

A bevy of begonia leaves (above) in showy shades make for a picture-perfect finish.

With colors and designs divined from the great outdoors, it's no wonder gardeners are spellbound.

Mad About

Majolica

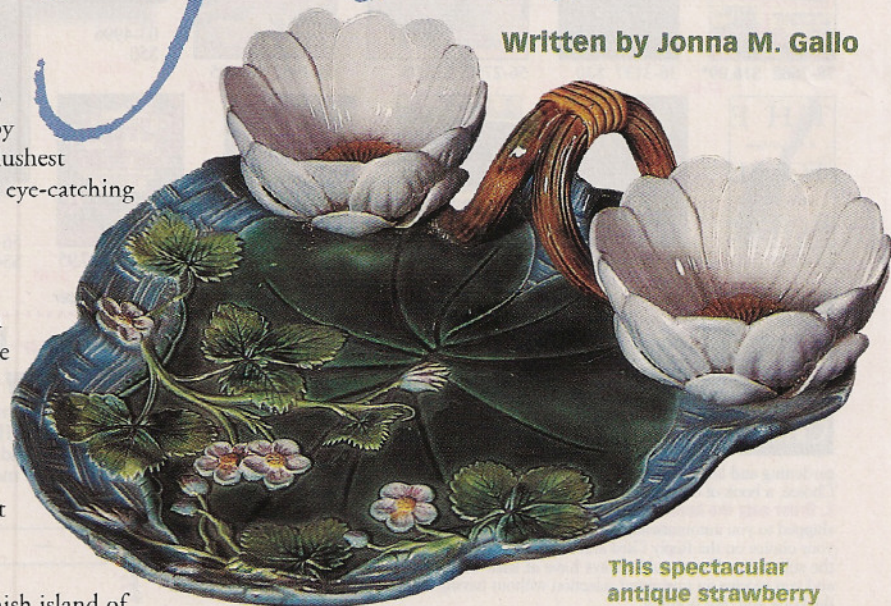
BOTANICAL MOTIFS ON PLATES HAVE been making glad the hearts of gardeners for centuries, but none with the Technicolor gusto of majolica. Decked out with details inspired by Mother Nature at her most glorious, with the lushest of leaves and the most fabulous of flowers, this eye-catching earthenware is a feast for the eyes.

The Start of It All

The majolica that collectors know and love is a vestige of the Victorian era. The period was one of celebration, and an eager public yearned for all things elaborately decorated. Thus, it was into welcoming arms that Herbert Minton of Minton & Company, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England, debuted his creations at London's Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851.

Although Minton's work was not entirely innovative—majolica harkens back to the Spanish island of Majorca in the 15th century—his designs were well received. Especially enthusiastic was England's middle class, seeking an attractive yet affordable alternative to everyday blue-and-white dishes, creamware or white ironstone. Buyers snapped up everything they could get their hands on, from

Written by **Jonna M. Gallo**



This spectacular antique strawberry server (above) is from the renowned **George Jones & Sons** company.

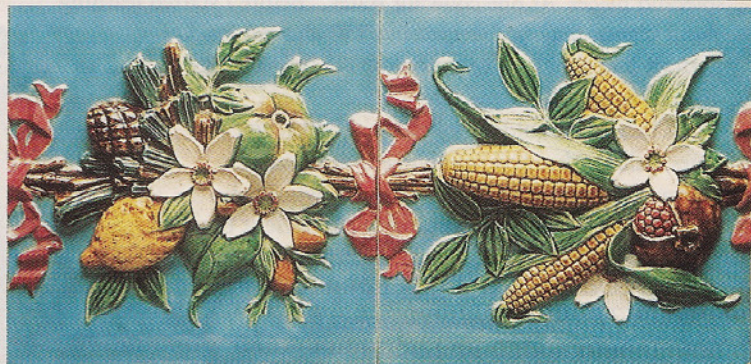
A footed bowl ringed with bold blooms (below) is a subtle statement on its own, but a grouping (right) of majolica maximizes the impact. Colorfully coexisting on shelves are platters, plates, pitchers and more; variations of green and a few pieces accented with asparagus are common threads that unite the display.



cheese bells to compotes, tureens to teapots. Production thrived throughout Queen Victoria's reign but essentially ceased by the early 1900's. Majolica had become too familiar, and overzealous manufacturers were turning out poorly painted pieces. Affection turned to Art Nouveau, and it wasn't until much later that interest would resurge.

The Real Thing

To be considered authentic majolica, a piece must have been manufactured in a certain way, explains Marilyn Karmason, who with Joan Stacke-Graham coauthored *Majolica: A Complete History and Illustrated Survey* (Harry N. Abrams). It must be soft, porous earthenware fired once to what's called the biscuit stage, then covered with an opaque background glaze of tin or lead enamel or a blend of both. Metallic-oxide glazes in bright hues are applied directly on the dried, unfired background glaze, often on distinctive designs in high or low relief. When the piece is fired again, the



A vivid blue background plays off a bounty of yellow and green to make a pair of Minton & Company tiles (above) especially appealing.

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This cheese bell (above) is attributed to Joseph Holdcroft, an artisan who was at Minton for 18 years before establishing his own company. The Calla Lily collectibles (below) are all from George Jones & Sons; Jones also once worked for Minton. A trio of leafy plates on the wall (left) anchors a tabletop grouping.

Flamboyant and fascinating, the majolica cherished by pottery collectors has a history as colorful and textured as the wares themselves.

translucent yet dynamically tinted glazes impart a lustrous brilliance that is the discerning characteristic of true period specimens.

These days, plum picks come dear. As with almost all antiques, price depends on maker, rarity and condition. For example, an English plate in mint condition can fetch anywhere from \$100 to several hundred dollars; notes Linda Ketterling, a majolica specialist and owner of Linda Ketterling Antiques in Toledo, Ohio. This veteran dealer has sold extremely unusual pieces for \$25,000 or more.

If you're not ready for such a financial commitment, there are plenty of marvelous majolica reproductions available; just check home catalogs, specialty retailers, even mass-market stores. And of course, with a keen eye and a little luck, there's always the possibility of picking up a prize for a song at a tag sale, flea market or country auction.

Color Collectors Happy

Nature motifs are part of what draws the green-thumbed to these splendid pieces. As one collector states, "Before I started learning about plants, majolica seemed like just another kind of pottery. But now I really appreciate the painstakingly done blooms and leaves."

The vibrant colors are key too. "Pinks, greens, blues, yellows, browns, you name it—they're just spectacular," enthuses Stacke-Graham, who is also president of the Majolica International Society, based in New York City. Some collectors become so enamored of a particular palette or design, they focus in that direction, Ketterling says; others select only certain objects, such as pitchers or plates. More often than not, people just buy what they love. "That's the best way to collect anything," says Karmason. "But especially this." ■



Manufactured by Villeroy & Boch c. 1855, a soup tureen (below) marries fancifully textured fronds with a pretty posy here and there.



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Though all the items on the preceding pages are antiques in private collections, there are many charming majolica-inspired options available. A stunning sampling, from

left, top: Leaf serving platter, William Wayne; cachepot, bamboo-handle teapot, both Gump's By Mail. First shelf: Leaf plate, William Wayne; vegetable pitcher, Lillian Vernon; frog

barrel, Gump's By Mail. Second shelf: Leaf plates and mugs, Lillian Vernon. Third shelf: Teapot, Tiffany & Co.; monkey plate, Abigail's; Artichoke condiment server, William Wayne.

Fourth shelf: Yellow salad and dessert plates with various fruit motifs, Gump's By Mail. Bottom: Two-piece asparagus cradle, artichoke tulipière, both Abigail's. See Buyer's Guide, page 99.