

COLLECTIBLE OF THE MONTH

Fanciful Majolica

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These colorful, nature-themed pottery pieces complemented Victorian dining room décor.

With its fanciful forms and carnival colors, the glazed earthenware called majolica is a prime collectible for the curio cabinet. Although majolica, which takes its melodic name from the Spanish port of Majorca where it originated, has been produced since the 9th century, it wasn't until the Victorian era that the pieces reached their peak of popularity.

It was in the middle of the era—1849 to be exact—that Herbert Minton, of the celebrated porcelain factory Minton & Co., and French ceramist Leon Arnaux put their heads together and began producing lead-glazed pottery for the gardens that were based on Renaissance designs. Their pieces made a huge impression when they made their world debut at the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition in London, England.

Soon, Minton and other companies, including Wedgwood, were making majolica for the dining table, the design of each piece reflecting the Victorian delight for a specific serving piece for each food. The lobster boxes, fish platters and oyster plates were augmented with game dishes decorated with running rabbits and fruit dishes replete with strawberries.

Such superb pieces were ordinary fare, however, when compared with the figurals. Herons, monkeys, mice and even busy bees adorned everything from urns to umbrella stands.

Museums have acquired all the pre-19th century pieces, so collectors focus on the exuberant pieces from the Victorian era. Prices vary from \$100 to hundreds of thousands of dollars. As with any porcelain, perfect condition is of prime importance. For more information on majolica and dealers, visit www.majolicasociety.com.



Majolica figurals, like this unsigned French bird, are highly sought-after.