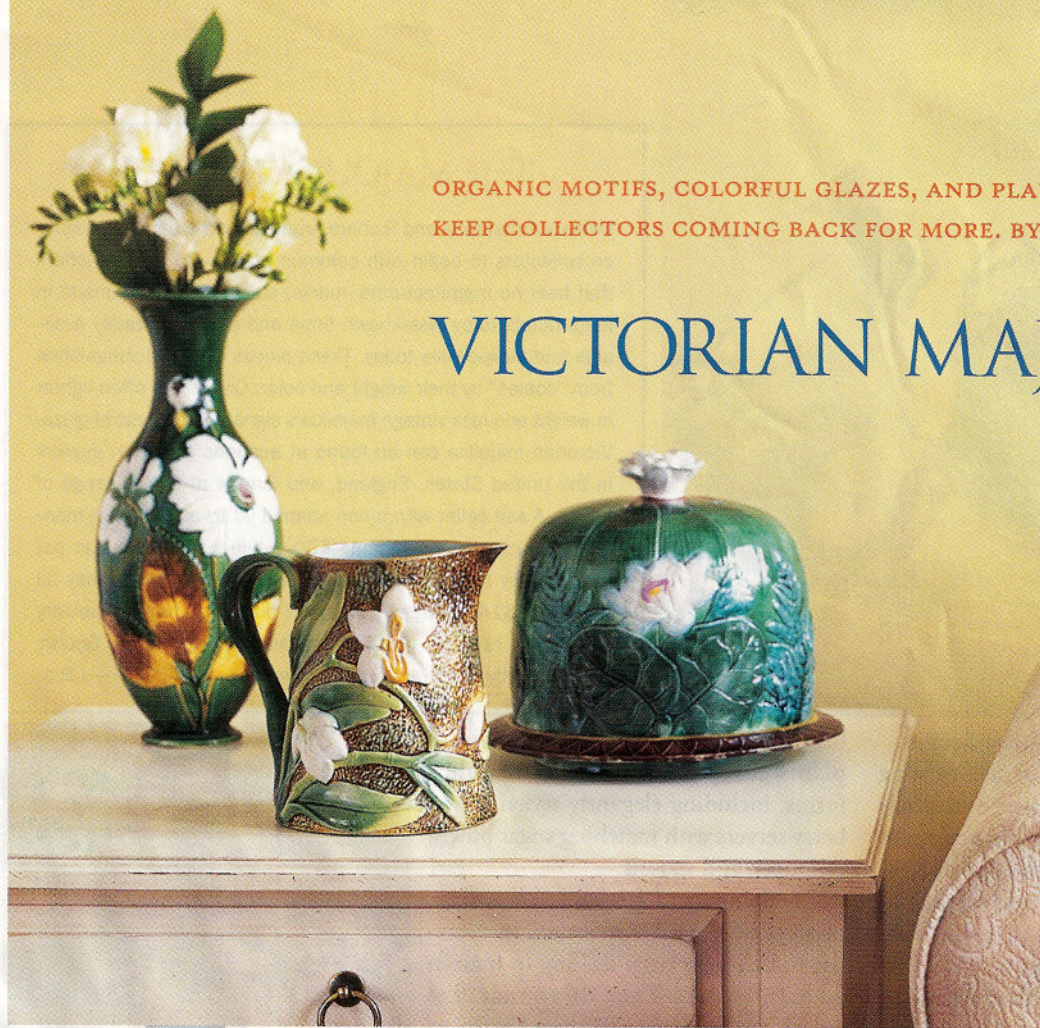


ORGANIC MOTIFS, COLORFUL GLAZES, AND PLAYFULNESS APLENTY
KEEP COLLECTORS COMING BACK FOR MORE. BY JEFFREY B. SNYDER

VICTORIAN MAJOLICA

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In 1851, English potter Herbert Minton introduced his firm's majolica wares to visitors at London's Crystal Palace Exhibition—and the public was instantly enchanted. "Majolica mania" ensued, and the low-fired earthenware, decorated with whimsical molded-relief figures and brilliantly colored glazes, was soon turned out in abundance. For the remainder of the 19th and into the 20th century, English, European, and American potters produced a dizzying variety of majolica tableware, serving pieces, vases, and jardinières.

Though an outgrowth of the *maiolica* of the Italian Renaissance, Victorian majolica vividly reflected the fascinations of its own times. The Industrial Revolution had proved to be a double-edged sword for the Victorians: While technological advances increased sophistication and wealth, those same advances left many Victorians longing for the simpler, cleaner agrarian lifestyle of pre-industrial times. This nostalgia sparked, in turn, a great interest in botany and gardening, a preoccupation echoed in the decorative motifs of majolica, which featured detailed images of flowers, foliage, trees, insects, fish, birds, and other wildlife.

Nineteenth-century art and social movements, which explored the wonders of the natural world, also influenced the period's taste for the organic. Beginning in the 1860s in England, adherents of the Aesthetic Movement celebrated the innate beauty of nature; the sunflower and peacock motifs, symbols of the movement, are frequent majolica decorations. At the same time, Japanese decorative motifs were entrancing English consumers, so English potters quickly learned to incorporate bamboo, pine branches, storks, and delicate flower

Above, left to right: A rare Wedgwood vase, a George Jones orchid pitcher, and a Joseph Holdcroft pond-lily cheese bell. **Right:** Collectors are attracted to majolica's jewel-toned lead glazes.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MCGONIGAL (TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF CONSTANCE AND RICHARD ARANOSIAN, CARA ANTIQUES, NEWTOWN, PA. (215-579-7971); WWW.CARAANTIQUES.COM), AND (BOTTOM RIGHT) PRIVATE COLLECTION. FURNITURE: ETHAN ALLEN. FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE THE SHOPPING GUIDE.

{ antiques }



THE MAJOLICA MARKET

Dealers Constance and Richard Aranosian advise novice majolica collectors to begin with common plates and small pitchers that bear no manufacturers' marks; such pieces were made in large numbers by less-known firms and are both readily available and inexpensive today. These pieces can be distinguished from "copies" by their weight and color: Copies are often lighter in weight and lack vintage majolica's signature richness of glaze. Victorian majolica can be found at auctions and from dealers in the United States, England, and Europe at a wide range of prices: A salt cellar with a hen-shaped lid by an unknown manufacturer can start at around \$50, while a lily-pad butter pat produced by the American firm Griffen, Smith and Co. may be valued at \$140. Large, well-made pieces by famous pottery companies, however, cost substantially more: An 1870s George Jones strawberry server is valued in excess of \$4,200. —J.B.S.


blossoms into their elaborate designs.

To create a link to nature, and to bring the world's natural beauty into their homes, Victorian city dwellers began to build greenhouses and indoor conservatories. A wide variety of opulent majolica garden accessories, ranging from pedestals and garden seats to jardinières and planters, was created to furnish the garden-oriented additions. Majolica was ideal for the purpose, for if the roses or narcissus refused to bloom, the brightly decorated ceramic pots could still cheer even the darkest Victorian room.

The greenhouse trend created a secondary craze: strawberries—homegrown, with any luck. Molded and

brightly glazed flowering strawberry plants covered all variety of majolica forms, including elegantly styled strawberry servers with matching sugar bowls, creamers, and spoons.

Constance and Richard Aranosian, owners of CARA Antiques, in Newtown, Pa., have been dealing in majolica for 14 years. They think that "the colors, the whimsy, the pure Victorian look of it" are what first draw collectors to majolica. "People love the natural forms, especially the pieces made by English potters George Jones and Herbert Minton," Constance says. "They love the flowers, the birds—and they love the bugs!"

Like the Victorians, Hilary Musser, an interior designer in Bryn Mawr, Pa., who collects majolica for herself and her clients, was originally drawn by the colors. Over time, though, she has come to love the quality workmanship displayed in the early wares of the English and French majolica potters. Of the several hundred pieces in Hilary's collection, many are embellished with motifs from nature, including cheese bells modeled with daisies and ears of wheat, a Herbert Minton umbrella stand decorated with storks, and tureens covered with creatures like lobsters, salmon, and doves. But Hilary does not limit her passions to one motif. "When you are a majolica collector," she says, "it's impossible not to like everything." 

*Jeffrey B. Snyder is the author of *Marvelous Majolica* and coauthor of *Majolica* (both published by Schiffer).*

Top left: A c. 1880s fish-eating-fish teapot and creamer by an unknown maker. **Above, right:** The brilliant blue glaze, fine detailing, and insects exemplify the work of Herbert Minton, the "father of English majolica," in this sweetmeat dish with bird of prey. **Left:** A shrimp finial tops Samuel Alcock and Co.'s butter dish.

