

353 MEDIUM FLAT PANEL ASH TRAY NEST

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In the Heisey Newsletter of October, 2010, you'll find a reprint of the June, 1927, issue of Table Talk, the Heisey Company's newsletter to its dealers. That issue touted the effectiveness of their bridge contest; big letters at the head of the article reminded dealers that the contest "Proves People Are Reading Heisey Advertisements." On the same spread were a number of quotes from prize winners, with an introduction mentioning the prizes. Men and women received different prizes, each woman getting a set of salad plates of an unstated pattern, and each man receiving a "nest of ash trays."



Figure 1



Figure 2

It isn't hard to surmise the pattern of the ash trays given away. In 1927, Heisey was possibly producing only one set of nested ash trays, and that was a three-piece set included in 353 Medium Flat Panel. For you users of the Vogel books, you won't find the Medium Flat Panel set there. You can, however, see an illustration of the set in Catalogue 102 (ca. 1924). This seems to be the only time they were illustrated. By 1929, they no longer appeared in a price list. I've included photos of the set nested (Fig. 1), and separated (Fig. 2).

Rather than calling these additions to 353 a "nested ash tray set," Heisey labeled them as an "ash tray nest," a slightly unusual turn of phrase. The 1186 Yeoman ashtray set is the only other one that might be called nested and only the large ashtray shows up regularly in that set. There are other patterns where ashtrays come in more than one size, but they were not designed to nest. This set clearly was designed to fit together. They are beautifully scaled, not only in width, but also in height. In the set before me, at least, the tops of the larger two perfectly align when nested; the smallest one is slightly raised.

To our eternal frustration, Heisey sometimes threw unlikely companions together under one pattern. Few people confronted with these ash trays for the first time would immediately think, "Oh, those must be Medium Flat Panel." Seasoned collectors must just shrug and mutter, "Whatever." The strongly incurved sides are unique, not only within pattern 353, but across Heisey glass in general. Early researchers sometimes counted sides to guess pattern affinity, but that wouldn't have helped here. These are 8-sided, whereas there are plenty of other 353 items with other numbers of sides, none of which resemble these ash trays. Nonetheless, Heisey assigned that number to them and illustrated them with the more usual pieces of the pattern.

These deeply scalloped pieces are not obviously ash trays. There being no rim rests, one merely propped the item being smoked as best one could on the piece. Of course, there are other Heisey ash trays that share this trait. Without the rim rest, one could just as easily think of these as candy dishes, dresser organizers, or pin trays. No doubt some owners did use them for other things.

In Catalog 102, the large tray is shown by itself; the two smaller ones appear only in the nest of trays in a separate illustration. Evidently, Heisey anticipated selling the large one singly more often than either of the smaller sizes and this seems borne out by availability now. While none of them are especially common, one does encounter the large tray by itself now and then; the sets are much harder to find. I have never seen either of the smaller ones offered singly, but that just may be me.

The glass in these ash trays is thinner than in many

Heisey pressed items, about 3/16" thick. Compare the thickness of, say, the 434 ash tray, a generous 9/16". A nested set of such thick glass would have required much larger individual pieces. The catalogue is silent on their bottom treatment. Unsurprisingly for thinner glass, some are fire-polished, such as the single large one illustrated here. However, each one in the nested set shown here is ground and polished on the bottom. Certainly, grinding helps the nested set fit solidly together. Pieces sold singly could do without grinding, and the thinner glass is an incentive to avoid it. Based on the items I've seen, my guess is that the large ones sold singly were usually fire-polished.

Some pieces were decorated by one of the anonymous decorating houses that existed at the time. The nested set illustrated here is flashed with a completely covering coppery carnival coating (Editor's Note: The set we have in the Museum has an amber stain that is then cut to clear with a beautiful floral cutting). The large single (Fig. 3) has a grey cutting of a schoolhouse and tree. The cutting wittily uses the Diamond H as a window of the schoolhouse (Figure 4). In our own collection, at least, this is the only time I've seen an incidental feature of a Heisey piece incorporated into decoration. This piece was found in Canada, but I don't know whether the cutting originated there.

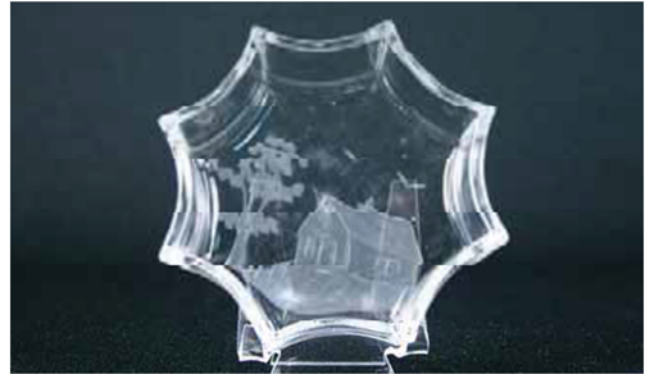


Figure 3



Figure 4

Vital Statistics

Large tray—Width (point to point), 5"; Height, 1 1/4"

Medium tray—Width: 4 1/4"; Height, 11/16"

Small tray—Width, 3 5/8"; Height, 1"

Isn't "nest" a heart-warming word? Which Heisey warms your heart? Tell me so I can feel warm and fuzzy, too, heisey@embarqmail.com.