



Joe Larese/The Journal News

Antiques dealer Charles Washburne is surrounded by samples of majolica at his home in Chappaqua.

# A majolica menagerie

## Chappaqua dealer will be among exhibitors at Caramoor show

Mary Shustack

The Journal News

The stately white Chappaqua home of Charles Washburne anchors a pristine spread of brilliantly green grass.

Washburne opens the house's door, though, and the tranquility evaporates into a dizzying array of frogs and fish, birds and monkeys.

On this September morning, the veteran antiques dealer has gathered a selection of his inventory — majolica ceramic pieces as vibrant as they are delicate — into his sunny Colonial-era dining room.

Washburne is offering a glimpse into a specialized field of collecting, one he'll be introducing to new customers when he makes his debut at the 2004 Caramoor Fall Antiques Show. The prestigious show returns to the Venetian Theater at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts in Katonah, kicking off with a gala preview tomorrow night and continuing

Please see CARAMOOR, 2E

# Majolica and more at Caramoor

CARAMOOR, from 1E

through Sunday.

Washburne, who regularly exhibits at national shows from the Triple Pier Antiques Show in Manhattan to events in Houston, Miami and Baltimore, looks forward to his Caramoor stint.

"How many shows of that caliber are in our neighborhood?" he says.

While the Caramoor show is designed to appeal to both beginning and more sophisticated collectors, Washburne says majolica is a collecting category that usually inspires devotion.

"It doesn't take long because once you get involved in it, it's addictive," he says with a smile.

And while Washburne does own a few majolica pieces himself, he is primarily a dealer.

"We feel that the collector has to get the best there is," he says. "If we keep the best for ourselves, the customer would get the leftovers."

Washburne's offerings sport crabs and pheasants, rabbits and butterflies. There are absinthe decanters and oyster servers, platters for game and pitchers for ale. All share a rainbow effect created by tropical turquoises and luminous yellows, navy blues and mint greens.

Indeed, collecting the earthenware ceramic pieces known for their bright tones and often whimsical, naturalistic designs is for those with a certain taste, and budget. "Starter" pieces, Washburne says, include butter pats, which can be scored for under \$100 but generally start at \$150. Plates can range from \$200 to \$4,000, while price tags for larger pieces can hit often-lofty heights.

"This is a major commitment, in every way," says Washburne.

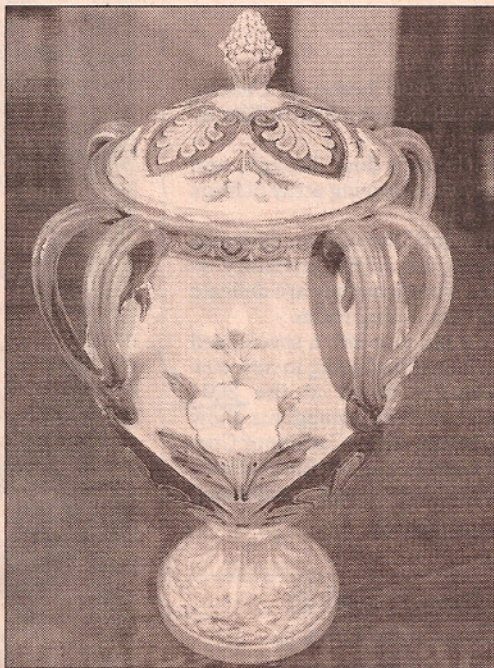
Majolica, he explains, is made when soft earthenware is fired to the "biscuit" or unglazed, stage at 1100 degrees Fahrenheit. Then, the plaster of Paris molds are removed and the form is covered with a coat of an opaque lead glaze. When this has dried, brightly colored metal oxide glazes are added, and another firing is done at cooler temperatures. This second firing causes the remaining water in the vessel to interact with the glazes, a process that yields the trademark look.

The making of majolica is based on an ancient Middle Eastern technique, revived in eighth-century Spain and later further developed in Renaissance Italy. It became a craze in Victorian England — the time of which Washburne's pieces represent — best exemplified by the works of the Minton, Wedgwood and George Jones firms.

Majolica was formally introduced to British society at the Crystal Palace Exhibition, held in London in 1851. For several decades, majolica was a distinctive part of home decor in both Europe and America before it fell out of favor as tastes changed to embrace the sim-



Photos by Joe Larese/The Journal News



A Minton majolica monkey, above, and vase, left, at Charles Washburne's home.

## If you go...

**What:** 2004 Caramoor Fall Antiques Show

**When:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

**Where:** Venetian Theater, Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, 149 Girdle Ridge Road, Katonah.

**Admission:** \$10.

**Preview:** Gala Preview Party, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. tomorrow. Tickets are \$125-\$1,000.

Proceeds will benefit the Caramoor Garden Guild, to be used for the beautification of Caramoor's gardens and grounds.

**Information:** 914-232-1253 or [www.caramoor.org](http://www.caramoor.org).

pler lines of the Arts and Crafts movement. Many of Washburne's pieces represent majolica's creative peak, 1870 to 1885.

A renewed appreciation for Victoriana some 30 years ago has translated into a renewed appreciation for majolica, Washburne says.

And even today, after more than 20 years in the business, Wash-

burne is amazed by the infinite pieces that survive. Unlike stamps or coins, where a collector can finish a collection by gathering each of a particular type, majolica offers an endless quest.

"There's no end to this," he says. "That's the one thing about majolica. You've never seen it all before."

Some people, though, have seen enough.

"It's not for everybody, definitely, it's not everybody's thing," Washburne says. "It is very loud, garish, bright, but we hope very cheerful in a good way."

After all, who could quibble with the attraction of the whimsical Majolica piece that holds court in Washburne's foyer? An oversize frog sits on a base, a puddle at its legs. It's very design incorporates its use, allowing a dripping umbrella's water to gently flow out of the container into a little pooled area.

That combination of whimsy with practicality continues to fascinate Washburne.

"That's what we appreciate about this."

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