

# Four Minutes That Changed My Life

As the new year begins, we all think of it as a fresh start. 1997 brings new resolutions, new jobs, new times and now with the new rains, the ground is covered with new life over recently scorched landscapes. In all, it is a time for new beginnings. For me too, 1997 will be the time for a new beginning. As an interior designer I collected many beautiful pieces over the years and have enjoyed displaying them. Like so many women, I have a special love for antique dishes. I have collected many types. My favorites are dishes I have gathered for more than fifteen years that resemble English Gardens. These pieces were not just central patterns or borders of flowers, but were spilling over with brilliant blooms.

Then came the Northridge Earthquake in 1994 and, fortunately, none of us were injured, but my irreplaceable Chintzware collection was shattered. My personal treasures, furniture, hutches and armoires were completely destroyed. So along with many other people, we relocated and this marked a new beginning for me and my family. Claridge House Interiors opened in Westlake.

One "blue" day my mind wandered. I asked myself, "How am I going to replace my exquisite Chintz?". As it was no longer being produced, authentic pieces were difficult to find. Market prices were skyrocketing and coordinating fabric was non-existent. It was at that moment that a brilliant idea emerged. I could have fabric printed to match the old Chintz...and in a mini-second, another thought...I could simply reproduce the dishes as well!



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These ideas continued to develop and in 1995, my daughter Christie (a very talented designer in her own right) and I traveled to England to research the origins of English Chintzware and explore the possibilities. We toured the old Chintz factories and actually learned how and where it was made. We earned our "Ph.D.s" in Chintz! Several companies, primarily in England and Germany, produced Chintz at the turn of the century. These bright, cheerful floral patterns were a dramatic contrast to the bleak English weather, bringing a ray of sunshine to every home. No wonder they were so popular!

The Spring of 1997 will see a rebirth of Royal-Winton Chintz. This long forgotten dishware will soon be available to everyone in a "once in a century" event.

My new company, **House of Claridge-Royal Winton**, will produce the same beautiful dishes manufactured in England and distributed worldwide. We will also manufacture matching fabric here in the U.S., sold by the yard, with a limited ready-made line such as valances, placemats and table skirts.

I am *thrilled* to bring the first two patterns, *Summertime* and *Welbeck*, to many places throughout the country with this lovely "bit of the garden".

It is said that 'when God closes a door, he always opens a window'. It seems, in my case, he has closed a window and opened a door!

Happy New Beginnings!

Gail Claridge  
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