

CHAPTER IV

INTERESTING DETAILS

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Section 23. The cyma curve.—This curve, pronounced si-ma, begins this chapter on “Interesting details” because it is the most frequently seen of all ornamental curves, and if we are familiar with it we will generally notice its presence and will thus be better able to enjoy antique furniture. Indeed much of our furniture would be somewhat unlovely without the cyma curve. Its proper form is shown in illustration No. 8, but the variations of it are numerous. This curve was called “the line of beauty” by the celebrated English painter and engraver, William Hogarth,¹ (1697–1764), whose name is sometimes given to certain chairs

1. Hogarth wrote a book entitled “The Analysis of Beauty: written with a view of fixing the fluctuating ideas of taste”, which was published in London in 1753. On pages 48–49 it is said that “there is scarce a room in any house whatever where one does not see the waving line employed in some way or other. . . Though all sorts of waving lines are ornamental when properly applied, yet, strictly speaking, there is but one precise line properly to be called the line of beauty”—this line, numbered 4 in figure 49 in his book, being the cyma curve, the distinctive feature of the “cabriole” leg which is the subject of the next section.

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in the Queen Anne style having these curves, such as the chair² shown here as No. 9.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Luke Vincent Lockwood we are permitted to quote from his "Colonial Furniture in America", volume 1, page 8, as follows, in reference to the use of the cyma curve:

"Two cyma curves placed thus $\left. \right\} \left. \right\}$

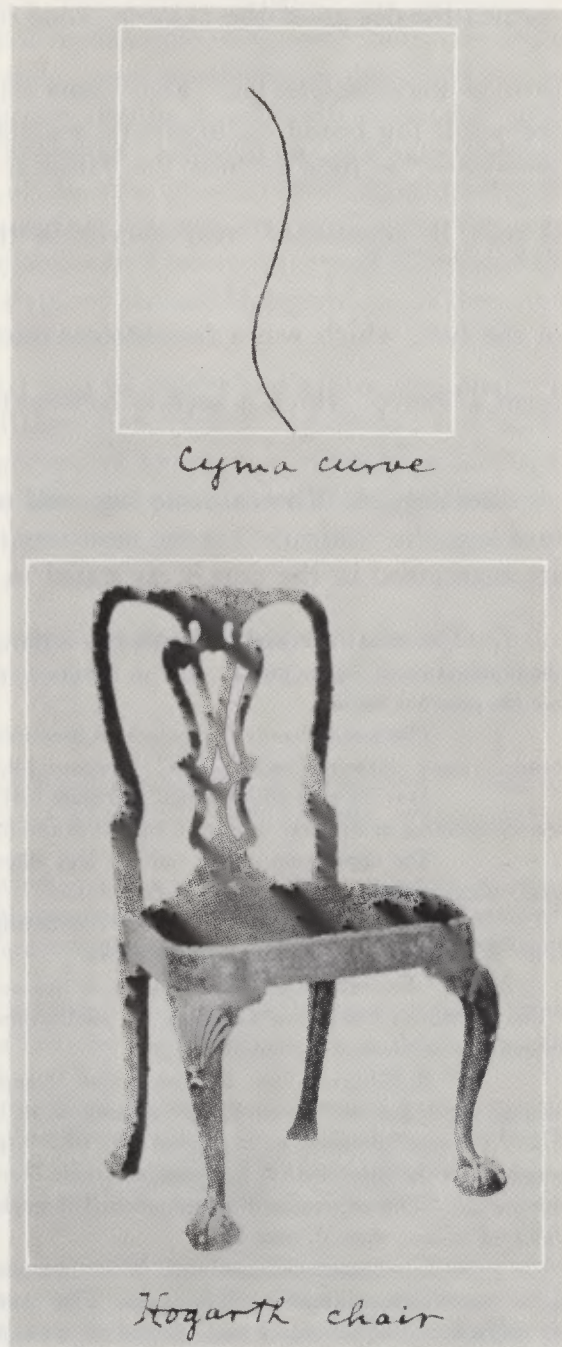
(NOTE 1, *continued*)

Several series of engravings by Hogarth are well known, the most popular being "Marriage à la mode" which is said to be "an accurate delineation of upper class eighteenth century (English) society", and "a miserable tragedy of an ill-assorted marriage"; Encyclopædia Britannica, eleventh edition, page 568. In some of these engravings the furniture of the period is well seen.

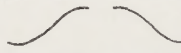

As is seen in illustration No. 8, the cyma curve consists of a continuous double curve, one part being convex and the other part concave. In the drawing, the convex part is above and the concave part is below. When seen on a piece of furniture, if the *convex* part is at the top, as in the drawing, the technical term is "cyma reversa"; if the *concave* part is at the top the term is "cyma recta". These terms are frequently used in the books; and the "cyma recta" may be remembered as concave at the top by noticing that the words "concave" and "cyma recta" each have the letter "c" twice.

The word "ogee" strictly means a cyma curve which is convex at the top and concave below; but "ogee" is frequently used for either or both forms.

2. Eighteen cyma curves, some more exact than others, may be seen on the inner and outer outlines of this chair which is copied, by permission of Mr. Herbert Cescinsky, from his book, "English Furniture", volume 1, figure 93. The two front cabriole legs are in cyma curves; two others of these curves, (one not visible), are at the front and side of the top of each front leg; two more appear on the inner and outer outlines of each of the upright posts of the back; two more are at the centre of the top rail; two others are at the bottom of the central openwork part of the back called the "splat"; and four more are on the outer outlines of the splat. In an arm chair of this type even more cyma curves may be seen.



NO. 8. UPPER. A CYMA CURVE; SECTION 23.
NO. 9. LOWER. A "HOGARTH" CHAIR; SECTION 23.

formed the design of the (Queen Anne style) chair backs. A cyma curve thus }
 formed the cabriole leg. Two cyma curves placed thus  formed
 the scroll top found on highboys, secretaries and cupboards. When placed thus
 they formed the familiar outline" found in many pieces. Also,
 it may be mentioned, two curves in this position } } form the framework
 of the lyre, which was a favorite ornamental design; and in this position } they
 form a "brace" which is used to connect two or more printed lines.

Section 24. The cabriole leg; and others.—Of the numerous types of furniture legs, the "cabriole"¹ is the most important and the most graceful. Other types are mentioned in the note.² As stated in the previous section, and shown on the

1. The word "cabriole", as applied to furniture seems to be of uncertain origin. Its meaning is about the same as "cyma curve", that is, having an outline consisting of a convex and a concave curve. See the previous section.

The word "bandy" is sometimes used instead of "cabriole". "Bandy" is defined as "having a bend or crook outward; said of legs"; Century Dictionary. The word lacks dignity.

As is the case with the ball and claw foot, the cabriole leg is believed to be of Chinese origin; see the remarks in the next section in regard to the foot.

The upper part of the cabriole leg, where it turns outward is called the "knee"; the lower part, where it turns inward, is called the "ankle".

An illustrated article entitled "Identifying periods by legs and feet", by Mr. George Brobeck, is in "The Antiquarian", June, 1929, page 48.

2. A. For several of the definitions in this note the writer is indebted to Mr. L. V. Lockwood's "The Furniture Collectors' Glossary", a publication of the Walpole Society, 1913. This book is also referred to in the next section, note 1.

B. Turned legs. See also section 35 entitled "Turnings". These legs were in many designs, among which are the "inverted cup" turning, as in highboys Nos. 633 and 634 and lowboys Nos. 669-671; "trumpet" turning, as in lowboy No. 672; "spiral", which is a twisted form resembling a corkscrew, as in the cane chair No. 35 and the table No. 1279. Almost all plain round legs were "turned", not carved. The expression "turned chairs" is explained in section 46, note 11, A. Turned feet are referred to in section 25, note 4, F.

C. Square straight legs. These were used on many chairs in the Chippendale style, to a great extent superseding the cabriole legs. They were less expensive to make than the cabriole legs and by using them the purchaser was enabled to apply much of his money to the chair back, which is the most conspicuous part of a chair. These legs at first sight may seem to be almost the same as the square but tapered legs seen on the chairs in the Hepplewhite style.

D. Tapered legs. These are square or round legs which gradually become narrower toward the bottom. The square tapered leg was a feature in the chairs, tables, sideboards and other articles in the style of Hepplewhite; and both the square and the round ones were used by Sheraton, as will be seen in the illustrations. The "tapering" on legs in the Hepplewhite style was generally on the inside only. See also "Spade foot", figure 17 in illustration No. 11, and the comment.

E. Scroll legs. These are in ornamental curved designs. Several forms of scroll legs have been used, as in the early chairs Nos. 36 and 38 which are known as "Flemish" scrolls. See also "Scroll foot" in the next section, figure 16.

Hogarth chair, No. 9, it is in the form of a cyma curve. Whether the cabriole leg terminates in the "Dutch", or "club", foot in the style of Queen Anne, or in the ball and claw foot of the Chippendale style, both of which are described in the next section, the superiority of the cabriole design is generally acknowledged. It first came into general use in England about the year 1700, in the reign of Queen Anne, and was a conspicuous example of the change from the straight lines of the previous style. In our country the cabriole leg was first used about the year 1705, and it continued in fashion in the styles of Queen Anne and Chippendale until about 1785. It was not used in the styles of Adam, Hepplewhite or Sheraton or in later styles.

Examples of the cabriole leg are best seen on chairs and tables. On chairs it is well seen in the Queen Anne style in illustrations Nos. 9 and 50-67; and in the Chippendale style it is shown in very many chairs, among which are Nos. 118-126; in the chapter on tables it is seen in many illustrations of these two styles, as in the card tables Nos. 1477-1482.

Section 25. The kinds of feet.—In this section mention is made of the principal kinds of feet which are found on articles of American antique furniture;

(NOTE 2, *continued*)

F. Fretted legs. These were in fretwork designs, either cut on the wood or in forms cut out separately and applied on the leg. Fretwork was used by Chippendale on chairs with square legs, tables and other pieces. See chair No. 141.

G. Grooved legs. A groove is a channel or hollow cut out of the surface of the wood. Many of the square legs of chairs in the Chippendale style were grooved vertically in order to ornament an otherwise plain leg. In the engravings grooves are more easily seen in the backs of chairs than in the legs; see chairs Nos. 130 and 172.

H. Splayed, or raked, legs. These are best seen in the six Windsor chairs shown in No. 440. They are not vertical, but are so placed that they slant, the front legs to the sides and the rear legs to the back and sides.

I. Curule legs. These legs, almost in the shape of a half-circle, were used by Robert Adam as a classical design and were copied by Sheraton and later by Duncan Phyfe and others. They may be seen in figure 30 of the Sheraton style chairs in No. 234. See also note 9 on the curule form in section 52. An early chair having a somewhat similar form of legs is known in England as an "X" chair. See the Index under the word "Curule".

J. Concave legs. This form was much used in the Sheraton, Directory and Empire styles. As indicated by their name, these legs curved inward in a concave line. Graceful examples are in the pedestal tables in the Sheraton style, copied by Duncan Phyfe and often erroneously attributed to him as the originator; see illustrations of tables Nos. 1322 and 1548 and chairs Nos. 305-310 and 323.

K. Round legs. These were seldom made in the Chippendale style of furniture but were much used in other styles. They were often reeded or fluted, as to which see section 41. Many illustrations of round legs are seen in the next chapter, on chairs; they were generally "turned", not carved.

L. Winged lion legs. This was a favorite form on sofas in the Empire period, as may be seen in the chapter on sofas, Nos. 588-592. The idea of combining a wing and the leg of a lion may have come from classic sources, but the design is not pleasing on the legs of a sofa.

M. Cluster-column legs. This is a leg formed actually or apparently by several columns placed together. Examples are in the chair No. 140; see also the mantel mirror No. 1233.

In the last three illustrations in section 48, Nos. 41–43, the chairs are in a transition state, being partly in the previous style of the cane chairs and partly in the Dutch style of Queen Anne. In a short time other changes into the Dutch style were made and finally the transformation became complete.

The special features of an early chair entirely in the Queen Anne style are well seen in No. 50 which is a good example of the style.² These features are all different from those seen in the cane chairs of the previous period and are as follows:

1. The back of the chair is curved at the ends of the top and there often is a concave curve in the centre.
2. The splat rests upon the rear rail of the seat, not upon a cross-rail above the seat; see No. 41 and the comment.
3. The front legs are in the curved form known as "cabriole"; see section 24.
4. The front feet are the rounded Dutch, or club, feet; or, on many of the later chairs, ball and claw feet; see section 25.

Certain other features, indicating changes in various details, will be mentioned as we proceed, such as the presence or absence of stretchers; the curved or straight seat; the form of the "stiles"³; and especially the design of the splat, either solid or pierced.

The most distinctive feature of the Queen Anne style of chairs, however, is the cyma curve, which takes the place of the straight line in the previous styles. This curve is present in almost every part of the chair, and particularly and always in the cabriole form of leg. The cyma curve is illustrated in section 23 in which it is mentioned that the artist Hogarth termed this curve⁴ the "line of beauty"; and a "Hogarth chair" is shown as No. 9.

The splats⁵ in the chairs of the Queen Anne style are in a variety of forms, many of them graceful, even though simple and plain. The most usual form of splat has a supposed resemblance to the shape of a vase or a fiddle⁶ and a chair of

2. In addition to the chairs shown in this section, there were at least two other kinds in the Queen Anne style. One is the "wing" chair which is shown in section 59; the other, not illustrated here, is a chair with a rectangular back and seat, all covered with upholstery except the cabriole legs. Both of these types are dated about 1725–1750.

3. A "stile" and a back leg together form one upright piece of wood. The stile is the part above the leg. Stiles are also known as "uprights", meaning the posts which extend up from the back leg and are braced together at the top by the top rail. They almost disappeared in the chairs of Hepplewhite but are seen again in those of Sheraton and in later styles. For the convenience of readers who may not see this definition, it is repeated in section 51, note 19. See also the Index.

4. Another good example of the use of cyma curves is in the arm chair No. 62. Here we find them in the legs, the arm supports, the stiles and the splat.

5. The word "splat" is explained in section 48, note 12.

6. The outline of a splat often resembles that of a vase but a resemblance to a fiddle is generally imaginary.

A somewhat similar type of solid splat was used in a late Empire style chair of about the year 1840; see section 57, Nos. 346–354. (Note 6 is continued on page 132.)

this type is often called a "vase-back" or "fiddle-back" chair. In many Queen Anne style chairs of late date the splats were "pierced", as were most of the splats in the Chippendale style as seen in the next section.

Certain differences have been observed between the Queen Anne and Chippendale style of chairs made in Philadelphia and those made in New England. Most of these differences are details of cabinet making, not interesting to amateurs; one feature, however, may be mentioned here. Looking at the back of a good Philadelphia chair, of about 1750-1785, just above the tops of the rear legs, the ends of the side rails of the seat are often seen extending through the rear posts.⁷ This method of construction was used in Philadelphia in the Queen Anne period and until the end of the Chippendale period. It has often been said that the method was not used in chairs made in other States; but this view has been found to be erroneous, as the same method has since been discovered in chairs made in New York and Connecticut. This illustrates the danger of asserting a negative!

The wood of which the New England chairs and other articles in the Queen Anne style were made was generally walnut or other native woods. Walnut was also used in the Pennsylvania chairs until mahogany became the fashion, which was about 1745; after that date mahogany was almost exclusively used in that State in the finer class of chairs. It was recently said that of all the numerous chairs in the Queen Anne style in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art only five are of mahogany and they were of about 1750.

Examining the illustrations, we see first a group of five early Queen Anne style chairs, Nos. 50-54. As with the cane chairs of the preceding period, these Queen Anne style chairs are furnished with turned stretchers. The lower stretcher is "recessed", as in the cane chair No. 40, that is, it is set back from the front and is connected with the side stretchers, not with the front legs. The stiles are straight, or almost so, not broken by a curve a few inches above the seat, as in No. 58 and others after about 1725. The splat in each of these five chairs is in a somewhat different design. The legs are in the cabriole form and the feet are of the Dutch, or club, type.

No. 50 is an early form of Queen Anne style chair. The splat is cut in a plain design, more suggestive of a vase than a fiddle. The seat is rounded at the corners and curved on the sides. This kind of chair is often found in New England. The wood is generally walnut or maple. About 1710-1725.

(NOTE 6, continued from page 130)

After examining the black splat of a chair with a white background it is often interesting to look at the white background which forms two white silhouettes. In some cases a little imagination may enable the reader to see outlines of an object; thus the head of a parrot may be recognized by the presence of a curved bill, as in Nos. 60, 89 and others. See also section 200 in the Appendix.

7. This method is well shown on a Queen Anne style chair, figure 3, illustrated in "Antiques", December, 1932, page 214, in an article by Mr. Louis G. Myers, mentioned in note 1 in this section. See also section 51 at note 12.

Another difference is said to be that turned stretchers, as in Nos. 50, 52-53 and others, are seldom found on Pennsylvania chairs but were used on chairs made in New England. See also section 51, above note 14, sub-title "Stretchers".

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59 (UPPER) MR. J. S. McDANIEL.
62 (LOWER) MR. A. M. TYSON.

60 (UPPER) DR. M. A. ABRAMS.
63 (LOWER) MR. A. M. TYSON.

61 (UPPER) DR. M. A. ABRAMS.
64 (LOWER) MR. A. M. TYSON.