

#1506 Whirlpool Creams and Sugars

The late 1930's were a time of shifting tastes. Interest in the colonial patterns had already flagged (although there were signs it might be reviving), and the very plain lines of Revere and Yeoman saw cutbacks, too. Art Deco, such a fresh breeze a decade earlier, was nearly spent. A new look was in order. Several new patterns came to market. Of these, a few made money for A.H. Heisey & Co. and endured until the factory closed its doors in 1957, and even beyond. #1506 Whirlpool, named by the company, was among those lucky few.

Before we get much further along, let's talk about the name. Many of you probably call this pattern Provincial, and that's just as good as Whirlpool. From 1938 until at least 1950, Heisey called the pattern Whirlpool. Truth be told, they tried another name at first. "Cameo" appeared in some ads, but it didn't stick, putting in only, ahem, a cameo appearance. The last catalog which uses the name Whirlpool is Catalog 31, dated September, 1950. A little over two years later, Catalog 32, dated January, 1953, shows the pattern as Provincial, but also carefully notes that it was formerly called Whirlpool. That was repeated in the company's last catalog, Catalog 33 of 1956, so they never completely let loose of the old name.

Apparently, some wished they would.

The tale is told that the name change wasn't altogether to appeal to customers' tastes or to reposition the pattern in the market. When Whirlpool was first named, the company president was E. Wilson Heisey, "Wils" if you want to get familiar. In 1942, Wils died and was succeeded by his brother Clarence. Brother Clarence had a streak of flamboyance and, evidently, another of irreverence. Giving in to an impulse that his more strait-laced brother repressed, Clarence is said to have repeatedly referred to the pattern as "Cesspool." Aghast salesmen knew this would not do, and a new name was born. Some folks just can't take a joke.

Imperial made the pattern only under the Provincial name (serious folks, they). Since Heisey used the Whirlpool name for most of its history, I have fallen into the habit of using Provincial for the Imperial product and Whirlpool for the Heisey product. You could argue that the Limelight pieces are all Provincial. But it really isn't a point for argument. Either name will work fine. Unless your humor is warped like old Clarence's.

Whirlpool fascinates with optical effects, something it has in common with its contemporary, Crystolite. They also share the odd little fact that Heisey flirted with inserting hyphens in both names early in their careers.

While Crystolite uses large, smooth ribs to gather the light and release it in brilliant bursts, Whirlpool invites you to look through it and see the large eyes gathered up into great bunches of smaller ones that shift with every movement.

Another thing the two patterns share is handles. We've seen how early in Crystolite's development, it adapted Stanhope's famous handles with their open centers for Plascon knobs, morphing them into solid glass disks. That was on the round, #1503 1/2 creams and sugars, not the more common oval ones. The round set didn't last long in the catalog. But the same idea was applied to Whirlpool creams and sugars. Here, those disk-shaped handles made even more sense, since they echo the large eyes that dominate the pieces. They stuck around for quite a while, too. In #1506 Whirlpool, Heisey had a winner.

What the two patterns didn't share was their style. Crystolite was resolutely Art Moderne. Whirlpool, with its gently scalloped top and large bull's eyes, hearkened back to 19th century design. (So maybe Provincial wasn't such a bad name, after all.) Even those handles I just mentioned served Whirlpool well in this capacity. How often do you see the same design element in Art Deco, Art Moderne and Early American?

There are two sets of creams and sugars in Whirlpool. The regular size was simply called footed cream and sugar in the catalogs. Three rows of large eyes, eight in each row, circle the cream and the sugar. The bottom row of eyes becomes more like honeycomb cells, compressed to flare out as an 8-petaled foot. The bottom of the foot is concave, and here you will nearly always find the Diamond H, although it may look a little smudgy at times. As far as I've seen, the bottom is always simply fire-polished. That may not hold true for sets produced by Imperial. I have seen other Imperial pieces of Provincial, such as the tumblers and sodas footed like the cream and sugar, with ground bottoms where Heisey left them alone. I haven't knowingly seen Heisey by Imperial Provincial creams or sugars, so I don't know if Imperial may have ground some of their sets.

The regular size creams and sugars were carried in the Heisey price lists continuously from 1938 until the factory closing. They may not have been quite as popular as other patterns offered at the end, however. Catalog 33, which is organized quite a bit differently than earlier catalogs, has a section just for creams and sugars. It shows photos (instead of drawings), repeating several patterns shown more fully elsewhere in the catalog. But Provincial née Whirlpool is not among them.



The individual set was simply the larger set scaled down, with hardly any alteration in proportion at all. The individually sized ones were accompanied by a tray. In those price lists where Heisey sold the individuals as sets, they always included the tray, so you probably should, too, if you want to feel your set is complete. The tray carries the eye motif underneath, where it may seem more like bubbles. Fifteen of these eye-bubbles in four different sizes cover the bottom. Eighteen more surround the rim. Each of the two handles is made of pairs of solid glass balls. The tray's mark will be found beneath one of these handles. None of these pieces has grinding, being simply fire-polished.

The individual cream, sugar and tray were not made as long as the larger ones were. They were listed as late as 1945 but dropped by the next year. In 1949, they came back into production, but they were gone again by 1953's Catalog 32, never to return. If you insist on distinguishing between Whirlpool and Provincial, you can say that the individual creams and sugars were never made under the Provincial name.

Whirlpool was made only in crystal for most of its time with Heisey. In Catalog 33 we find several Provincial-formerly-Whirlpool pieces in its Limelight listing. The regular sized cream and sugar were in that list, but not the individual sized pieces. Limelight was given to color shift, so you will find different shades of it. Something to keep in mind when buying a Limelight set of cream and sugar.

When Imperial took over Heisey's production, they seemed ambivalent about the pattern. A lot of Provincial was considered discontinued at first. But in 1961, Imperial resumed producing many of the Provincial pieces, including the regular sized cream and sugar. Eventually, they produced the set in crystal, Amber, dusky purple Heather, and olive-green Verde, ending Provincial production in 1971. Many of these will be marked with the Diamond H and are often offered as Heisey pieces.

The colored pieces, of course, will be easy to tell when they are Imperial. The crystal ones take a little more

work. Look for rippling in the glass or rough seams as possible indicators of Imperial products, but that can't be taken as a sure thing—either company had good days and bad ones. Ultraviolet (standard long-wave fluorescent) will usually show Heisey as glowing fairly strong yellow-green and Imperial as faintly yellow-green or with a milky white glow. The newer LED ultraviolet lights, which are at a different wavelength than fluorescent bulbs, can give false readings, since they will cause Imperial crystal glass to glow yellow-green, too, and only a little differently than Heisey.

Whirlpool hardly needs decoration. For once, the decorating companies seem to have agreed. Anyway, how would you work that uneven surface? Heisey knew to leave well enough alone. Other than a bit of etching on the bases of candlesticks, they evidently didn't touch a piece of Whirlpool once it had cooled down. I don't think I have ever seen a decorated Whirlpool cream or sugar. If you have, I'd like to know what they did to it—I mean, how they enhanced it.

Vital Statistics

Cream: Height (highest point on spout), 3 7/8"; width (side to side), 3 3/8"; length (handle to tip of spout), 5". Diameter of base, 2 1/4".

Sugar: Height, 3 3/8"; width, 3 1/2"; length (handle to handle), 5 5/8". Diameter of base, 2 1/2".

Individual cream: Height (highest point on spout), 2 3/4"; width (side to side), 2 3/8"; length (handle to tip of spout), 3 5/8". Diameter of base, 1 3/4".

Individual sugar: Height, 2 1/2"; width, 2 3/8"; length (handle to handle), 4". Diameter of base, 1 5/8".

All creams and sugars: Fire-polished bottom. Marked, underside of bottom.

Tray: Length (including handles), 7 1/4"; width, 3 3/4"; height (at sides), 5/8"; height (at handles), 1 1/8". Fire-polished bottom. Marked, beneath one handle.

Team Whirlpool or Team Provincial? Let the discussion begin, at heisey@embarqmail.com.

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