

Majolica Matters!

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE MAJOLICA INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
www.majolicasociety.com

July 2002

From The Editor's Desk

Moe Wizenberg

I think I'm still recovering from our Annual Meeting in Atlanta. The meeting was simply fantastic in every way. Our deepest appreciation to LeRoy Davis, Phil English, and the locals in Atlanta---wow, what a show. If you weren't there you missed a real treat. Start thinking now about the 2003 meeting scheduled for May 2-4. Le Roy Davis, our annual meeting VP is close to completing the contract to have that meeting in St. Louis, Missouri. The central heartland USA location should be convenient to all members as well as offering excellent airline connections for members coming from overseas. Official (meaning it's settled) news will appear first on the web site.

Majolica seems to have suddenly become HOT with news appearing in multiple locations as well as a number of shows at museums. Reports of our annual meeting have been published in the Maine Antique Digest, July 2202, and in The Arts Weekly (aka the Newtown Bee), May 31,2002 as well as in this issue of Majolica Matters. Creative Home Magazine of May 2002 has an article entitled "Majolica" about decorating and collecting majolica. House and Garden for May 2002 has a beautiful article entitled "Primary Source" showing Madeleine Castang's manor house near Chartres, France---lots of gorgeous majolica and Minton blue.

The New York Times on May 19th, 2002, in Sunday Styles (page 9) had an article by Ruth LaFerla entitled "Suppose They Gave a Party and Served on Majolica". The party was given by member and interior designer Susan Zises Green whom we have had the pleasure of hearing at a recent annual meeting. Veranda Magazine for July-August 2002 has an article about the decorative use of Majolica in a family cabin in

Minnesota. A major article appeared in the July 2002 issue of Art and Auction. Entitled "Minton Condition" and written by Paul Jeromack, this extensively researched ten page article explores the rising interest in majolica as well as the upcoming sale at Bonhams and the controversy which surrounds it.

I have enjoyed being your editor for the past 2 years (no, I'm not leaving) and would like to thank all of you who have made my life easier, and Majolica Matters better, by contributing to its content. I hope you enjoy seeing your writing in print and I am delighted to finally have a small backlog for future issues---keep them coming. As for the rest of you who haven't written, give it a try---you might like it, and I know we would like to hear about you and your collection, research or whatever.

My special thanks to my co-editors Deborah English and Helen Cunningham, Phil English who inspires me with his dedication to the Society, and Duane Matthes who is a never ending source of information, great suggestions and the labels which ensure that this reaches you. Have a happy, healthy, majolica filled Summer. MJW

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Majolica And Absinthe

The following correspondence was initiated by an email by a new member in South Africa (ed.)

I recently purchased a Keller & Guerin St Clement Marabou Stork water pitcher (#431), dating from 1890-1910. This pitcher is illustrated in Helen Cunningham's book on Pg 97, where she states that the pitcher might have



been intended for use with absinthe, on account of the extremely small hole in the beak for the spout. (Traditionally absinthe was served with the addition of water and sugar. A sugar cube was placed on a perforated spoon balanced on the rim of the glass containing the

absinthe - then iced water was slowly poured on the sugar, so that it dissolved and together with the water dripped into the glass, diluting and sweetening the bitter drink. Special carafes were made for adding the water - some of these have a single needle-thin hole for the spout, so that the water could be dripped over the sugar especially slowly - this was believed to enhance the taste.)

The same pitcher is illustrated in Maryse Bottero's excellent book "Pichets en barbotine" (Pg 41). Bottero also describes its use with absinthe, and says that a version exists with publicity for "Amourette" - an anis based liqueur very similar to absinthe introduced after absinthe was banned in 1915.

A French dealer recently emailed me and told me that he recalled seeing a K&G marabou pichet about 10 years ago with publicity for an actual absinthe brand, but cannot remember which one.

So my question is: Other than this "circumstantial" evidence, has anyone seen any definite proof that this pichet was specifically used for absinthe prior to its prohibition in 1915 - ie a mention to that effect in a contemporary K&G catalogue or other document, an actual example with absinthe related publicity, a contemporary engraving showing it in use etc. Any information at all would be greatly appreciated (as of course would any details of other French majolica items with an absinthe connection). David Nathan - Maister

Hello David,

With regard to your question about the St. Clement Marabou Stork jug, you bring up several good points. When researching majolica and other pottery many times the only evidence available is "circumstantial." Often the factories themselves, especially in the case of European potteries, have been destroyed. So researchers must rely on information from former employees of the factory, factory catalogs, and of course collectors. If none of these are available, then an educated guess is the best one can do. As research continues, other information surfaces sometimes disproving previously accepted points.

Your description of the use of water to dissolve the sugar for absinthe is quite accurate. Pitchers with very small openings allowed the water to drip slowly over the sugar to sweeten the bitter absinthe. The 1927 catalog from

Majolica And Absinthe

St. Clement did not show the Marabou pitcher. Evidence indicates that the stork dates much earlier, probably prior to World War I. Since absinthe was banned in 1915, these facts correlate. One collector, Mr. Bertrand Cocq, tells me that he has seen two Marabou pitchers with advertising for absinthe. The first displayed "Absinthe oxygénée" and the other an advertisement for "estaminet in Pontarlier." Both of these were on the bottom of the jug and were not seen when the jug was in front of you. (estaminet was a term used prior to 1900 for a popular bistro)

Although an English liquor distributor sought a joint venture with Sarreguemines pottery at the very end of the 19th century whereby he would import the pottery and label it with his brand names, business ventures of this sort were a relatively new idea at this time. Whether St. Clement already offered its jugs with absinthe labels before or after the English venture with Sarreguemines, I don't know. Perhaps by researching the dates for the two absinthe companies, one might determine whether the St. Clement venture was earlier than the English-Sarreguemines connection.

One can safely assume, however, that the idea was popular both in Victorian England and on the continent. Within the first years of the new century more liquor companies seemed attracted to marketing their products on majolica jugs. St. Clement became well known for its connection with liquor distributors as the century progressed. The marketing of liquor brands on pottery jugs continues today as companies such as Jim Beam offer their liquor in pottery displaying their logo.

Thanks for your interest in majolica.

Helen Cunningham

Dear Helen

Many thanks for your extremely informative reply - it's quite a thrill to hear directly from THE expert in the field....I've really found your book an invaluable reference.

Its most interesting to hear that the marabou is known with the "Absinthe Oxygenee" mark. This was not a specific brand as such, but a type of premium absinthe enriched with ozone during the production process, and claimed to have numerous health benefits. They were an attempt to counteract the (ultimately successful) attempts

of the temperence lobby to have absinthe banned as a danger to public health. The best known "Absinthe Oxygenee" was made by the well-known firm of Cusenier, although the Premier Fils version was also widely sold. Both Cusenier and Premier Fils produced dozens of promotional items for their brands, so its not suprising at all that this type of majolica item was included.

Several other St Clement and Sarreguemines jugs have very small holes for the water, but what one really wants as an absinthe specialist of course is a more specific or definite connection. Its not really majolica, but I do have a fine "Gres d'Alsace" jug with a bulldog face made for "Absinthe Delizy et Doistau"



I hope perhaps in the future to bring out a book on absinthe related antiques (there is one in French, but none in English), and so any further information would be most appreciated, and of course acknowledged fully.

Once again thank you for your most useful email!
David

Report On Strawser Auction

April 5 & 6, 2002

by Deborah English

Michael Strawser held his Spring Auction in Hatfield, Pennsylvania on Friday, April 5th and Saturday, April 6th. In spite of the chilly weather (snow flurries!), attendance was robust, especially for the Saturday session. Most of the dealers who are well known to the MIS membership were there as were a number of collectors. There was a broad geographical sample with collectors coming from as far away as Dallas, Arizona and California. There were also some absentee bids.

The sale went smoothly and finished early in the afternoon. I'm not a judge of the market but it seems to me that the prices realized were somewhat lower than they might have been two years ago. There was, as always, a lot of excitement about the top pieces but the competition was softer. Naturally, there were exceptions to the trend.

Herewith, some prices before buyer's premium:

1. George Jones cobalt stork garden seat, \$17,000.
2. George Jones cobalt garden seat with water lilies, 2 examples at \$15,000 and \$11,000.
3. George Jones cobalt water lily cheese keeper, \$6500.
5. George Jones unusual game pie dish with basket base and dead game on top, \$6000.
6. George Jones underwater pitcher, \$12,500.
7. George Jones turquoise punch bowl, \$15,000.
8. Minton double bunny game pie dish, \$35,000.
9. Minton Louis XIV turquoise pedestal, \$4,000
10. Minton turquoise jardiniere, \$1500
11. Minton frog creamer, \$5,500.
12. Minton heron and fish ewer, \$9,000.
13. Minton oyster tier, \$7,500.
14. A boar's head pate dish, identified as George Jones but which created much discussion as to the manufacturer, \$7,000.
15. Holdcroft pair of stork and heron walking stick stands, \$22,000.
16. Holdcroft bear with drum pitcher, \$1,600.
17. A cobalt fish in seaweed cheese keeper, \$4,000.
18. Wedgwood cobalt neo-classical pedestal with medallions, \$3,000.
19. Wedgwood cobalt dragon teapot, \$3,500.
20. Brown Westhead & Moore cobalt fox pitcher, \$3,000.
21. WS&S two-piece centerpiece, \$4,500
22. Sarreguemes figural poodle with top hat candlestick, \$450.
23. Hugo Lonitz hanging triple fish plaque, \$8,000.
24. Sarreguemes stork walking stick stand, \$4,000.

25. Massier rooster vase, \$2,250.
26. Hugo Lonnitz bird figure, \$2,100.
27. Continental figural rooster bottle, \$2,200.
28. Etruscan pink swan & lily sardine box, \$500.
29. Etruscan napkin platter, \$600

The mid range pieces, such as plates and figural pitchers seemed a few dollars lower than last year. There were relatively few passes but one, the George Jones cobalt complete tea set was a surprise at \$17,000. Others included two nice Minton painted jardiniere.

It was a good day to be buying if one hasn't been affected too much by recent turmoil. Still, I didn't sense any unease about long term value. All day long the mood was upbeat and cheerful. There were several moments of applause and much chatting back and forth. The prices might have been a little lower than in the past but they seemed reasonable. There weren't many "steals" although there were some bargains.

Minton Museum Masterpieces

Bonhams July 23, 2002

by Marilyn Karmason

Bonhams - one of the world's leading fine art auctioneers - will be selling more than 500 selected items from the Minton Museum Collection on Tuesday, 23 July 2002. The collection belongs to Royal Doulton, one of England's oldest and most celebrated manufacturers of ceramics, and is one of the finest in existence.

The auction will be an historic occasion, in which some of the best Minton porcelain and pottery, spanning 150 years from 1820-1970, will be offered. Sale highlights will be exhibited at Doyle New York between 15 and 18 June prior to the Bonhams auction in London. Viewing in London will begin on 17 July, at Bonhams, New Bond Street. A lavish, hardback catalogue, extensively illustrated in colour, will be produced for this historic auction. The auction will offer something for everyone.

Porcelain from Minton's so-called First Period includes Gothic and Rococo vases and amusing candle extinguisher figures, as well as 'flat-backs' - a colourful specialty of Minton from the 1830s. The French influence in the middle of the 19th Century encouraged Minton to borrow valuable old Sèvres vases to make exact copies. Minton's 'Sèvres' porcelain was considered every bit as fine. The sale will include one of the few surviving examples of Minton's Vaisseau à mat - a truly wondrous achievement.

Minton's display at the Great Exhibition in 1851 included ware made from Parian and Majolica, two very different but equally important ceramic bodies. Amongst fine Parian figures and busts in the sale a statue of Colin Minton Campbell, owner of the factory will be offered. A selection of relief-moulded jugs will represent the best of Victorian design at surprisingly reasonable prices (many costing less than £100), while Majolica, glowing with rich coloured glazes, will be the most desirable of all Victorian pottery, with prices to match.

Minton made the world's finest Majolica. A highly important Majolica roundel, a monumental Renaissance vase and, of course, the celebrated Peacock (£100,000) will be sold. Modelled by Paul Comolera, the peacock is one of Minton's most important creations and may well set a new auction record.

Louis Solon's Pâte-sur-pâte masterpieces represent the ultimate in Minton's technical and artistic brilliance. A selection of important exhibition pieces will be included in the auction.

Further French influence is prominent within Minton productions. Master potter Charles Toft copied old French Henri Deux and Limoges Enamel wares and William Mussill worked on monumental vases painted boldly in different coloured clays. Antonin Boullemier and his son Lucien painted historical figures and children on truly outstanding porcelain cabinet wares. Some of Minton's finest painted pieces will be offered, such as the dessert service made in 1867 to commemorate the safe return of Lord Milton from an expedition to explore a North West Passage across Canada.

Minton's Japansque porcelain is refreshingly different, appealing today to a new kind of collector. A series of plates from 1879 illustrating great ceramics of the world will be the highlight in the Japanese section of the sale.

Minton will retain an equally representative collection for reference purposes, and it will be housed in its Visitors Centre.

Both Bonhams and Minton were founded in 1793, and in this unique collaboration, they will produce a lavish, hardback catalogue, extensively illustrated in colour for this historic auction, which will chart the history of the great ceramic factory.

I've typed up the list of the Minton pieces that will be auctioned at Bonhams on July 23. I did not include the examples of damage in almost all of the pieces, and I couldn't get photos of the pieces.

The Bonhams catalogue is available from John Sandon (01144 207 468 8244) or Mark Oliver (01144 207 368 8233). Bonhams is at 101 Bond Street, London W1S 1SR, Great Britain (or UK)

Masterpieces of Minton

Selected items from the Minton Museum Collection
Auction by Bonhams, Tuesday 23 July 2002 New Bond Street, London

- 157 Minton Majolica Plaque by Thomas Kirkby, 1870.
1,000-1,500 pounds
- 158 Minton Majolica Two-Handled Vase, 1864.
1,200-1,500 pounds
- 159 Minton Majolica Pedestal, 1897.
2,000-3,000 pounds
- 160 Minton Majolica Aziglio Vase by
Edouard Rischgitz, 1864. 1,5000-2,5000 pounds
- 161 Minton Majolica Seafood Platter, c. 1876.
2,000--3,000 pounds
- 162 Minton "Della Robbia" Majolica Tondo, .c 1860.
2,000-3,000 pounds
- 163 Minton Majolica Vase by Thomas Kirkby, 1864.
1,000-1,5000 pounds
- 164 Minton Majolica Circular Plaque, 1866.
200-300 pounds
- 165 Minton Majolica Oval Platter, c. 1870.
600-800 pounds
- 166 Minton Majolica "Holly Dish," c. 1870.
1,000-1,500 pounds
- 167 Minton Majolica Vase, c. 1870. 400--600 pounds
- 168 Minton Majolica Plate, 1863. 300-400 pounds
- 169 Minton Majolica Jug, 1876. 150-200 pounds
- 170 Minton Majolica Garden Seat, 1885.
400-600 pounds
- 171 Minton Majolica pedestal, 1888.
1,400-1,600 pounds
- 172 Minton Majolica Garden Seat, c. 1882.
2,000-3,000 pounds
- 173 Minton Majolica Monumental "Bacchus Vase,"
1884. 7,000-10,000 pounds
- 174 Pair of Minton Majolica Figural Vases, 1871.
1,000-1,500 pounds
- 175 Minton Majolica Figural Vase, c. 1874.
500-700 pounds
- 176 Minton Majolica Teapot and Cover, 1874.
800-1,200 pounds
- 177 Two Minton Majolica Tiles, 1905.
400-600 pounds
- 177A Minton Majolica Candlestick, c. 1870.
200-300 pounds
- 178 Minton Majolica Stick Stand by John Henk,
c. 1875. 3,000-5,000 pounds
- 179 An Important Lifesize Minton Majolica Model of a
Peacock by Paul Comolera, 1873.
100,000-120,000 pounds

MIS 2002

People And Items You Missed If You Weren't There



Should I get that Minton Cat?



How were your powers of resistance?



Comparing notes



Linda Ketterling with the French contingent



Getting ready for the web



Time for decision making



Lunch scene at the Dearings



More at the Dearings

MIS 2002
People And Items You Missed If You Weren't There



James Cox and LeRoy Davis - relaxed!



Stuff that would look better in your home - ne c'est pas?



Jerry and Aviva with another great find



Carla Benhardt - when a dealer is a buyer



A Majolica family -- Carol Staab and daughter



David Tulk - first time dealer from England



Ed Flower --- decision time?



In case you still have some space at home

Report of 14th Annual Meeting Majolica International Society

Marilyn Karmason

The 14th annual meeting of the Majolica International Society was held at the Renaissance Waverly Hotel in Atlanta Georgia on the weekend of May 3-5, with 101 members in attendance. The Friday afternoon weekend opened with discussions of majolica's insurance, restoration and presence on the Internet. At the evening's MajoliCake and Coffee, members heard "A Retrospective" by Joan Stacke Graham and "Collecting" by Ed Flower. Saturday's Continental Breakfast introduced a new version of Barter'n Buy, including a silent auction. Speakers Saturday morning included Frances Rothschild on "Decorating with Majolica" and Wanda Matthes listing "My Favorite Things." The afternoon was spent researching antiques shops, including the majolica-filled Dearing Antiques shop in the Miami Circle antiques - area, and on Bennett Street.

Paul Atterbury was the featured speaker at the gala Majolica Society Banquet. An excellent writer of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century ceramics, Atterbury described the celebration of changes in Victorian England with the development of Victorian majolica. Gastronomy, horticulture, conservatories, sea life, royal persons, birds and animals and other images illustrated Victorian life in glorious majolica forms and glazes. There was also discussion of Royal Doulton's decision to hold an auction of their museum-based Minton majolica by Bonhams in London.

Sunday morning's annual business meeting introduced new goals of the society. Moe Wizenberg, editor of Majolica Matters, listed quarterly publication of the newsletter in July; October, January, and April. The newsletter announced an exhibition of 100 pieces of Sixteenth Century Palissy to be held in the Fine Arts Museum of Tours, from October 19 to January 13 2003. Information about attendance at the opening night on Friday, October 18, may be obtained from Dr. Wizenberg and Marshall Katz, the expert and author of books on Nineteenth Century Palissy wares.

Duane Matthes, head of the MIS website, described the historic archival area, and requested issues of old newsletters so that the society's Private Area will have a great assortment of past information for new members. A forum may be established in the MIS public area.

Jim Trout, membership chairman, indicated that membership has improved this year, and possibly could increase three times by next year's meeting.

Michael Strawser, founder and first president of MIS, will include information in the Strawser auction catalog for new and potential members. A second suggestion was to have brochures with information exhibited at majolica dealers' booths. Extending the radius of regional meetings to 100 miles was discussed by Linda LaPointe, delegate-at-large. Members will be encouraged to bring friends.

Philip English, MIS president, informed members of the suggested change in the by-laws of the organization. Fran Rothschild, a member and judge in San Francisco, took part in the renewal of the by-laws. The renewal was passed unanimously: Terms of office are three years each; two consecutive terms may be six years. With a change to another place on the board, that officer may hold a total of a 12 year term.

The President announced the Annual Majolica Award for the best article on majolica. Articles must be submitted by November 1, 2003. First place winner will receive an honorarium of \$2,000 and be considered for publication by an international magazine. Second place winner will receive an honorarium of \$1,000. Articles submitted should be 3,000 words; illustrations and photographs are encouraged. Articles should be submitted to the Majolica International Society, c/o Philip English, President, 7350 Brightside Road, Baltimore, MD 21212.

After LeRoy Davis, vice president and chairman of the annual meeting, led the discussion on the MIS 2003 meeting, doors were opened to Majolica Heaven.

Dealers included:

- Richard & Connie Aranosian, Newtown, PA;
- Carla Benhardt, St Louis, MO;
- Charles Carpenter, Charlie's Aunts Antiques, Rockmart, GA.;
- Jerry S. Hayes; Oklahoma City, OK;
- Linda Ketterling, Toledo, OH;
- Nancy Kramer, Sparrows, Inc. Kensington MD.;
- Linda Lawrence, Atlanta, GA;
- Madelena Antiques, Essex, United Kingdom;
- Wilma Murray, Philadelphia, PA;
- Randi Schwartz, Raven and Dove, Wilmette, IL;
- Charles Washburne, Chappaqua, NY;
- John C. Weld, Jr, Yarmouth Port, MA

A good time was had by all. See you in 2003.

Avisseau and the Spirit of the Renaissance

Tours, France

Musée des Beaux-Arts, October 19, 2002-January 13, 2003

Limoges, France

Musée National de Porcelaine Adrien-Dubouché, February 4-May 12, 2003

This exposition will be the largest ever devoted to the faïence of Tours, a type of ceramic pottery characterized by a tremendous variety of forms and shapes: bowls, grottos, pitchers, fountains, bottles, vases, sconces, tobacco jars, paperweights, and more. Its decorations in relief and vividly-hued glazes were liberally inspired by Bernard Palissy; the aquatic flora and fauna are strikingly realistic. The romanticism and naturalism of the era explain this passion for the great potter of the Renaissance, whose school of ceramic in Tours was the first to revive the myth of the 19th century.

The leaders of the faïence movement, Charles-Jean Avisseau and Joseph Landais, were extremely successful in their art, winning awards at the 1849 industry exposition in Paris as well as the World Fairs of 1851 (London) and 1855 (Paris). Their works were purchased by the Musée de Sèvres and the Victoria and Albert Museum of London, and their clientele stretched throughout Europe. Their legacy was carried on by their children and grandchildren (Edouard and Caroline Avisseau, Edouard-Léon Deschamp, Charles-Joseph and Alexandre Landais), as well as by imitators such as Brard, Chauvigné, Carré de Busserolle, Deniau, Tinier, and de Neuchez. The production of faïence became very eclectic and demonstrated the varied styles of the Middle Ages to the 18th century.

This exposition will bring together a selection of 150 pieces, gathered from public and private collections in France and elsewhere. Among the most important, aside from the exceptional collection of 200 pieces at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Tours, are museums from the Centre region of France: Orléans, Chartres, Bourges, Châteauroux, Angers, and le Mans. The ceramics of Tours can also be found in the large museums of France and Europe: the Louvre, the Petit Palais, the Musée d'Orsay, Sèvres, Ecouen, Arts et Métiers, Arts Décoratifs of Paris and Bordeaux, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the museums of Cologne, Stuttgart, Kassel, and Hamburg, and the Musée Ariana of Geneva, as well as in numerous private collections in France, England, Germany, and the United States.

The exposition and its catalog will study many previously unresearched and unpublished aspects of faïence, from copies of Palissy's works (the originals of which will be on display) to analyses of clay and glazes,

performed by France's National Center of Scientific Research and the Center of Research and Restoration of the Museums of France. Researchers from these laboratories, as well as a professor from the Ecole Nationale des Arts Appliqués and the Institut de Formation des Restaurateurs d'Oeuvres d'Art will publish the results of their studies in the catalogue and in specialized magazines.

These studies will allow us to confirm that the ceramics of Tours are, as all the specialists of its era asserted, at the origin of a true renaissance of this type of art in the 19th century, opening the way to the schools of Limoges, Angoulême, and Paris, and even to a type of English ceramic and to the school of Portugal. Indeed, Art Nouveau would draw its roots from faïence.

A number of events will take place in Tours around the exposition at the Musée des Beaux-Arts. The Musée d'Histoire Naturelle will present an exhibit of preserved animals of the Loire Valley, and the works of two modern-day neo-Palissyists will be on display at a site to be determined by the city. The Municipal Archives will present public and private documents pertaining to the homes and workshops of Tours' potters and their most prestigious sponsors.

The exposition at the Musée des Beaux-Arts will be composed of six sections:

- Bernard Palissy, the faïence of Saint-Porchaire, and the potters of Tours
- Rivers, marshes, and rocks
- Fishing baskets
- To the table!
 - Fishermen's tables
 - Tables of the land
 - Aristocratic tables
- Decorative and monumental pieces
- Techniques of the potters of Tours
- Restoration techniques

A virtual exposition will be organized by the DESS Multimedia Department of the Sorbonne and will be accessible through the official website of the city of Tours. A video of restoration operations carried out on the pieces will be integrated into the virtual exposition as well. Finally, a film featuring the pieces displayed, *Microcosme*, will be shown to explain and provide a smooth entrée into the subject and technique. There will also be a shop offering ceramics.

Marshall Katz has informed your editor that the Tours Fine Arts Museum has graciously permitted him to invite as his guests, individuals who would like to attend the Vernissage, a special dinner at the museum on opening night. The dinner will begin at 6PM on Friday October 18th 2002. Any members planning to go to the exposition and who would like to attend the vernissage please contact Moe Wizenberg as soon as possible.

WHY PALISSY WARE?

by Geoffrey Luff
Maker of Palissy Ware ceramics.

Life has a way of dealing you wild cards now and then. My wild card was dealt to me one sunny morning in Montsoreau on the banks of the Loire where every second Sunday of the month there is a lively 'brocante' or antique market. It came in the shape of a circular metal dish 42 cm in diameter profusely sculpted with allegorical figures. I liked it, bought it and took it home. I had almost forgotten it when some days later watching television I saw Steffy Graff winning Wimbledon. She was clutching her trophy above her head and at that moment I shouted out , ' hey, that's my plate'. My wife thought that I had gone mad. That same evening I recorded Steffy and her trophy and did some image freezes on the screen and sure enough it had the same figures on the dish with the same central character.



I had a friend who worked at the BBC at the time so I rang him up and asked him if he knew anything about the Wimbledon Ladies' Singles Trophy. He didn't but the next day I got a fax from the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum. It told me that the parcel gilt salver had been made by Messrs Elkinton and Co. Ltd of Birmingham in 1864 and was an electrotype copy of a pewter dish made in the 16th century by Casper Enderlein who in turn had copied it off a pewter original by Francois Briot who probably made it in 1585-1590 and there was an original pewter plate in the Louvre in Paris.

So off I went to the Louvre to see my plate. After a bit of meandering around I finally found it, not surrounded by other pewter plates but next to a multicoloured ceramic copy of it, made so the label read, by Bernard Palissy or one of his

followers. Well I had heard of Mr Palissy, if you live in France there are many streets named after him and I had a vague recollection from my schooldays in France about him burning his furniture to keep his kiln going; there was even, I remembered, in one classroom a picture of him doing just that.

Now looking around in that room in the Louvre I started looking at what else he was supposed to have made, and there, I saw some very weird oval plates covered in all sorts of things like snakes, lizards, frogs, etc. all apparently swimming around in water and vegetation. The detail was fantastic; you could see every vein on a leaf and every scale on a fish or snake and despite it being four and a half centuries old I could almost imagine all those animals jumping or swimming out of that plate. It was obvious that to get that sort of detail these things had been moulded.

I got back home and decided that I would have a go at making a mould of my plate which I had discovered by now was known as the Temperentia plate because it had a seated figure of Temperance in the middle. She was in turn surrounded by four oval cartouches of symbolic figures depicting the four elements and they were in turn surrounded by eight cartouches containing symbolic figures of Minerva and the seven Liberal Arts that at the time were considered to be Geometry, Astrology, Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Music and Arithmetic. Between the cartouches were panels of strapwork with grotesque masks, foliage, fruit, birds, and reptiles. So all in all quite a busy little plate.

Up to that day I had spent 20 odd years restoring antique furniture and had used silicon and resins to restore bits of broken moulding on old frames. I tried them but it was not a success. So I thought if Bernard Palissy could get such amazing results with plaster I should be able to achieve something, especially as I suspected the plasters available to me today were of a better quality than those available to him. Eventually after much trial and error I got a good heavy plaster mould of my Temperance plate (which by the way was a silvered pressed copper 19th century copy).

My wife had done some pottery back in London and when we moved to France we took her kiln with us but it had sat dormant in the barn for the previous 15 years and it was too small to fire my eventual plate. Before investing in a new kiln I would have to experiment a bit, so I got some clays and pushed pieces of clay into my mould, let them dry and then fired them. Not bad I thought, so I bought some glazes. They turned out to be more of a problem but after much mixing and testing I finally came up with small samples resembling

Palissy Ware. This all took about two years and was done in spare time between the furniture restoration. I still did not have a finished piece but the results of small tests convinced me that I now had to invest in a new kiln. The kiln I chose was a simple electric top loader. I jumped in the car one day, drove to London and two days later it was installed. A week later I had my first finished Palissy Ware copy of a Francois Briot Temperance dish. Over the next two or three months I produced a few more varying the colours a bit as I had seen other copies in different shades in various museums.

Of the five I have seen four are 16th -17th century and probably from the same mould and workshop. Who made them? No- one really knows. It was not Bernard Palissy as he was dead by the time Briot made his plate. They are now attributed to his workshop or his followers. The four are in the Wallace collection, the Louvre, the Metropolitan and the Victoria and Albert . The fifth is also in the Victoria and Albert but that is a 19th century copy and signed Pull. No doubt there are many more. A Pull copy was selling at Majolica Heaven a year ago. I noticed it on the web site.

I could not carry on making the same dish 'ad infinitum'; I had sold two and that just about saturated the market. So my mind now turned to 'Rustiques Figulines'; those wonderful oval dishes covered in reptiles and fish. This was a new challenge and by now ceramics was taking up more than half my time and the furniture was being neglected - so the ceramics I was going to produce had to be more varied to be more commercial. The first step was to get moulds of these creatures. Easier said than done. The vegetation and shells were not a problem, but fine specimens had to be found, so there was a lot of crawling around on hands and knees.

My first mould was of a frog and that mould is still producing frogs today; it must have made over four hundred. As you can imagine getting hold of a frog in France is relatively easy but some of the other creatures were a bit more difficult. I have to thank the cat for catching the lizard but in doing so the lizard ejected its tail so now on many of my pieces you will see a little leaf covering the joint. In fact putting little bits of leaf over lizards' tails is quite a common feature on both 16th and 19th century Palissy Ware. The fish were easy; there are plenty of keen fishermen who like a challenge. The hardest to get was the viper, not that they are particularly rare but their habitat makes them hard to see and they can be dangerous - not to mention protected. In the end I had to rely on road kills and in fact that is where most of my creatures come from. I can spot a dead snake on the roadside a mile away; screaming to a halt on a busy road is one of my specialities. I even

remember bringing back a dead snake in my sock whilst out cycling as I had nothing to carry it in. Palissy of course could not rely on road kills; he must have gone out to capture his creatures himself or had people who collected them for him. Interestingly enough, you can still see to this day on plates that are over 400 years old, that mark on the snake made by the stick used to dispatch it.

Now that I had my moulds, over 500 of them, including all sorts of leaves and flowers, reptiles and amphibians, snails and insects, fish and crabs and lobsters etc. I could get on and make my 'Rustiques Figulines'. Each plate is a different composition, the possibilities are endless. Living next to Tours my work is inevitably influenced by the 19th century Palissy Ware Tours School especially the Avisseau and Landais families. I mainly make large oval plates with the occasional grotto. My production is limited to 40 to 50 pieces a year; they are intricate and take a long time to make, added to which one occasionally breaks in the kiln. Some of my very early pieces are unsigned but since 1994 I have signed my pieces with my initials GL in a signed monogram and each year I add a little distinctive sign to my monogram so that one can tell which year the piece was made.

I am currently working on pieces for an exhibition at the end of the year to be held in Tours with Christine Viennet the only other person I know who makes Palissy Ware. At the same time the Musée Des Beaux Arts in Tours is holding a very exciting exhibition of Tours School Palissy Ware. A must for all enthusiasts.

Since that wild card was dealt it's been ten years and of course the furniture restoration has stopped and Bernard Palissy has taken over.



UNUSUAL HUGO LONITZ PIECE

Thomas J. Camp

Hugo Lonitz, of Saxony, is considered a minor potter but many collectors believe his modelling, glazes and naturalistic pieces are often of the very high quality seen in Minton and George Jones. Prices for his items have escalated in the past few years.

Lonitz had his own large exhibition in Australia, where he sold all his show samples and took many orders, so a number of his pieces wound up "Down Under". I have been fortunate enough to purchase a number of Lonitz pieces found in Australia and currently have 19 in my collection. I recently received a Lonitz centerpiece, pictured here, which is representative of his work in the middle period of the majolica era. More than any other potter of whom I am aware, Lonitz was prolific in the use of raspberry, yellow and purple glazes, often mixed in with a special color of light blue. He also used a lot of figures of animals and putti, mermaids and griffons, flowers and ribbons, in a sort of combination Palissy/Minton style.

The unusual feature about the item just received is the bottom of the piece. As the picture shows, it is ornately designed and highly glazed and, except for the white on the bottom of the four feet makes a great presentation. The small oval in the blue on the upper right quadrant is the Lonitz mark, two fish inside an oval.

I have not seen another Majolica piece so finely finished on the bottom. Have you?



Majolica On Television Again

Member and Majolica Heaven dealer Jerry S. Hayes has done it again. Almost a year ago he was on the Martha Stewart TV Show educating Martha and the public about Majolica. Now he has an upcoming appearance on HGTV in the program "At the Auction with Leslie Hindman" airing twice on the evening of Friday, July 12th, at 8pm EDT, 7pm CDT, and again at 11pm EDT, 10pm CDT. Jerry just created a web site and you can check his show schedule and contact him at www.jerryshayes.com/ <<http://www.jerryshayes.com/>> . HGTV also has a wonderful informative web site that refers people eager to learn more about majolica to our Majolica International Society web site.