**Minton Ceramics and the ‘Japan Craze’ in Victorian Britain**

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**About the lecture:** The Minton factories had the artistically widest-ranging output of any ceramics maker in the mid- to late 19th century. From the late 1860s to the early 1900s, Japanese forms and motifs were key factors in fashionable Western design. The lecture will explore how the Minton factories used this source material, and what role it may have played in their marketing.

**About the speaker:** Jeff Ruda taught art history at UC Davis from 1980 to 2015. He is president of the SFCC.
UPCOMING SFCC TALKS


THURSDAY, MAY 11, De Young Museum. Megan O’Neil, Associate Curator, LACMA, will discuss ceramics related to Teotihuacán for the FAMSF docents and the SFCC.


MARCH LECTURE BACKGROUND: MINTON CERAMICS

Thomas Minton set up a pottery in 1793 to make high quality but competitively priced tableware. He was both a smart businessman and a master engraver who knew the field of tableware decoration. Most early Minton patterns were fresh takes on commercially proven types, and the factory kept up with new ideas in ceramic bodies and printing techniques.

Thomas Minton’s son Herbert entered the business in his teens and was running the factory well before Thomas died, in 1836. At least as smart commercially as his father,
Herbert Minton led a new generation who believed that excellence was both morally charged and good marketing strategy. By Herbert’s death in 1858, however, standards of artistic excellence had become starkly polarized. To build Britain’s largest ceramic business, Herbert pursued every approach at all but the lowest price points. This meant adding ornamental ceramics to tableware, and following divergent trends in both areas.

John Bell, 1811-95, modeler, for Minton & Hollins
*Una and the Lion*, modeled 1847
Parian, height 36.8 cm
*Victoria and Albert Museum, London, acquired 1865 (Photo © V&A)*

Parian, first credited to the Copeland factory, is a variant of bone china that allows very precise detail and reliable firing.

From the 1830s to World War I, Rococo Revival was the most conventional taste in European decorative arts, with Renaissance Revival as second choice. There are no solid numbers, but rococo models were probably the bulk of Minton’s output during this period. What changed were the alternatives, flowing from Gothic Revival to the Aesthetic Movement to Art Nouveau, and then quickly to austere early-modernist design. Different as these fads look, they share a commitment to the ornamental value of materials. Contemporary with Courbet, the most progressive British commercial designers rejected illusionism as unsuitable and even dishonest. From the 1840s to the end of the century, Minton pioneered all phases of the development.

Léon Arnoux, 1816-1902, designer, for Minton & Hollins
*Bottle [Flask] with crackle glaze*, c. 1862
Porcelain, height 19.7 cm
*Victoria & Albert Museum, London, acquired 1864 (Photo © V&A)*

Louis Jahn, 1839-1911, designer & painter, for Minton & Hollins
*Vase & Cover with Watteau Scenes*, c. 1862
Bone china, height 50.8 cm
*Victoria & Albert Museum, London, acquired 1863 (Photo © V&A)*
Minton also pioneered ceramic technology, especially in two areas: tiles, and the brilliantly glazed earthenware called majolica. Herbert Minton gambled a big investment over many years to perfect machine-made, durable, yet richly colored “encaustic” tiles. These proved ideal for the mid-century Gothic Revival architectural boom. Then, while translucent lead glazing is an old ceramic technique, Minton perfected new color formulas to suit local materials and industrial production. The name majolica was misapplied from Italian maiolica, also colorful but based on opaque tin glaze; Renaissance Italians often wrote “i” in the long form we read as “j.”

In the 20th century, the idea of art ceramics shifted to studio work and festive dining shifted from homes toward restaurants. Minton continued to make fine tableware, though artistic leadership was no longer an issue.

Pierre Jeannest, 1813-57, designer, for Minton & Hollins
Ewer & stand, c. 1862
Lead-glazed earthenware (majolica), ewer height 71 cm
Victoria & Albert Museum, London, acquired 1863 (Photo © V&A)

At the 1862 London International Exhibition, Minton’s display included this ewer & stand, Jahn’s Watteau vase, six of Arnoux’s Chinese-style pieces, and Christopher Dresser’s earliest ceramics.

Christopher Dresser, 1834-1904, designer, for Minton China Works
Vase, shape 2695, 1886
Porcelain, height 19.4 cm
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photo: museum)

M.L.E. Solon, 1835-1913, decorator, for Minton China Works
Flask, c. 1870-95
Porcelain with pâte-sur-pâte decoration
Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent (Photo: SFCC)