



## *DISHES FOR ALL OCCASIONS*

### **Purchasing Pointers and Care**

Gracious dining depends on three things--good food, friendly company and an attractively set table. No one item can be singled out as the whole answer, nor can anyone be omitted from the total picture. Since an attractively set table "pays off" at mealtime, it's wise to consider the selection of dishes that helps to set the stage for gracious dining.

Current trends provide today's consumers with many options.

- More "casual china" is being used for both every day and special occasions. These pieces cost less than fine china but more than the "everyday" dinnerware of the past. Prices often range between \$40 and \$90 a place setting.
- There are many more places to shop for new dinnerware ranging from speciality shops to local department stores to discount/outlet stores and catalog shopping. Video shopping, electronic mail addresses and toll-free telephone numbers for information or direct ordering are additional options offered by many manufacturers.
- Thousands of patterns are available in a wide range of styles. Consumer skills are critical when evaluating a store display showing 300 or more patterns ranging in price from \$10 to \$300 a place setting.
- Types of dishes and place settings are changing. For example, oversized dinner plates are now shown with many patterns. Some everyday sets come with a mug in place of a cup and saucer. Most are dishwasher-safe.

### **PLAN IN ADVANCE . . .**

Do your homework before buying! Know what you want to look for. Look through magazines and catalogs. Ask questions as you browse through stores. Think about what you need and what you want.

Be creative. If you already have dishes from estate sales, second hand shops or treasured family pieces, consider how these colors and patterns can be mixed and matched with new dishes to suit various occasions. Accent plain dinner plates with patterned salad plates, combine old dishes with new or simply have fun with a combination of bright summertime colors!

Consider your budget and what you can afford. Don't rush your decisions since dishes are a longtime purchase that must fit many different settings. Taking time to make wise selections will help you get the best buy for the dollars spent.

### **BUYING GUIDE . . .**

- Buy dinnerware to suit the size of the family, type and amount of entertaining, and available storage space.
- Buy needed pieces first and add other pieces later. Plan your purchases to fit into your budget.
- Check to find out if dishes are "open stock." This may mean you will always be able to purchase additional or replacement pieces, or it may mean the pattern will be made for a 5-year period.

- Sets of dishes may vary in number of pieces included. A popular way of buying dishes is by the place setting, which usually consists of a dinner plate, cup, saucer, soup/cereal bowl and bread-and-butter plate. Some “English style” settings use a large salad plate in place of a soup/cereal bowl. A twenty-piece set consists of four place settings; a forty-piece set has eight. A forty-six-piece set consists of eight place settings plus a large platter, a round vegetable bowl, an oval vegetable bowl, a creamer and a sugar with cover.
- Two starter sets (20-piece) may cost less than eight place settings or a set for eight (40-piece). Various stores and shopping sources may have the same pattern at different prices. Comparison shop for the best price!
- Some families may prefer using stainless steel or silver serving pieces since they can be used with any set of dishes.
- Be realistic. Don't expect perfection in less-expensive dishes. Strict quality control may be one reason formal dinnerware is so costly. Quality gets better as prices climb. Inspect each place setting carefully.
- Shop several different sources. Prices vary. Ask when sales will be held. If you fall in love with a special pattern that's only carried by a few selected shops, be prepared to pay the price or wait for a possible sale.
- Ask questions as you shop. Check quality. Practice good consumer skills to get the best buy.
- Check warranties. Some warranties guarantee that a pattern will be available for a certain length of time. (Popular patterns are usually available much longer than poor sellers. Some makers include replacement warranties for breakage. Some makers have no warranties at all.

## HOW TO TELL QUALITY . . .

At the store begin with an inspection of designs that you're interested in. Examine the dishes for quality and defects. Evaluate whether the

dishes are of good quality and without defects? (Or marked as seconds with a discounted price?)

Handle the merchandise . . . carefully. How does it look? How does it feel? How heavy are the dishes? Are they easy to handle? Would they be easily placed into and taken out of the cupboard many times a week?

Inspect the dishes in each pattern that you are considering. (If dishes are delivered to your door, unpack and inspect them immediately. Keep all sales and delivery information and report any breakage or flaws as soon as possible.)

Pick up a plate and check for quality.

- Look for flaws in the glaze. You shouldn't see ripples when you angle the plate to a light.
- Check for pinholes while holding the dish under a bright light. They'll look like dimples in an orange peel. Sharp ridges may hold food or dirt. Smooth edges are probably sealed off and harmless.
- Check for spots, discolorations or bumps. If they won't rub or scrape off easily, they may be set in the glaze permanently. Bumps may break away, exposing the pottery surface.
- Place the plate on a flat surface. Does it sit squarely on the surface or wobble back and forth?
- Check the symmetry of plates by placing two dishes of the same size side by side. Rims should be even in height. Now place a dish face down on a surface or put two dishes together with eating surfaces face to face. All edges should be touching without any gaps.
- Feel the base of a plate. Does it feel smooth or rough? Bumps and sharp edges will scratch table surfaces or mark other plates when stacked on top of another.

Look at the design.

- Are borders evenly spaced and precisely placed around the rim?
- Are center designs squarely in the center with each one matching the others in a set?

- Are straight lines straight?
- Are colors uniform over the entire plate?
- Will the design wear off, fade or discolor?  
Can dishes be safely washed in the dishwasher? Ask questions and read labels.

Lift the cup or mug. Is it a good size?

- Does the bottom of the handle provide a rest for your middle finger? (If not, your finger will rest against the hot surface of the cup.)
- Does the cup feel well balanced when you are holding it by the handle?
- Would you still be able to hold it easily if it were filled with hot coffee?
- Will the handle be comfortable for either large or small hands?

Study the area where the handle is fastened onto the cup or bowl.

- Are the handles joined securely?
- Is the glaze smooth and unbroken?

## CHINA OR EARTHENWARE?

Dinnerware usually is placed in two categories: china or earthenware. A test often used is to hold a plate against a strong light. Fine china is translucent and will allow the shadow of your fingers to show through the plate. If the plate is so opaque that the outline of your hand doesn't show through, it is in the earthenware category.

Fine china will have a bell-like ring when tapped sharply with a knife. Earthenware will have a dull sound.

Fine china will have a smooth, lustrous glaze that has been fired at an extremely high temperature. Earthenware will have a softer, usually duller glaze that has been fired at a lower temperature. China looks fragile and delicate, but is actually strong. Earthenware seems sturdy but chips and breaks easily.

Bone china, porcelain and ceramic china are all included in the general china category. Bone china is very white and sometimes referred to as English china. Porcelain is highly translucent, looks more like glass than china and can be brittle.

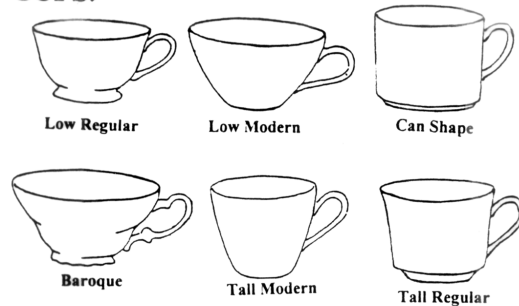
Stoneware and pottery are forms of earthenware. Designs are often more informal and primitive than china patterns. Colors will be darker than for china. Pottery breaks more easily than stoneware.

Metals (pewter, stainless steel, silver), glassware and plastic are other options for dinnerware.

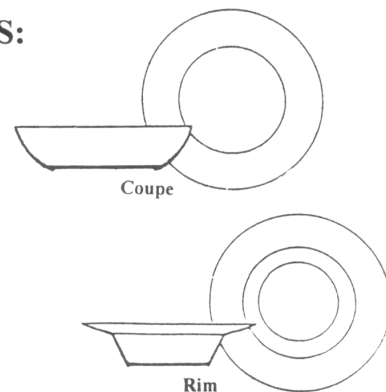
## STYLES OF DINNERWARE

Several different styles of dishes are available. Here are several examples:

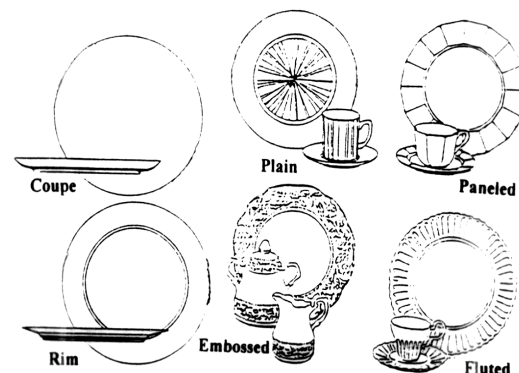
### CUPS:



### BOWLS:



### PLATES:



## DESIGN DECISIONS . . .

Getting a good buy for your money includes making wise decisions about china patterns and colors. The type of design selected is a matter of personal choice. Remember, however, that dishes are used over a long period of time for varied occasions in many different settings. Look for a pleasing design that coordinates well with other patterns, is versatile and fits the types of tables that you want to set. The types of designs most often seen include:

- Floral centers and rims
- Floral centers with embossed rims
- Floral centers with bands
- Floral rims with plain centers
- Bands only
- All-over sprays and patterns

These designs can be applied in various ways.

- “In-the-clay” designs are cut or printed on moist clay.
- “In-the-glaze” decorating is done by coloring the glaze itself.
- “Under-the-glaze” designs are durable and smooth to the touch because they are permanent. The glaze goes over the pattern.
- “Over-the-glaze” decorations must be fired on the dishes in decorating ovens so they will last. Gold and platinum are applied over the glaze because they lose their beauty under the glaze. Over-the-glaze patterns often use many colors, and the texture is slightly rough in contrast to the rest of the dish. Some dishes use a combination of both methods. Ask to see if they can be placed in a dishwasher.

As you are selecting china patterns, ask to see a place setting together to get the idea of how it will look. Remember that dishes are a background for food, not decorative items in themselves. Try to visualize how food will look on the plates. Will it be appetizing or will it be lost in a busy all-over pattern? Do the colors harmonize well with food? Also, check to see how glassware and flatware patterns will harmonize with the china patterns and whether you will be able to use a variety of table linens to complete the table setting.

## MIX AND MATCH

Instead of purchasing an entire new set of dishes, you may wish to simply update your present dishes by purchasing a few pieces of a different pattern in popular new colors or fashionable design. To do this, take a dinner plate, salad plate, cup and saucer from each pattern and try different combinations. Check for similarity of color, line, shape, pattern, and overall formality or casualness of the different pieces. Try a salad plate from one pattern and a dinner plate from another. Certain cups mix very well with saucers of a different pattern. Combine several colors that are about the same value in lightness or darkness or start with combinations of a solid color with a pattern. Experiment with pattern on pattern, such as a delicate floral with another floral. Again, look for some common element to coordinate the pieces.

Consider, too, some of the bargains that can be found at antique shops, estate sales and flea markets. Nearly complete sets of fine china can often be purchased at a moderate cost. Sets of salad plates and soup bowls may be priced reasonably because dinner plates are not available. If you decide to invest in some extra pieces, be sure to take a piece of your main pattern along to check color and design and use the same shopping guidelines recommended for buying new dishes.

## SAFETY NOTE . . .

Lead has sometimes caused a problem since lead oxide is used in glazes to enhance smoothness and transparency. Modern commercial glazes used by large manufacturers are safe from leaching, however.

Check labels and product literature to see where the dishes were made. If made in a foreign country, is there a guarantee for safety in lead-free materials and high quality glaze? If handmade in this country, check for guarantees or talk directly with the craftsperson to find out about the materials used and recommended care. Inspect the dishes under

good light to visually check the glaze for any cracks or imperfections that might allow lead to leach through into food.

If you have any doubts about safety, use a lead-testing kit to check. Examples of four home lead test kits on the market are:

- Test for Lead in Pottery (\$25) and the FRANDON Lead Alert Kit (\$29.95): Frandon Enterprises, Inc., P. O. Box 300321, Seattle, WA 98103 or call 1-800-359-9000.
- LeadCheck Swabs (\$25) or LeadCheck Swabs-Half Packs (\$15): HybriVet Systems, Inc., P. O. Box 1210, Framingham, MA 01701 or call 1-800-262-LEAD.
- LeadTest (\$10): Verify, Inc., 1185 Chess Drive, Suite 202, Foster City, CA 94404-1109 or call (415) 578-9401.
- Leadcheck II (\$15): Distributed by Michigan Ceramic Supplies, 4048 Seventh St., P. O. Box 342, Wyandotte, MI 48192 or call (313) 281-2300.

Check also at local hardware and department stores.

To receive a pamphlet listing more than 2000 lead-safe dish patterns, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Lead Safe China Brochure, Environmental Defense Fund, P. O. Box 96969, Washington, D.C. 20090-6969.

## CARE:

Like other beautiful things, dishes deserve proper care. Hand washing with a lemon-free detergent is preferable, especially for fine china, antique dishes or older dishes with silver or gold trim. However, most dishes are dishwasher safe. (Check when making your purchase. If in doubt, place one dish of a set in the dishwasher for several cycles to observe any changes in luster or whether design is changed in any way.) Dishwasher racks should be coated with rubber or plastic, the detergent should be mild, and the temperature should not exceed 140°F.

## Some Do's:

- Do rinse china before you wash it, especially if not washing dishes soon after use. Food and stains can affect the color over the years.
- Do place dishes gently into the dishwasher; china can scratch.
- Do stack plates with separating pads or a paper towel when storing.
- Do store cups on hooks or stacked no higher than two cups.
- Do warm your plates before use, if you wish, in a **warm** oven or in **warm** water, **never hot**.

## Some Don'ts:

- Don't allow coffee or other beverages to dry in cups; it is hard to clean.
- Don't scour china with scouring pads or powder.
- Don't rub aluminum or silver against the hard glaze; it often leaves metal marks that are hard to get off.
- Don't overload dishwasher racks. Dishes that rub against other items can be marred.

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Jenkins, Emyl. Appraisal Book. Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, NY. 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. "In Search Of the Perfect Dish." Consumer Reports. January, 1997.

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