

#1590 Zodiac sugar and cream

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Clarence Heisey had an idea. Sometime around 1946, he called Horace King into his office. Horace, as you probably know, designed pieces for several patterns of the 1940's and early 1950's, such as Plantation, Waverly, and Cabochon. These are designs of their time; they *look* like they came from the 1940's. But Clarence had another thing on his mind. He was looking at a large #1238 Beehive plate, the 14-inch size. You know the one, the near-copy of a busy, lacy Boston and Sandwich 1840's pattern. He handed the plate to Horace and asked him to come up with some new fanciful pattern that incorporated the scalloped edge and the stippled background. This was not at all like a 1940's design. Horace was unthrilled.

He knew that for such a large plate, twelve sides was about right. Horace credits his young daughter with realizing that a twelve-sided plate was just the ticket for displaying all the signs of the zodiac. A large plate in the new pattern was made. Both Clarence and his chief salesman, Rod Irwin, liked the plate so much that they asked the still unenthused Horace to design more pieces. A couple hundred new drawings would be needed. Horace groaned. At least it was job security. By January of 1949 the Zodiac line expanded to include many pieces and got the full Heisey sales treatment. Two of the new pieces were the sugar and the cream.

Both pieces sit on low stems, similar to the ones seen on #5024 Oxford, #5086 Plantation Ivy, or a few others. The body of each is six-sided, so the set has twelve sides in total. Each side displays one of the zodiac signs, both a small astrological symbol and a larger classical figure, set in an ornate frame or medallion. The frame itself swims on the sea of stippling that Clarence had

asked for. A vaguely floral motif runs around the bottom of the bowl and up each angle. The handles appear to represent crashing waves, which may be a carryover from other Zodiac pieces that place Jupiter in his stormy aspect in the center. The cream shows the first six zodiac signs, proceeding in order around the sides, with the sugar picking up the remaining six. The elaborate design looks very much like something that could have come from the 1840's. After such energetic excess, it's a bit of a letdown—or relief, perhaps—when one gets to the plain, circular foot.

The utterly flat rim of the sugar practically begs for a cover. None, however, seems to have been designed for the Zodiac sugar, so you can quit looking for one now. Both sugar and cream were moulded as single pieces, body, handle, stem and foot all in one operation. Fresh from the mould, the foot would have been cupped. The cup foot likely would have been flattened by machine, with the only hand tooling being a little tweak to the cream spout. There was no grinding, just routine fire polishing. They needed to keep it simple because the design was difficult to remove from the moulds, slowing down production. Since Zodiac sugars and creams were priced the same as Crystolite, Whirlpool, or Lariat sets, all faster to make, the profit margin would have been less on Zodiac.

Heisey made the set only in crystal. They didn't make it very long. The cream and sugar, along with nearly all the Zodiac pattern, disappeared from the catalog by September of 1950. Imperial re-issued the sugar and cream, using crystal, Amberglo, and Verde. (Other Zodiac pieces were made in other Imperial colors.) Imperial

re-introduced the pattern in 1969, just about the time that many of a certain age were sure that Jupiter's aligning with Mars signaled the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. I don't recall beaded and bell-bottomed crowds celebrating the New Age by thronging the glass and china counters in their local department stores. Imperial, like Heisey before, may have misjudged its customers. They dropped Zodiac in 1970. If love was going to steer the stars, it had to do it without the benefit of Horace's design.

By 1969, Imperial was no longer using the Diamond H, preferring their IG mark instead. In theory, at least, any Zodiac piece marked with the <H> is a Heisey product, but testing with a UV light wouldn't hurt. The <H>, if present on the sugar or cream, will be found at the top of the stem, right beneath the bowl.

One would think that such a bumptious pattern would not, could not harbor any decorations. For the most part, one would

be right. Obviously, there is little room for cuttings or etchings. But I have seen Zodiac stemware with flashed-on ruby color covering the medallions and the rim above, much like the ruby souvenirs of fifty years earlier. Who knew anyone was doing that in mid-century? An out-of-its-time treatment for an equally anachronistic design. Ruby may have been applied to the sugar and cream.

Vital Statistics:

Sugar: 3³/₄" high, 5³/₈" wide (handle to handle), 2⁷/₈" wide (front to back). 2³/₄" diameter foot.

Cream: 3³/₄" high (excluding spout), 4⁷/₈" wide (spout to handle), 2⁷/₈" wide (front to back). 2³/₄" diameter foot.

Clarence had an idea. Horace had an idea. I bet you've had an idea. Pass it along to me at heiseyglass@gmail.com.

