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MOVING ON UP?

THREE AVON FAIENCE PIECES BRING REMARKABLE PRICES

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Products of the short-lived Avon Faience Pottery Co., Tiltonsville, Ohio, seem to appeal to an acquired and perhaps even a limited taste, although collecting may be partly constrained by the rarity and costliness of Avon Faience pottery, particularly the elaborate squeeze-bag examples attributed to Frederick Rhead's brief tenure in Tiltonsville.

Three major pieces of Avon Faience have sold at three different auctions, bringing startlingly high prices, although these may not indicate an overall quantum leap in Avon prices.

Beginning in January 2004, Dargate Auctions offered a remarkable Avon Faience jardiniere and matching pedestal. In two shades of blue, with three-petalled white flowers and the footed or stemmed trifoliate abstract leaf design so characteristic of Rhead's work, this set sold for \$7,000. Although the jardiniere appears decidedly darker than the pedestal, this is not a "married" set, the contrast is due to the greater use of black glaze on the jardiniere. While it did not bear a squeeze-bag motto around the jardiniere rim, it is still an impressive example of Avon Faience.

March saw the Harold Rosentreter collection of Pepsi-Cola memorabilia sell in Carthage, Illinois. Featured was one of four or five known examples of an early Pepsi syrup dispenser decorated with Avon's characteristic squeezebag rose trees. Fourteen inches high, the dispenser was glazed in green and two shades of blue, decorated with squeeze-bag rose trees and tiny rabbits. The lid also bore a squeeze-bag motto extolling the medicinal virtues of Pepsi, claiming that it "Cures Indigestion, Relieves Exhaustion." The base revealed Avon's characteristic cream-colored body and its ink-stamp "church-steeple" mark. When some rim repair was pointed out, the laconic response I received was, "Someone will buy it." And indeed someone did -- for \$27,000. Presumably that person was a Pepsi collector rather than an art pottery collector. In 1999, another of the dispensers brought \$37,600, undoubtedly a record for a piece of Avon Faience.

May 15th offered another Avon Faience jardiniere and pedestal, this representing

"Winter," in the (presumably) four seasonal set created by Rhead for Avon Faience. (While several "Summer" jardiniere are known, only one example of "Spring" has been found, and no examples of "Autumn.") The Winter jardiniere and pedestal, sold by DeFina Galleries, Austinburg, Ohio, is decorated with the standard rose trees and more unusual clusters of pine cones.



The motto on the rim of the jardiniere proclaims "Winter the King of Intimate Delights, Fire-side Enjoyments, Home Born Happiness." Condition problems were minor, mostly some missing squeezebag and a faint internal hairline on the jardiniere. Bidding rapidly climbed into the thousands and ended at \$12,000 (plus a 10% premium). The buyer is not an Avon Faience collector per se but likes Arts and Crafts and "knew it was a good piece of pottery."

Although this was the only example of the "Winter" jardiniere and pedestal known, somewhat remarkably another "Winter" jardiniere sold at a Treadway-Toomey auction a week later. With several glaze flakes and glued chips, it brought only \$750, with a 17.5% premium, well below the \$1,000-\$1,500 estimate. The piece may have been overlooked by some art pottery collectors because it was not featured or even mentioned in Treadway-Toomey's advertising, although it could be found by searching the eBay Live auction site.

What to make of all this? One obvious but also obviously erroneous generalization would be that pedestals are worth more than 15 times their matching jardiniere. Probably more valid is the observation that art pottery prices can be extremely volatile, even when dealing with a small collector base, if the piece is genuinely rare. And, perhaps most obvious, it helps if the piece says "Pepsi" on it.