

Majolica

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

By Marilyn G. Karmason



George Jones & Sons garden seat, ca. 1875, 19" high.

In the first month of the Millennium year 2000, the Brits from London landed on the island of Manhattan with a fantastic display of Victorian majolica. The invasion took place at the National Academy of Design, housed in a 1902 Fifth Avenue building, itself in the best of French Renaissance Revival style. Rita and Ian Smythe, of Britannia, and Nicolaus Boston of the eponymous-named antiques shop, assembled an array of brilliantly glazed and dramatically sculpted majolica amidst curved walls and high ceilings.

The majolica shared the exhibition with Chinese Export partridge tureens, 18th-century Staffordshire figurals, plates and teapots, Renaissance chargers majestic and tin-glazed, mottled Whieldon plates, pale blue and white Wedgwood table ornaments and potpourri urns, Meissen birds, a Bernard Palissy 16th-century Fecundity platter replicated in Delft, and Aesthetic Movement Japanese pieces. All these were precursors of the humorous, whimsical, naturalistic 19th-century majolica.

Early Development

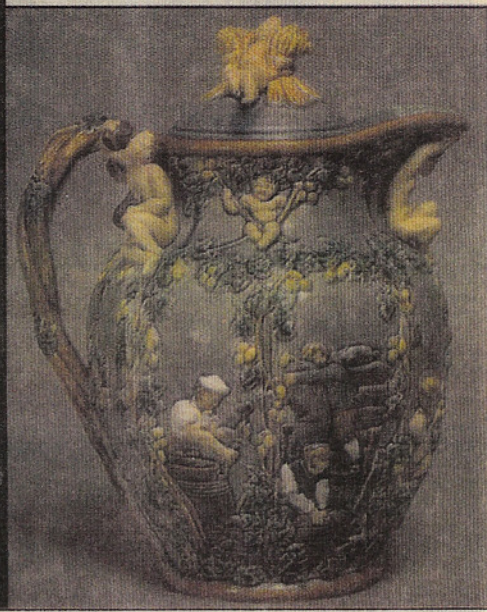
In the 13th century, tin-glazed Hispano-Moresque pottery, in such shapes as albarelli and platters, were transported from Spain to Italy. Its name, *maiolica*, was derived from the Spanish shipping port of Majorca. In Italy, colorful tin glazes were applied over soft-earthenware shapes such as platters and

pitchers. In the 17th century, this new pottery found its way to further development in England and Stoke-on-Trent. Important in the 18th-century development of ceramics at Stoke-on-Trent were John Astbury, Thomas Whieldon and his young partner, Josiah Wedgwood, Ralph Wood, and Thomas Minton. With Thomas Minton's death in 1836, his son, Herbert, became president of Minton & Co., thereby leading to the production of Victorian majolica.

Minton & Co.

In 1851, Herbert Minton and his French ceramic chemist, Leon Arnoux, presented "majolica" to the world of ceramics. It was well-received at the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London.

The excitement generated by the richly colored majolica inspired Minton artists to develop art revival styles parallel to those of the Renaissance, Palissy design, Gothic revival and medieval styles, naturalism (by far the most prolific), Oriental and Islamic



Minton & Co., clockwise from top left: Game pie dish (#1990), 1877, 18" long, courtesy Jeremy Cooper Ltd., London. Four-tiered oyster stand (#636), ca. 1856, 10" high. Hop jug, 10-1/2" high, 1855, Henry J. Townsend, courtesy Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Covered lobster dish (#1523), 1870, 14" wide. Strawberry server with spoons (#1330), 1855, 7-1/2" high.

styles, and figural pieces, both human and mythological. Minton's lead and tin glazes were impermeable to damp English weather: many pieces, in the shapes of cache pots, urns, fountains, umbrella stands and large birds and animals, were made for the garden or conservatory. The Victorian dinner table highlighted the growing Victorian interest in culinary variety: oyster, crab and lobster plates and fish platters were made in great numbers. There were game dishes illustrating the contents of the game dish, humorous and bizarre tea pots made for conversation at tea parties, cheese bells with placid cows as finials, strawberry serving dishes and spoons used at strawberry-time and pitchers of every size and every naturalistic design poured water, milk, and cream.

Different marks of Minton & Co. could include the name of the factory, the British registry mark and a lozenge-shaped symbol that, when deciphered, would reveal the date of registration of a design or shape, including the year and the date of design. A date code would reveal the exact date of manufacture of an individual piece, whereas earlier pieces of the same design would have an earlier date code. The ornamental shape number allows the collector to verify a piece in the factory's design book. Finally, in the case of major majolica manufacturers, there may be the artist's mark of his name or his monogram. Examples of these are seen on Minton majolica pieces, with names such as Hugh Protat, Paul Comolera and John Henk, all major artists at Minton. Unattributed English majolica was decorated with many patterns similar to marked pieces. Popular patterns were pond lilies, storks, corn, pineapple, leaves, blackberries, roses, fish and the ubiquitous shell-and-seaweed.

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons were some 10 years behind Minton & Co. in the production of majolica. Wedgwood glaze and modeling was more dense and formal than that of Minton, but there were many pieces that displayed the naturalism and humor of Minton. Shapes were similar to those of Minton: cache pots, pitchers, candlesticks, cheese bells, umbrella stands, sardine boxes, plates in naturalistic patterns, bread trays, and infinitum. By 1878, with the majolica market crowded with bright majolica glazes, Wedgwood increased its popularity for some years by introducing Argenta ware, pieces with white backgrounds surrounding familiar Wedgwood patterns. Shell or Ocean patterns were glazed in argenta or, conversely, with turquoise or cobalt backgrounds. Fish platters and plates were in this group. Foremost among Wedgwood majolica were 26" fish platters and matching plates in argenta or turquoise, bowls decorated with lobsters, again with matching plates, and oyster plates with decorations of shells, ocean waves, or dolphins, all representing the English enjoyment of sea food. One of the most whimsical pieces was the "Punch and Toby" bowl, with four representations of four clown-like heads of Punch and four supporting figures of Punch's dog, Toby. Most frequently seen in shops and antiques shows are green salad plates with raised designs of different leaves. In thrifty fashion, examples of Wedgwood wine and water ewers first designed for black basalt forms were later reborn as majolica examples.

Wedgwood markings included marks such as Wedgwood incised, the British registry mark, the Wedgwood date code letters and

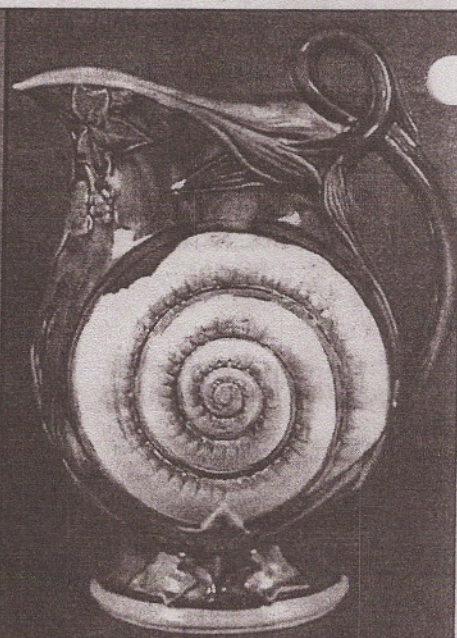
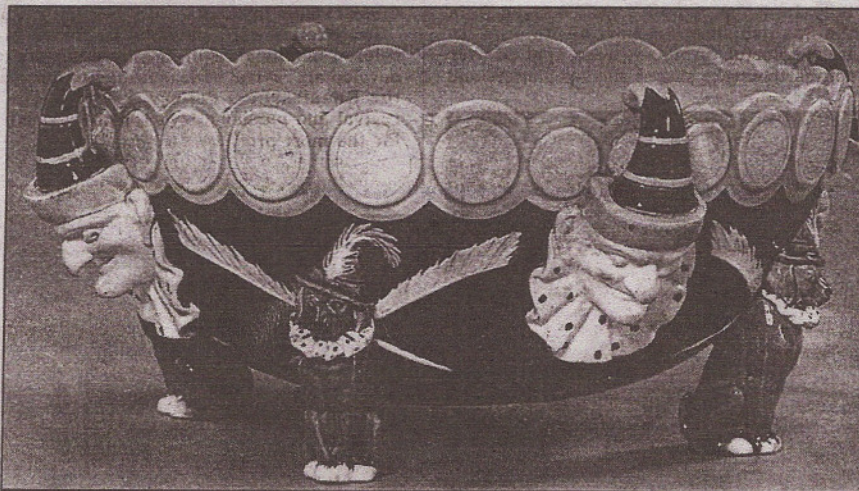
the potter's mark. An impressed "M" signified majolica produced between 1873 and about 1888. An impressed "K" identified the dates from 1888 to about 1920. Some pieces were impressed with the name of the artist.

George Jones, Joseph Holdcroft and Others

Two of Minton & Co.'s disciples next turned to their own production of majolica. George Jones opened his factory behind the Minton kingdom. George Jones' pieces were elegant and humorous, in marvelous and glowing shades of glaze. Strawberry servers with matching spoons for berries, sugar and cream came on to tea tables. Cheese bells with cow finials, cupids and putti riding dolphins, huge cache pots and garden seats in matching pond lily patterns and tall pedestals and cache pots in calla lily pattern formed interior "gardens." Like Minton and Wedgwood, almost all pieces of George Jones majolica were marked with the name of the maker and identification of date of production. All patterns thus marked were not to be copied for three years, but many were.

The other Minton disciple was Joseph Holdcroft, a man given to original design but also prone to copying earlier shapes. Minton storks and herons inspired by the Meissen artist Johann Joachim Kändler were reproduced with Holdcroft marks, but smaller and with less elegance than their predecessors. Holdcroft pieces were frequently not marked, but could possibly be identified by a familiar glaze of green or gray on the undersurface.

Many prestigious makers of porcelain, such as Copeland and Worcester, created ele-



Top left: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Punch and Toby bowl, ca. 1878, 11-3/4" in diameter, courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

Left: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons fish platter (# 3954), 21" long, ca. 1880.

Above: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons shell jug, ca. 1878, 8-1/2" high.

gant majolica as well. Less well-known pottery factories such as T. Forester & Sons, S. Fielding and Co., T.C. Brown-Westhead, Moore and Co. produced majolica in styles similar to the major manufacturers. Majolica produced by still less known companies such as John Adams & Co. and Wm. Brownfield & Sons might not have been marked, but identifications were made by named photographs and articles in the 19th-century *Pottery Gazette*. Totally unmarked pieces were made in shapes similar to familiar pieces; they are valued for their colorful glazes and their whimsical designs.

Griffen, Smith and Hill

English majolica began to wane in popularity in about the mid-1870s. At the American Centennial in Philadelphia in 1876, American potters recognized the potential importance of majolica, bringing brightly colored patterns to replace the white or blue and white patterns of dinnerware. It was with the manufacture by Griffen, Smith and Hill that American majolica, with its Shell and Seaweed dinner service, came into great prominence. Although American majolica had been produced by migrant English potters since the early 1850s (Edwin Bennett in Baltimore, Md., with his brother William, for example),



George Jones & Sons. Pieces in the Calla Lily pattern, ca. 1873: garden seat (#5220), 19" high; cachepots, 10" and 12" high; cheese bell (#5229), 11-1/4" high; pitcher, 7" high, courtesy Britannia, London.



Griffen, Smith and Hill. Tableware in the Cauliflower pattern, ca. 1880: teapot, 5-3/4"; dinner plates, 9" in diameter.



Griffen, Smith and Hill baseball and soccer pitchers, 8-3/4" high.

American majolica blossomed in 1879 when Griffen, Smith and Hill produced the outstanding, award-winning Shell and Seaweed. In the beginning, Shell and Seaweed resembled a Wedgwood pattern and was glazed in an argenta background in Wedgwood style (it was unsuccessful). Thereafter, the well-known pieces were glazed nacreous shell-pink. The dinner service consisted of service for 12 and coffee and tea services, ice-cream services, compotes, butter servers and butter pats, salt and peppers, open salts, toothpick holders, humidors and even spittoons. Shell and Seaweed established the GSH fortune. Other Wedgwood look-alikes were the GSH strawberry/ sugar/ cream serving dish and the GSH baseball and soccer cider jugs, which were derived from the Wedgwood athletic jugs with cricket and soccer players. The GSH sardine dish resembled the George Jones piece. There were various Aesthetic Movement sunflower syrup jugs, swan-finaled cheese bells, sardine dishes and paperweights. Equally English-inspired were pitchers decorated with wild roses, plates with raspberries and tea services with birds. A pansy-designed butter pat was hard to distinguish from that of Copeland. The GSH oyster plate is thought to be the only American version of an oyster plate and has been bid up to \$6,000.

Although the GSH factory in Phoenixville, Pa., was 115 miles from the Atlantic shore, the firm produced not only shell-and-seaweed pieces, but also compotes with stands modeled as entwined or separate dolphins. Agricultural symbols—vegetable and fruit designs, especially cauliflower, corn, pineapple, strawberry and grapevines—also prevailed. Other full dinner services, but without the large serving dishes, were in the Oriental pattern, Bamboo. Other patterns included Rustic and Cauliflower. Side dishes in the begonia leaf shape, compotes with daisies, cake platters with maple leaves, pitchers with butterfly spouts or set with hawthorn motifs in the asymmetric Oriental style, and the "Conventional" pattern on various shapes where the name "Conventional" symbolized the use of the stylized flower motif ... all these and more were products of the GSH factory. The first mark of the factory was the monogram "GSH" impressed in old English letters. The next mark was the monogram within two concentric circles, with the words "Etruscan Majolica" between the circles. A rare example is simply "Etruscan." Incised letters indicated specific shapes of the pieces. Despite the creativity, the firm was decimated by withdrawal of major leaders and by the arch-enemy of a pottery, fire. It closed in 1893.

Other American Potteries

At the Philadelphia Centennial, the dramatic exhibition of Minton majolica stimulated interest in potteries other than GSH. James Carr of New York and Trenton produced pieces that were similar to shell-and-seaweed patterns of Wedgwood. George Morley in East Liverpool, Ohio, made upright gurgling fish, owls and parrots that resembled English pitchers of the same designs. The Chesapeake pottery of Baltimore, Md., under the direction of David Haynes paid tribute to Wedgwood with its albino, rough-surfaced pieces featuring the Wedgwood Blackberry Bramble design. The most attractive pottery was made in Trenton by the Eureka Pottery, established in 1883. It spe-



Left: Minton & Co. heron (#1917), left, and stork (#1916) walking-stick stands, 1876 and 1875 respectively, 41" high, courtesy Sotheby's London.



Right: Joseph Holdcroft flower stands, stork (#8B), left, 26" high, and heron (#6), 33" high.

cialized in highly and colorfully glazed ice-cream services, owl-and-fan tea services, bird-and-fan serving pieces and plates following a Wedgwood design, and Stork pitchers with motifs reminiscent of Minton's and George Jones'. Hampshire Pottery in Keene, N.H., produced traditional table pieces in a rustic brown and green design. The New Milford Pottery Co. in New Milford, Conn., opened in 1887. The factory produced utilitarian pieces in restrained colors. In 1892, with the re-organization of the company called Wannopee, the factory brought forth a French faience pattern, Lettuce Leaf, in majolica. Its number of different shapes brought to mind those of GSH, and it added items such as olive dishes, asparagus plates, chop plates, square, rectangular or ovoid plates, tobacco jars and large candlesticks. The firm was successful until 1904, when it failed. It soon was reestablished in Trenton using original molds from New Milford. Portland, Maine, and Evansville, Ind., are known to have produced majolica, but no marked pieces are known at this time.

End of an Era

At the close of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1901, majolica production was at an end. Production, which had increased since 1875 but with fewer original examples and with less artistic enterprise, was finally overcome by the fatal effects of plumbism, or lead poisoning. Labor and management could not resolve workers' demands and factory doors were closed. The public looked for new designs in Art Nouveau and in the Art Pottery movement.

The Continent

In Europe, potteries in France and Germany continued to produce majolica. Most striking were the numerous designs of asparagus plates and serving pieces of the Alsace-Lorraine area, the 19th-century Palissy works of French ceramic artists of Paris and Tours, and the majolica of Choisy-le-Roi, Sarreguemines, Luneville and Saint Clement, and Onnaing among others. The Massier family in Vallauris in the south of France produced the link between traditional Victorian majolica and Art Nouveau pottery.

Villeroy and Boch of Germany, Wilhelm Schiller and Sons of Czechoslovakia, Mafra and Sons of Caldas de Rainha, Portugal, and Rorstrand of Sweden all contributed to the ceramic history of the latter half of the century. These factories are the subject of another article.

Reproductions

As the price of Victorian majolica increases and the presence of majolica on the market becomes more scarce, some collectors will turn to reproductions to increase their collections. Some reproductions have a charm of their own, but it is wise to distinguish "repros" from original pieces. Reproductions cost less than antique pieces, and the buyer must recognize the difference. In reproductions, the glaze can be less intense and less uniform over the piece. The weight of the body—and at times the temperature—is less. It is mandatory to check the mark on the undersurface. It can be fraudulent or non-existent. Some repros do have the appropriate mark of factories in Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, China or Italy. In some repros, the modeling of a piece can be an accurate copy of the original, but in many cases details are much less exact and the color of glazes is not as appropriate (ocean waves of brown, for example.) Some complex pieces are not reproduced with all the segments, such as a cache pot without the underplate. Majolica undersurfaces are almost always glazed, including the outer rim; with repros there may be no glaze there. Designs themselves are not as graceful. With continued viewing of pieces of majolica, the collector comes to distinguish between the original and the copy.

There are very valid reproductions, such as those by Minton & Co. and Mottehedah. The function of the Minton copy is to celebrate the Minton bicentennial. Each year since 1993, Minton has manufactured almost exact copies of its Victorian majolica tea pots. To date, these include the Monkey tea pot, the Chinese Actor tea pot, the Cat and Mouse tea pot, the Monkey and Cockerel tea pot and the Blowfish tea pot, with the Turtle tea pot slowly ambling toward eager collectors. Each tea pot undersurface is carefully marked with the year of production, the

number of teapots in each series, the specific number of the particular tea pot, and the label of the body as "Fine China" (not passing as majolica). The Mottehedah Co. has reproduced almost all forms of ceramics, including majolica, but has always labeled the undersurface appropriately. Mottehedah copies also have a function: it is said that in places such as the White House, "souvenirs" may disappear, so it is necessary to guard against the greater loss of the original piece.

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More Information

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Portuguese Palissy Ware by Marshall Katz

Majolica Figures by Helen Cunningham

Victorian Majolica by Leslie Bockol

The Collector's Encyclopedia of Majolica by Mariann Katz-Marks

Majolica, American and European Wares by Jeffrey B. Snyder & Leslie Bockol

Organization

The Majolica International Society, PO Box 103, 1275 First Ave., New York, NY 10021. (212) 969-0025, Fax (212) 744-1124, e-mail majsoc@erols.com. The next annual meeting is April 28-30 in Wilmington (Newark), Del.