



Grouping of pots, circa 1920 manufactured by Italian Terra Cotta Company. Their highly stylized signature bisque pots are adorned with angels, deer, garland and leaves. Left to right: \$1,200, \$1,200 and \$1,450. Others from the Inner Gardens collection.

WHEN I SPOKE WITH STEPHEN BLOCK OF INNER GARDENS ABOUT HIS shop's collection of vintage American terra-cotta, he had just ended a phone call with a client for whom he had found four identical 14-inch pots manufactured in the early 20th century by Italian Terracotta Company out of Southern California. "I have never seen these particular pots before. They are gray, glazed in lead—which is almost bizarre—with a crosshatch design. All four have saucers. They are beautiful," says Block, with the kind of enthusiasm also found among rare-plant collectors after a successful hunt.

In Block's off-the-cuff description, we find the key points collectors have in mind when shopping for these vintage pieces: color, glazed or unglazed, location and date of manufacture, designer, patterns and embellishments, and inclusion or absence of saucers. "Usually, the saucers have been broken, which makes this set even more extraordinary. Saucers have a market all to themselves," explains Block.

The artistry demonstrated in most vintage pieces harks back to the popularity of Mediterranean Revival style, when terra-cotta's popularity resurged. In her book *Antique Garden Ornament: Two Centuries of American Taste*, Barbara Israel writes, "At the turn of the twentieth century, as interest in cast iron waned, terra-cotta returned to favor.... Indeed, in the 1920s garden at Gwinn at Bratenahl, near Cleveland, Ohio, designed by Charles A. Platt and Warren Manning, the Galloway-made glazed terra-cotta urns on the balustrade by the lakeside add a classical note, giving the distinct impression of a waterscape."

Since importing mass quantities of European terra-cotta became cost prohibitive and inconvenient, American manufacturers sprouted in clusters near clay mines as the popularity of terra-cotta grew. Many Amer-

ican terra-cotta producers made sewer pipe, while remnant clay was used to satisfy the new demand for decorative pieces. As early as the late 1800s, Zanesville Stoneware of Ohio, 130-year-old Gladding, McBean of California, and Galloway of Philadelphia began commissioning artisans to create vessels, tile and architectural details, as did Boston's Grueby Faience Company. Grueby's artisan designer, George P. Kendrick, was admired for his work in the July 1903 edition of *House & Garden*, in which Samuel Swift wrote that Kendrick's Gruebyware was "softly luminous, without hinting at polish. Its skin is smooth and fine, but not inanimate.... This, in fact, is one of the not too numerous examples of American garden pottery that may properly be the subject of enthusiasm."

Today, vintage pieces made by smaller producers without resources for exporting can often be found in greatest abundance near the city of their manufacture, as historical societies, antiques dealers and private local collectors have amassed collections and keep their region's history close to home. Still, as Israel says, "Terra-cotta production was a healthy industry in the early 20th century, and larger companies like Galloway did ship terra-cotta across the country, though packing costs would run high, discouraging customers and merchants."

The lines and embellishments of vintage American garden pottery usually reflect the Mediterranean houses they were designed to partner with, but other styles do exist. Arts and Crafts-style containers by Stevenson & Cassel of Philadelphia were unusually heavy, angular terra-cotta pots made from their signature high-fired, glazed bisque clay (page 61). Highly

FYI: As terra-cotta pottery became an industry in its own right, smaller producers like Ambrose Tellier, an Italian-born New York artisan, produced terra-cotta garden ornament exclusively. As noted in the 1859 edition of *The Horticulturalist*, Tellier made "ornaments in Terra Cotta, for gardens, lawns, terraces, or halls of entrance, in a style that would be creditable in his own sunny land."

terra-cotta today Still in business after 130 years, Gladding, McBean no longer operates the 15 terra-cotta production plants of its early-1900s glory days, but its Lincoln, California, location still produces some of the finest terra-cotta in the world. The company's Architectural Garden Pottery division has a line of 35 unique pieces, most forms based on their original line and three new pieces added this year. The glaze colors have remained fairly consistent over the years, too: their 24 glazes range from smoky green "Watermelon rind" to speckled "Graystone." Shown right, from left to right: #1204-18 pot in "Cavern Clay," \$730; #87 oil jar in "Limeade," \$1,090; and #88-33 oil jar in "Caribbean," \$930. For a directory of vendors, visit www.gladdingmcbean.com or call 800-776-1133.





Above left to right: Very rare and unusually heavy, high-fired, glazed bisque clay. Stevenson & Cassel, 1925: \$1,250. Most Stevenson & Cassel was produced in the late 1800s. Sky-blue glazed oil jar by Galloway, 1920: \$1,200. Middle two pots by Stevenson & Cassel, 1920: \$1,250 and \$1,050. Cobalt-blue jar, a rare form with depictions of greyhounds chasing a stag, by Gladding, McBean, 1925: \$5,000. Green glazed oil jar with "ears" (handles). Manufacturer unknown, probably 1930: \$1,500.

stylized oil jars with curvy, feminine shapes (above, far right) contrast with the less daring vases and urns typically associated with Mediterranean Revival. Classical styles (page 57) can be found in greater quantity.

In California, owners of Spanish Colonial houses have spurred on the collecting of these pieces. In an effort to be true to the architecture, they take care to find and incorporate the vintage terra-cotta roof tiles and pots that first adorned their houses. "I have built collections for my California clients, locating pots for their gardens," says Block. "Originally, I started my own pottery collection with Redware—the earliest American pottery out of New England—whose primitive forms I love. But my business has led me to understand and appreciate a range of forms, especially the Southern California styles."

Florida's story is much the same. Aficionados of Addison Mizner's Mediterranean Revival architecture will remember that Mizner Industries manufactured terra-cotta tile, pots and garden ornament for his development projects in turn-of-the-century Palm Beach. Revivalists collect his pots and tile and incorporate them in restoration projects.

South Florida design enthusiast Robert Eigelberger owns a singular Mizner terra-cotta collection and has donated additional pieces to the Historical Society of Palm Beach. "These pieces show how good Mizner was at mixing colors for glaze. The turquoises, aquas and royal blues are spectacular, and you

won't see new glazes that match these in quality," he says.

Although Eigelberger's collection is not on the market, Block found and sold a pair of turquoise glazed urns, 24 inches high and 18 inches wide, for \$7,500 in 2003. Market value often upstages the appraised value of rare pieces, depending on a collector's preference for particular producers and endearing flaws, says Block. "And what sells well in one part of the country might not be as hot elsewhere, because people aren't aware of a manufacturer from another part of the country or because availability is limited further from its origin."

For those of us not renovating an early-20th-century house, vintage terra-cotta has virtues other collectors can appreciate. The ram's head urn shown on page 57, said to have been exhibited at the 1904 World's Fair, is an intriguing find, especially this year during the fair's centennial celebration. While its manufacturer is unknown, the entire piece, including molded embellishments, shows durability beyond expectation. ■

go get it

Find vintage terra cotta through the following dealers:

■ Barbara Israel

Garden Antiques

296 Mt. Holly Rd.
Katonah, NY 10536;
www.barbaraisrael.com;
212-744-6281

■ DHS Designs

6521 Friel Rd.
Queenstown, MD 21658
www.dhsdesigns.com;
410-827-8167

■ Inner Gardens

6050 W. Jefferson Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
www.innergardens.com;
310-838-8378

■ Recycling The Past

381 Main St.
Barnegat, NJ 08005
www.recyclingthepast.com;
609-660-9790

■ Southern Accents

Architectural Antiques

308 Second Ave., S.E.
Cullman, AL 35055
www.antiques-architectural.com;
256-737-0554