

(COLLECTIONS)



## Magical Majolica

Though daintily made, this classic pottery is known for its robust colors and hearty sense of humor

WRITER KRIS IMHERR PHOTOGRAPHER ELIAS MOHAMMED

### KIM SEMYAN APPRECIATES THE FUNCTIONAL ART INTRINSIC IN HER MAJOLICA.

As a passionate collector, she is satisfied if her pieces of the Victorian-era pottery, which first appeared about 1850, are beautiful and show well. "Everything that English ceramists credited with creating the genre made had a purpose. It was to be used on the table or garden...It had a reason, other than just being pretty," Semyan says.

While she loves some English examples of the lead- and/or tin-glazed ceramics, Semyan gravitates toward French and Italian expressions of the art. "I wanted to do English, but I never got into it. It wasn't as flashy as I wanted." She knows that her preference may put her at odds with some enthusiasts, because some collectors think the only true majolica is English. (Most of Semyan's pieces shown here are French.)

But in reality, according to Jody Wilkie, international specialist head of European ceramics at Christie's in New York, there is a great deal of majolica on the market that is actually French, and sales are doing well. As an example, Wilkie points to a Christie's sale last October that included a late 19th-century



**ABOVE:** This heron vase is by Delphin Massier (1836-1907), whose great-grandfather began the family ceramic business in Vallauris (now a suburb of Antibes) on the French Riviera, before the French Revolution. Delphin, as well as his brother, Clément (1845-1917), and their cousin, Jérôme, (1850-1916) became masters of French majolica.

**TOP:** An animal lover, Semyan is drawn to phantasmagorical representations like the griffins that serve as the handles of this jardinière, an ornamental pot for plants or flowers.



Stains inside this rare tile piece, which probably was created in France in the early 1800s, suggest it originally served as a downspout on a building exterior.



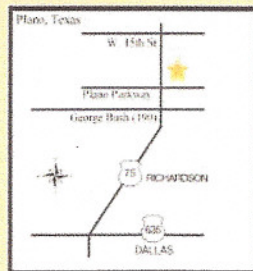
"That front piece, that creature's face, I love," says Kim Semyan of this pitcher. She also loves the entwined serpents, realized three-dimensionally as its handle, and the lovers, depicted in applied raised relief on the side. Because of the presence of the third figure, a cupid, Semyan isn't sure if the piece is French or Italian. Italians, she notes, frequently incorporated one putto or many putti—plump cherubs—into their decorative arts.



## Veranda Tea Garden

Tue.—Sun. 11:00—2:30PM Closed Mondays

Taking Reservations for Afternoon Tea NOW!



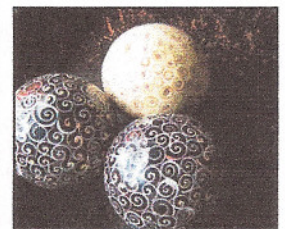
# Antique Land

P L A N O

*Antiques & Design*

800 North Central Expressway Plano, Texas 75074

## Inspired Treasures for the Home



## Big Mango Trading Co.

1130 N. Industrial Blvd. • Dallas, TX 75207

214-752-4755 • [www.bigmangotrading.com](http://www.bigmangotrading.com)

piece marked H. Boulanger et Cie, a cockatoo perched between two hollow stumps that served as a double-spill vase. Estimated to fetch between \$4,000 and \$6,000, the piece sold for \$8,400, including buyer's premium.

Collectors know that finding an item in perfect shape can be a triumph in itself because most pieces, regardless of creator or country of origin, were fashioned from soft, porous clay that remained fragile after two firings. As Semyan puts it, majolica "could not take a joke." However, the pieces frequently seem to tell one, often with a wink and a nod, such as the stork balancing on one leg rendered as a receptacle for canes and walking sticks.

Majolica colors tend to be brilliant. Emerald green, sparkling blue, blazing orange, and bright yellow abound, as do hot pink and deep turquoise, which are widely recognized as majolica's signature glazes.

## About that "I" and "J" Business

Ask about majolica, and you may be asked "Do you mean the 'I' or the 'J' kind?" or "Do you mean the Italian or the English?" Both derive their name from and trace their lineage to Majorca, Spain. But the "I" kind, spelled maiolica and pronounced "My-ALL-ih-kah," refers to masterfully painted pottery that was created in Renaissance Italy and peaked as an art form in the 1500s. The "J" kind, spelled majolica and pronounced "Muh-JALL-ih-kah," is credited to English ceramist Herbert Minton. Minton & Co. is said to have created the name by running ads that compared one line of the new ware's coloring to that of "old maiolica."

A good glaze is also all-important in order to allow the final firing to give the piece a finish of "translucent, richly colored, silky brilliance," according to Duane Matthes. Matthes helps his wife, Wanda, operate her antiques business, which specializes in Victorian majolica. Besides each serving as a vice president of the Majolica International Society, the couple's credentials include his creation and supervision of the society's Web site ([www.majolicasociety.com](http://www.majolicasociety.com)) and her editorship of its quarterly newsletter.

In addition to humor and whimsy, majolica also possess, charm, elegance, and great natural beauty. Although changing times and tastes halted majolica production by the 1920s, it resurrected as a hot collectible in the 1980s. Renewed popularity then triggered higher prices and an onslaught of copies, and majolica remains today, as the collectors' saying goes, "highly desirable." **D H D**

### RESOURCES:

**Antiquing Dallas with Pamela** (specializing, but not limited to, the design trade), 214-803-6853; [www.antiquingdallaswithpamela.com](http://www.antiquingdallaswithpamela.com)  
**Antiques from Trilogy** (in Snider Plaza Antique Shops), 214-373-0822

### OTHER SOURCES:

*Majolica: A Complete History and Illustrated Survey* by Marilyn B. Karmason and Joan B. Stacke (Harry N. Abrams, 2nd Revised Ed., 2002); Majolica International Society, [www.majolicasociety.com](http://www.majolicasociety.com)



This French grasshopper, bearing Jérôme Massier's mark, "Jérôme Massier fils," is often labeled a planter or vase, but you'd be hard-pressed to fit anything but a small piece of greenery in it, because the opening in the back is a mere three inches wide.



Kim Semyan's spouse, John, bought this wishing well, credited to French majolica master Jérôme Massier, for her as a birthday gift through a Dallas Design Center dealer.