

VINTAGE • ANTIQUES • HERITAGE • INTERIORS • COLLECTIONS

WIN  
DINNER FOR  
FOUR WORTH  
£3,000

# HOMES & ANTIQUES

## *Autumn* GLORY

- Explore a dreamy woodland hideaway
- Cosy, rustic looks for your home

**DEALER FOR A DAY**  
COULD YOU CUT IT?

### MAJOLICA

The pottery that's  
this season's hottest  
must-have!

## VINTAGE TREASURES

IN 36 PAGES OF INSPIRATIONAL REAL HOMES



ISSUE 2.49 \$9.25 USA £3.99 UK

IMMEDIATE MEDIA





# The magic of MAJOLICA

There's much more to majolica than crazy glazing and extravagant moulding, says **Ellie Tennant** as she finds herself entranced by the most eccentric of ceramics

STYLING **JENNIFER HASLAM** PHOTOGRAPHS **NASSIMA ROTHACKER**



'An unmarked green cabbage leaf plate was what started it off,' enthuses Carol Harkess, a member of the Majolica International Society and proud owner of some 350 pieces. 'I bought the plate 15 years ago. My husband disliked it then, and still dislikes it now.'

There's nothing as divisive as majolica. 'It's like Marmite,' explains Nic Saintey, director of Bearness Hampton and Littlewood Auction Rooms, Devon. 'You either love it or hate it. Because it's bold and bright it can be considered unsubtle, even kitsch, but when I see a quirky piece, I can't help but like it.'

Those who do like it, love it. The Majolica International Society, founded in 1989 with just 45 members, now has more than 1,000 across the globe and has become a thriving network of passionate collectors, dealers and historians. From spotting pottery in films and on TV ('In one episode of *Downton Abbey*, Daisy holds a majolica sardine dish,' gushes one enthusiast), to sharing recent discoveries and organising lectures, members obsess over what they affectionately call 'the most brilliantly glazed, exuberantly decorated and whimsical ceramic'.

It was revivalist Léon Arnoux, art director at Minton and Co in the mid-19th century, who coined the term 'majolica'. Fascinated by 16th-century tin- and lead-glazed painted Italian maiolica, he developed a range of lookalike, brightly glazed pieces. But when he launched them at The Great Exhibition in 1851, he did so under the name of Palissy Ware – presumably to mirror a contemporary French trend for the rediscovered glazing and enamelling processes of 16th-century French potter Bernard Palissy.

It was the name 'majolica' that caught on, however. Other potteries such as George Jones and Wedgwood quickly began ►

**ABOVE** Antiques, from left: George Jones squirrel nut dish, c1869, £555; Minton squirrel nut dish, c1869, £520, both Madelena Antiques. Linen used as napkins in Chinese yellow, £35 per m, Volga Linen. Nut crackers, find similar at Tobias and the Angel. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Antiques, from left, Elias parrot toothpick holder, c1890, £335; Crocodile-like reptile figure, c1890, £405; Minton cockatoo, c1910, £580, all Madelena Antiques. Props: 'Maderial' digitally printed wallpaper in cobalt, £185 per 12m roll, Designers Guild. Carafe vase, £3.75; small display dome, £36, both Rockett St George. 'One world' large glass dome, £65, Selfridges. Zinc-topped console table, £550, Petersham Nurseries. All plants and foliage provided by Achillea Flowers. Succulents wrapped in linen by Volga Linen





**ABOVE** Forester chestnut tête-à-tête tea set, £1,075, c1880, Madelena Antiques. 'La Favorite' MLW2215-05 wallpaper, £49 per 10m roll, Lorca at Osborne & Little

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR....

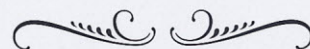
'Rather unhelpfully, many of the Victorian majolica makers left their wares unmarked,' points out David Tulk, so don't automatically dismiss unmarked pieces as modern reproductions. George Jones's mark was usually an impressed or printed 'GJ' monogram with a crescent bearing '& SONS' addition from 1873, and the word 'ENGLAND' from 1891. 'However, as marking was haphazard and inconsistent, the absence of an 'ENGLAND' mark does not necessarily mean pre-1891,' notes David.

A diamond-shaped British Pattern Registration mark can often be found on majolica by

Minton and Wedgwood, with letters and numbers in the four corners that specify the exact date of registration, providing a handy guide to the date of manufacture.

The Majolica International Society advises buyers to look out for a three- or four-digit black number on Minton, George Jones, and Wedgwood pieces, which corresponds to the number of the piece in the pattern books. Many of the great ceramic artists signed their work, such as Paul Comolera on the Minton peacock, so these pieces are easy to identify and often very high in value.

*'George Jones was a self-made man, whose work perfectly captured the birds, plants and ferns of the English garden'*



manufacturing their own versions and by the 1880s, the term 'majolica' was commonly applied to such wares, whether made by Minton or not. The manufacturing process used to create these ornate earthenware pieces was quick and inexpensive: 'The biscuit was coated with white opaque glaze, fired, then coated with coloured glazes and fired again,' explains David Tulk, founder of online majolica emporium Madelena, whose stock ranges from an £80 vase adorned with twisting squid tentacles to a £2,535 George Jones fish server complete with an enormous salmon. 'Minton's team revolutionised the process by developing nine new glazes in vibrant colours that could all be applied at the same time and didn't run when fired. Arnoux invented a new kiln, too, with precise temperature control.'

## SURREAL SCENES

David concedes that the designs can be 'a bit bonkers'. In the weird world of majolica, a cheese dome is a small castle turret, gaping frogs' mouths form the top of milk jugs; squirrels chase walnuts around nut bowls and all manner of three-dimensional flora and fauna creep, dance and flutter across brightly glazed earthenware – cockerels, bees, hummingbirds, beetles, ferns and sardines. Lots of sardines, in fact. It's all very strange...

'Anthropomorphic majolica pieces are always highly collectable and rather amusing,' chuckles auctioneer Nic Saintey. 'I've seen umbrella stands featuring storks wearing spectacles and coats, but a lot of earlier majolica is naturalistic. Far from being random flights of fancy – with these pieces, there has been some degree of effort to get every detail entirely right. Majolica was born around the same time that Charles Darwin was exploring evolution, so there was a great fascination with the natural world.'

For David Tulk, George Jones is the producer whose naturalistic designs are the most successful. 'He was a self-made man, whose work perfectly captured the birds, plants and ferns of the English garden,' he says. 'He really nailed the passion for naturalism of that era.' David's current stock includes many George Jones pieces such as a pineapple plate for £280 and a perching bird ring holder for £995.

Considering majolica was made only for a comparatively short time (1851-late 1880s), the variety is astounding. 'The ➤



*Members obsess over what they call “the most brilliantly glazed, exuberantly decorated and whimsical ceramic”*



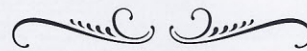




**ABOVE** George Jones sardine box, c1880, £345; Mafra cup and saucer (just seen), c1900, £140, all Madelena Antiques. Stack of cabbage leaf plates, including Wedgwood plate; platter with scalloped edge, all from £30, buy similar from Madelena Antiques. **Props, from left:** Linen used as table runner in plum and as napkins in Chinese yellow, both £35 per m, Volga Linen. 'France' wine glass, £7.95, Summerill & Bishop. **BELOW** Antiques, from left: Holdcroft game pitcher (one of a set of three) c1870, £870; lily pad and flower candle holder, c1870, £195; game pie dish, c1870, £605, all Madelena Antiques. Mafra Palissy cup and saucer, as above. Stack of cabbage leaf plates, as above. **Props, from left:** 'France' wine glass, and linen table runner and napkins, as above. Antique silver cutlery, from £28, from a selection at Summerill & Bishop. Magnetic butterfly, part of 12-piece set, £7.50, Cox and Cox



*'The most wonderful thing I ever saw was a 1.5m tall Minton peacock, designed by ceramic artist, Paul Comolera'*



most wonderful thing I ever saw was a 1.5m tall peacock made by Minton in the 1870s and designed by the French ceramic artist, Paul Comolera,' says David. 'Only 11 examples are known and it has to be top of the list for collectors with enough space to accommodate it.' Collector Carol Harkess once glimpsed one of these rare birds in a private collection ('such presence, such beauty!'). She may not have her own, but her husband Jim happily notes that they're now in the exclusive 'Bunny Club', having recently purchased a rare, highly prized two-headed 'Double Bunny' Minton game pie dish.

**THE MODERN MAJOLICA MARKET**

Rabbits and huge peacocks are the tip of the iceberg; among collectors, whispered rumours of unimaginable treasures abound. There are tales of life-size tigers, vultures, enormous elephants and monumental urns with gigantic swan finials. Fans flock to The Potteries Museum in Stoke-On-Trent to pay homage to the intricate St George and the dragon statue that topped Minton's legendary 10m-high majolica fountain made for the International Exhibition in London, 1862. It was sadly divided into 369 sections in 1962, and sold off piece by piece.

Weatherproof, architectural majolica items such as ceramic columns and garden seats are also highly desirable, according to Nic Saintey. He reveals prices are on the up: 'Ten to 15 years ago, there were two or three big collectors in America who competed at auction and pushed prices artificially high. When they died, their pieces flooded the market and prices dropped again, but now they're gradually creeping up.' When buying, Nic's tip is to steer clear of badly chipped pieces or incomplete sets: 'We had a dainty strawberry dish in one sale, but the accompanying cream jug and sugar bowl were missing, so it just didn't sell.'

Today, one only has to glance at the flora- and fauna-covered ceramics by cutting-edge designers such as Nathalie Lété and Lou Rota at chic boutique Anthropologie, to see that the romantic naturalism trend is once again in full swing. 'Colourful, bohemian ceramics suit the present climate, when we have a similar set of circumstances to the Victorian era in many ways,' points out Nicholas Dawes, vice president of special collections for Heritage Auction Galleries and author of *Majolica*, a treatise on Victorian majolica. 'We're ►





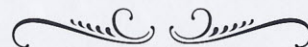
Top shelf: Minton sailor tobacco jar, cover and inner weight, c1868, £1,220; frog and snake pitcher, c1870, £490, cat-handled teapot, c1880, £535, all Madelena Antiques. 'La Favorite' (MLW2215-05) wallpaper, £49 per 10m roll, Lorca at Osborne & Little. 'Capri' bowls and plates, from £10, Brissi. Large oval platter, £42 Petersham Nurseries. Bottom shelf: Onnaing drunken army reservist pitcher, c1900, £305; Delphin Massier bird dish, c1900, £525; elephant teapot and cover, c1870, £440; fish teapot and creamer, c1870, £300, all Madelena Antiques. 'Capri' bowls and plates, as before. Props, from left: 'Simple' fruit stand, medium, £235, Astier de Vilatte at Summerill & Bishop. Small oval platter, £36, Petersham Nurseries





**THIS PAGE, TOP** George Jones shell and seaweed basket, c1870, £680, Madelena Antiques. **Props, from left:** Set of 16 starfish, £29; Jessica de Lotz silver anchor necklace, £255, both Solid ID. **BOTTOM RIGHT Antiques, from left:** George Jones storks and swallows garden seat, c1860, £3,975, Madelena Antiques. **Props, from left:** Books from a selection at Pimpernel and Partners. 'Wee Willie Winkie' candle holder, £4.95, Coastal Home. For a similar bed try The French House. Double 'Lazy' linen bundle in light grey, £225. Loaf. Linen fabric in Chinese yellow used as throw, £35 per m, Volga Linen. Plant supplied by Achillea Flowers

*'Colourful, bohemian ceramics suit the present climate, when we have similar circumstances to the Victorian era'*



living in a period of significant technological advances and rapidly expanding cities; people dream of escaping to the country, just as in Victorian times.'

For collector Deborah English, it's this connection with the past that makes majolica so fascinating. 'Each piece reflects the complex issues that concerned Victorians,' she says. 'For example, Minton's 'Monkey' teapot (a garish, grinning monkey in a colourful Chinese-style jacket, with his legs wrapped around a coconut) represents natural history, exotic culture, zoology and, by extension, the width and breadth of the entire Empire.' All that in a teapot? It's mad, but rather magical. ■

## FIND OUT MORE

### WHERE TO BUY

- **Alastair Bruce**, 07775 565434; alastair-bruce.com
- **Carolyn Stoddart-Scott**, 020 7602 8640; antiqueceramicslondon.com
- **Jesse Davis Antiques**, 07831 496516; jessedavis-antiques.co.uk
- **Madelena Antiques**, 01245 425045; madelena.com

### WHERE TO SEE

- **The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery**, Bethesda Street, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire. 01782 232323; stokemuseums.org.uk
- **The Wedgwood Museum**, Wedgwood Drive, Barlaston, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire. 01782 371902; wedgwoodmuseum.org.uk

- **The V&A**, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London. 020 7942 2000; vam.ac.uk
- **The Majolica International Society**, majolicasociety.com. Holds annual 'Majolica Heaven' conferences and shopping events in the UK, France and USA. Visit the website for news, further majolica information and to browse a great archive of majolica photos.

### WHAT TO READ

- **Majolica: A Complete History and Illustrated Survey** by Marilyn Karmason and Joan Stacke (Harry N Abrams Inc)
- **Majolica** by Nicholas Dawes (Robert Hale Ltd)
- **Majolica** by Mike Schneider (Schiffer Publishing Ltd)







**THIS PAGE** Antiques, clockwise from top: Small Wedgwood geranium plate, c1883, £140; sunflower plate, marked 'FFAS', c1920, £135; George Jones maple leaf and fern plate, c1870, £235; English sunflower in basket plate, c1880, £160, all Madelena Antiques. Props, from left: 'Maderial' digitally printed cotton fabric in cobalt, £75 per m, Designers Guild. Linen used for napkins, £35 per m, Volga Linen. 'Waves' white plate, £3.99, Zara home. Antique forks, from £28, from a selection at Summerill & Bishop



**THIS PAGE** Antiques, from left: George Jones shell and seaweed basket, c1870, £680; Gustafsberg Fish pitcher, c1880, £440; Gustafsberg dolphins and shell vase, c1884, £360, all Madelena Antiques. Props, from left: Set of 16 starfish, £29; Jessica de Lotz silver anchor necklace, £255, both Solid ID. Card from a selection at the Archivist. For similar frames try The Lacy Gallery. Branch coral sculpture, £36, Buy The Sea. 'Coraille' (MLF2196-01) curtain fabric, £42 per m, Lorca, from Osborne & Little. For a similar painted chest try Eastburn Country Furniture

