



The distinctive colorful enamelware known as majolica has enjoyed a storied history that spans both centuries and continents. The vividly hued pottery is linked to Babylonia, where the people began applying tin enamel glaze to fired earthenware. The technique was adapted and used extensively by 14th-century Hispano-Moresque artisans, who shipped their wares to Italy from the port of Majorca, Spain. This historic island inspired the name *maiolica*, which is interchangeable with the more commonly used term *majolica*.

Eventually the skill spread throughout Europe. French ceramic artist Bernard Palissy created marvelous and highly collectable designs, called "Palissyware," inspired by marine life. In 1849, Herbert Minton joined forces with famed French ceramic chemist Leon Arnaux to rejuvenate majolica for use in English gardens as flowerpots, urns, and fountains.

These items were beautiful and durable to be sure, but it wasn't long before Victorians clamored for majolica that could be used indoors as well. Potteries large and small began turning out intricately detailed examples that featured charming elements of wildlife and nature. The pieces were almost always rendered in five colors—antimony yellow, iron red, and copper green, with cobalt blue and manganese purple used mainly for outlining. Though many were functional for serving, the most popular were those valued purely for aesthetic reasons. For consumers long accustomed to the oft-used white ironstone, terra-cotta, and blue and white china, this splashy alternative was enthusiastically received.

By the turn of the 20th century, consumers' tastes had changed, and the prismatic pieces fell out of favor until the 1970s when a renaissance of sorts catapulted majolica onto collectors' must-have lists. Today, many fine though pricey examples are available in antiques shops across the globe. Here they await eager buyers who will take them home, where their beauty will be showcased on bookshelves and buffets, bringing splashes of color and Old-World enchantment wherever they are displayed. ❧

Majolica Pottery

Whether *gracing* shelves or grouped in tabletop vignettes, these *vibrant* earthenware pottery pieces bring instant *dashes of color* and charm to a home.

BY KAREN CALLAWAY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCY BLACK SIMPSON

The first examples of 19th-century majolica were shown in 1851 at the Great Exhibition in London. The public was intrigued with the whimsical subjects and bright colors of this revived ceramic art form. Once Queen Victoria enthusiastically stamped the majolica with her approval, it became instantly and immensely popular. This sought-after collectable is made by firing soft earthenware to the "biscuit" stage and then painting it with a metal glaze. When the glaze has set, brightly colored metal oxide paint is applied, and the piece is fired again, resulting in the brilliantly hued majolica that collectors cherish.

