



THE SECRET LIFE OF MAJOLICA

Anyone who's ever looked to spruce the spring table is likely no stranger to majolica, the brightly-colored earthenware pottery that assumes some of tableware's most whimsical forms.

Whether you're considering investing in majolica for the first time, or you're fifteen or so pieces deep, majolica's story is one worth exploring. A rich history, full of rises and falls, makes majolica one of the most intriguing collectibles on the market.

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- Green Leaf Dinnerware, 19th Century Italian Models & Figurines, Early 20th Century French Serving Dishes & Pieces, French Hand-Painted Barbotine Sculpture



Photo courtesy of Le Louvre French Antiques

MAIOLICA: THE PRECURSOR TO MAJOLICA

Most of what we think of majolica today—Trompe l'oeil plates, figural soup tureens, cabbageware—is actually Victorian majolica.

Unlike later Victorian majolica, Maiolica is one-dimensional. It typically features a white background over which religious or mythological scenes are hand-painted in colorways of yellow, blue, and green.

Throughout the Renaissance, Maiolica flourished in Italy, reaching the height of its popularity in about the mid-15th Century.



Photo courtesy of Boston Vintage Studio

VICTORIAN MAJOLICA

Customary ebbs and flows led to a downturn in Maiolica demand after the 15th Century, but by the 19th Century it was back in vogue thanks to Europe's leading ceramic factory, Minton Company.

Unlike the Maiolica from the Renaissance era, Minton's majolica was three-dimensional, created via relief-molds.

Ten years after Minton introduced majolica commercially, their patent expired, opening the floodgates for other manufacturers like Wedgwood and Holdcraft.

Among the more curious subcategories of Victorian majolica was Palissy ware. Inspired by the 16th-century French potter, Bernard Palissy's anomalous snake-platters, Victorians began manufacturing majolica adorned with hand-formed amphibians, caecilians, and the like.



Photo courtesy of Boston Vintage Studio

1970S REVIVAL

Just as the rise of Art Nouveau led to the demise of Victorian style, it also led to a loss of interest in Majolica. By the 1920s, the majority of the molds used by Minton, Wedgwood, and others had been destroyed.

The '70s revival was also due in large part to the London dealer Jeremy Cooper. Cooper famously organized an English Majolica exhibition at the Smithsonian Design Museum in New York in the 1970s.



Photo courtesy of Majolicadream

DETERMINING MAJOLICA'S WORTH

As collectors' interest in majolica waned, so did an interest in 19th Century majolica's value. Since the majority of early majolica is unmarked, it can be difficult to assign value to it.

Look for a Serial Number

While it's true that most 19th Century majolica is not officially marked, many European manufacturers like Wedgwood did press pieces with a series of numbers before firing.

Look for "Hazy" Colors

It may sound counterintuitive to what you'd think, but dealers advise that you side with majolica that has more subdued color than rich color if you're looking for the real deal.

Look for Precision

While modern day majolica is, by no means shoddy, it is more common to find dirty and streaks in its glazing.

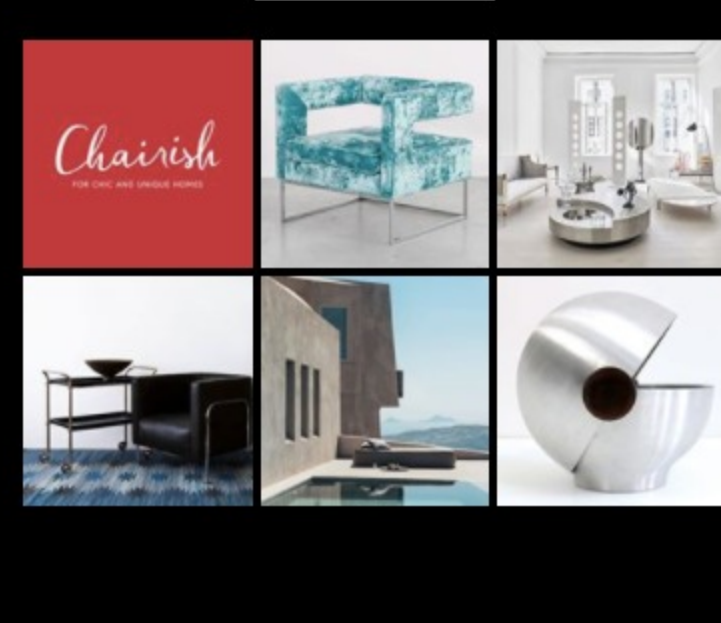
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