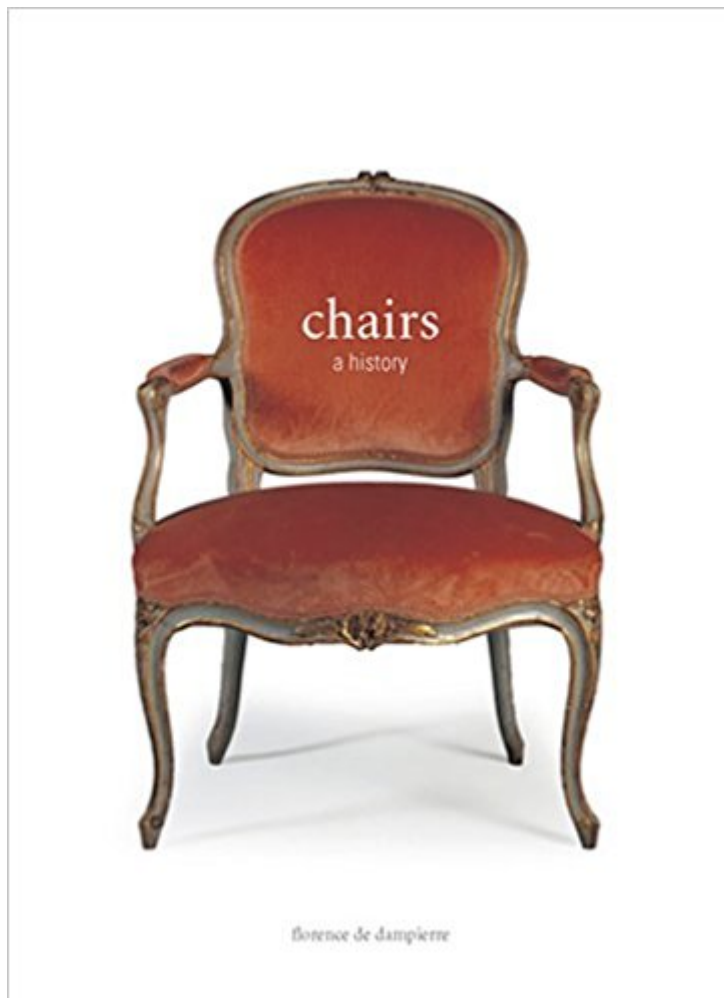


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# Chairs: A History



## Synopsis

Henry David Thoreau wrote, "I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." In *Chairs: A History*, furniture historian Florence de Dampierre presents a wonderfully readable and visually stunning exploration of chairs and their place in culture through the ages. Along with hundreds of gorgeous photographs—many taken specifically for this book—de Dampierre fills these pages with fascinating information and anecdotes, tracing the chair's emergence in ancient Egypt and examining various forms of seating from classical Greece, the Roman Empire, and the Renaissance era, to the classic designs of today. From thrones to divans, straightbacked to overstuffed, Baroque to Bauhaus, this beautiful volume will delight anyone who's ever taken a seat and wondered where it came from.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Decorator and furniture historian Florence de Dampierre is the author of several books, including *The Best Painted Furniture*, as well as numerous articles on period furniture. She lives in Litchfield, CT.

I have a weird obsession with chairs. I'm fascinated by them and their history and this was a great compilation with great tidbits of history and great photography. In my undergraduate class of Modern History of Interiors, I used this book religiously as an outside source and used it for a few projects. It definitely outweighed my textbook, which wasn't that resourceful for furniture. I still love

seeing it on my shelf and will take it down from time to time just to flip through the pages and brush up on my history of my favorite chairs.

wonderful reference

Lets face it some us are simply in love with furniture and for a great deal of us the true great love is chairs. I also love history and this book gives you both. This book has a permanent home on my living room coffee table and I never tire of looking through it and neither will you.

Love it!! Very thorough background on chairs. Will be helpful to my study for our new museum exhibit.. Book good as new.

Another great Florence book!

If you have ever had a conversation with a friend, or better still, been interviewed by a national magazine design writer, and been shocked by their lack of knowledge on the subject of furniture- then this book is for them. Gift-wrapped. Witty and anecdotal, *Chairs: A History* by Florence de Dampierre takes the reader through the history of the chair in a painless and highly entertaining fashion. Early Egyptian chairs- and I do mean early- look quite modern despite being nearly four thousand years old. And who knew that there was a thousand-year gap in innovative chair design between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance? *“Either stools or thrones,”* explains de Dampierre, *“there was little inbetween.”* Chairs are more than convenient resting-places, they come with many associations. De Dampierre explains the hierarchy of sitting down as an issue fraught with social complications. For example, in seventeenth century France, Louis XIV forbade anyone to sit in his presence without his permission, unless they were his children or grandchildren, and even then only on stools. The right to certain types of seating became so important that during a memorial mass for the same king in 1717, the attending bishops stormed out of the cathedral of Saint-Denis when they were refused kneeling cushions or *carreaux*. De Dampierre takes each important design period in the history of the chair and discusses it in depth. For example, she traces the evolution of the Gothic chair from Strawberry Hill in England in the eighteenth century, to France, Germany, then eventually to America where walnut versions were made for the White House in 1846. Grotto chairs were also the rage in the eighteenth century, the

first recorded designer was Thomas Chippendale in England. This creation of a make-believe world was wildly fashionable, and its ultimate expression was in the “mad” Linderhoff castle. Here, he built a rocky cavern, with chairs of coral, and a gilded, mussel-shell throne. With the modern chair, architects began to play a role in their design. De Dampierre quotes author Peter Collins who pointed out “The ultimate test of architectural genius became whether or not one could design a new kind of chair.” In her extensive modern chapter, the author explains the cultural history and background of legendary designers such as Mies van der Rohe, Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, and Denmark’s Hans Wegner. “Chairs” benefits from de Dampierre’s European perspective. Although she has lived in America for many years, and is the author of two other books- “The Best of Painted Furniture” and “The Decorator”- she has written a truly international book. It might even inspire a lifetime enthusiasm for furniture as the author is able to communicate her passion in a very infectious manner.

I am a card-carrying chair freak. The wild, weird, and wonderful world of chairs was the subject of my college thesis. Fascinated by the psycho-social-cultural implications of chairs, I was thrilled to discover that de Dampierre’s book explored the subject from this angle as well. Gorgeous to look at, filled with historical data, and comprehensive, this illustrated study of chairs is as exhilarating as it is exhaustive.

No one who has seen my home would expect me to have anything to do with a furniture book. But some perceptive friend gave me this book and now I get it! Under Ms. de Dampierre’s tutelage, I have grown to understand how pieces of furniture are a reflection of the times in which they were created. This study of chairs is no less fascinating than any great work of art history and the author does an incredible job of detailing changes in social and political currents which impact the design and use of each chair in her exhaustive chronology. As importantly, the pictures are beautiful; the book is worth buying for them alone.

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