



Pewter perfect

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THE CREATIVE WORLD OF PEWTER; FROM ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO BECOMING A MUST-HAVE ACCESSORY.



Diana Carmichael



Diana Carmichael



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FAVoured FOR ITS shine and smooth surface, pewter tableware and decoratives have been used in homes for centuries.

Being a soft metal alloy, traditionally between 85 and 99% tin, with the remainder consisting of 1 to 15% copper which acts as a hardener – with the addition of lead for lower grades of pewter which have a bluish tint (www.wikipedia.org) – pewter has enjoyed a long history dating as far back as 1500 B.C. (www.associatedcontent.com).

However by the mid-1700s the health hazards and tarnishing drawbacks of leaded pewter lead to the popularity of Britannia or “white” metal, a non-leaded form of pewter.

“The old pewter, due to its lead content, took on a dull greyish appearance and was undesirable as food containers, but the glowing sheen, lustre and strength of the lead-free Britannia metal quickly gained popularity. Tin, which is the fourth most important precious metal after platinum, gold and silver, renders pewter corrosion-resistant, is ductile and prevents excessive oxidation in casting processes,” says Michelé Stuurman of Carrol Boyes.

As pewter has a low melting point and the property of expanding on cooling, it allows for fine definition and has recently been made fashionable again by designers such as Art of Pewter, Carrol Boyes,

Diana Carmichael and Nicolson Russell, who use this metal alloy in many of their finely detailed pieces.

According to Isabelle Laws, sales and marketing manager of Diana Carmichael



Diana Carmichael



Carrol Boyes



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Artworks, pewter items are today enjoying an enormous revival: both consumer and craftsman have discovered the glowing beauty and practical function of fine pewter.

Originally, pewter items were made by one of two methods – the metal was either hammered or it was cast. Later another method of producing pewter emerged, called spinning. This is the art of shaping the vessel in a mould on a wheel by putting pressure from a blunt tool to the pewter, with the softness of the pewter allowing it to be shaped the way the designer wishes by applying pressure where needed. This method is still used by many major manu-

facturers and skilled craftsmen today (www.scienceray.com), although companies such as Diana Carmichael choose to hand-pour pewter instead. The company also combines different materials such as Swarovski crystals, glass, springbok horns and African rosewood with pewter. "The warmth of wood for instance, balances the coldness of the pewter metal while

celebrating the richness of Africa's natural resources," notes Isabelle.

Damiano Sadie of Art of Pewter suggests that one should always look out for pewter that contains at least 92% tin. "Another thing to look out for is a mark or symbol engraved on the product, as most of the reputable manufacturers want clients to know that this is their creation and it is also used to lesson the forgery of the pieces," he adds. Michelé also suggests using white metal 90-grade pewter items if used as food containers. Industry special-



Carrol Boyes



Carrol Boyes

ists also note that a very significant aspect to look out for is good craftsmanship, the finishes of the product and the quality of polishing.

In terms of maintenance and ensuring the longevity of your pewter artefacts, most experts suggest adhering to some basic guidelines when cleaning and storing them. Emma Russell of Nicolson Russell says: "The best way to maintain pewter pieces is to store them away from damp and in a non-scratch area." Ideally they should also be wrapped in a cotton cloth. Although pewter looks like silver, it does not tarnish as easily. Isabelle also notes that pewter generally has a polished, satin or antique finish and should be washed in hot soapy water and dried with a soft clean cloth. Although pewter requires minimum care to keep it in its original state, if neglected it will take on a patina, but cleaning as indicated above will restore its glow. Also, finger marks can be easily removed with mentholated spirits if necessary.

"Never use a dishwasher, and when drying your pieces, rub in one direction only. For those who prefer a shiny polished appearance, use a recommended metal polish. But the patina on pewter, especially antique pieces, is highly treasured by collectors," adds Michelé.

Pewter has a glowing beauty that assures its place as a desirable metal to enhance home decor and if cared for properly, your pewter items will last for generations. ■

With thanks to Art of Pewter, Carrol Boyes, Diana Carmichael Artworks, Nicolson Russell, www.associatedcontent.com, www.scienceray.com and www.wikipedia.org



Art of Pewter



Nicolson Russell



Nicolson Russell