

collecting

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Majolica Tea Sets

From 1850 to the late 19th century, English potteries produced a wealth of botanical-themed majolica, like this tea set (c. 1867) by Minton. Called Chrysanthemum Dejeuner after its mum-adorned creamer (not shown), it's one of only three known complete sets.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WENDELL T. WEBBER PRODUCED BY SHARON GRABER STYLED BY PAMELA DUNCAN SILVER
WRITTEN BY ANNE MARIE CLOUTIER

After Commodore Matthew Perry's 1854 treaty with Japan opened the country's culture to the West, **majolica tea-set designs** began sprouting bamboo trims, monkeys, and other Nipponesque nuances.

When the Great Exhibition of 1851 opened its doors in London, the splendid expanse of Prince Albert's new-fashioned Crystal Palace was flooded by a sea of bonnets and top hats covering the heads of a public eager to view its global bazaar of equally new-fashioned goods. And for matrons of England's emerging middle class, one of the chief attractions was Herbert Minton's richly glazed, elaborately molded ceramic ware called majolica. Just when the biological finds of naturalist-explorers like Charles Darwin were setting Victorian fancy afire, Minton was producing vividly painted tea sets burgeoning with all manner of lifelike flora and fauna. The public went wild, and soon Wedgwood, George Jones, and other potteries followed Minton's lead. The examples here—from collector and Majolica International Society President Gabrielle Ehrenthal—are some rare survivors of that early majolica madness. "The details are so amazing, you're always discovering something new," says Ehrenthal. Originally made for use, majolica is now deemed a decorative collectible on account of its rarity and value.

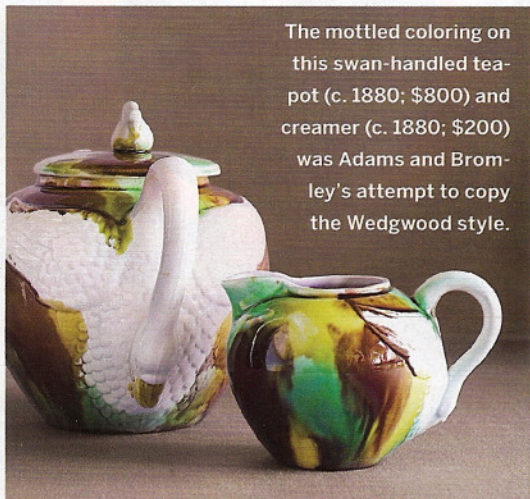


Geometric lines and a burst of cherry blossoms attest to the Asian influence on a teapot (c. 1870; \$3,000) by T.C. Brown, Westhead, Moore & Co.



whimsical

Like all majolica, this teapot, lid, cup, and saucer by ceramist George Jones were each cast in a single mold. If the c. 1870 tea set were complete, its value today would be \$18,000. The teapot alone is \$5,800.

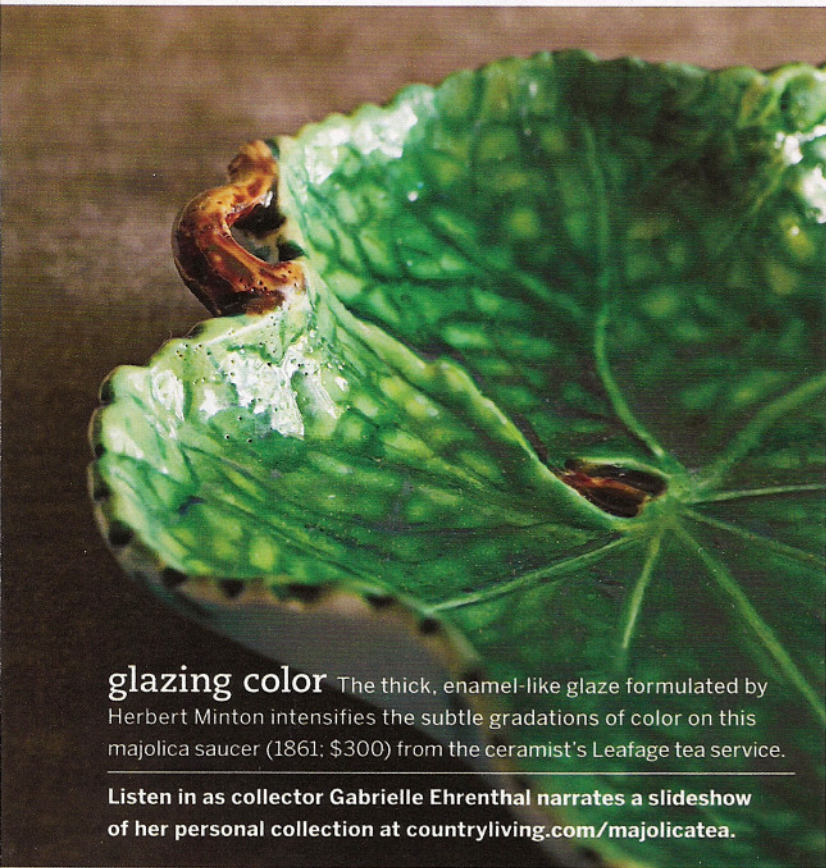


The mottled coloring on this swan-handled teapot (c. 1880; \$800) and creamer (c. 1880; \$200) was Adams and Bromley's attempt to copy the Wedgwood style.



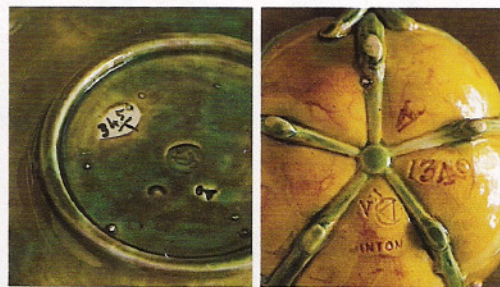
🌿 beauties in the details 🌿

How incredibly gifted they were, those designers of early majolica. Challenged by the Victorian passions for nature and novelty, Minton's artisans responded with such whimsical realisms as (above, left to center right): a lid's veined-bamboo finial, a wave-churned base for a fish-shaped pot, and a saucer of overlapped lily pads—all painted in the vibrant Minton palette. On a cobalt George Jones teapot (above, far right), the colorist's sensitivity breathes life into a cleverly conceived branch spout and leaves.



glazing color The thick, enamel-like glaze formulated by Herbert Minton intensifies the subtle gradations of color on this majolica saucer (1861; \$300) from the ceramist's Leafage tea service.

Listen in as collector Gabrielle Ehrental narrates a slideshow of her personal collection at countryliving.com/majolicatea.



MARKS The bases of all George Jones's majolica (above left) have green-and-brown mottling, often with a circled GJ and the pattern number. Minton's examples (above right) feature the pattern number, pottery company's name, and date.

SOURCES To learn more, pick up a copy of *Majolica: A Complete History and Illustrated Survey*, by Marilyn G. Karmason (Abrams). From May 1 to 4 in Washington, D.C., the Majolica International Society's annual convention will feature home tours, lectures, and "Majolica Heaven"—where dealers will be on-site selling majolica; majolicasociety.com. Can't make it? Charles L. Washburne Antiques (majolica.net) and Cara Antiques (caraantiques.com) are reputable dealers in majolica. Prices for single tea-related examples can range from three to five figures.