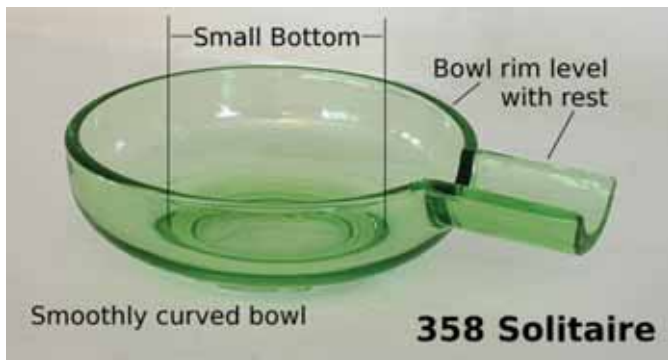


358 Solitaire

Eric Tankesley-Clarke



How gregarious is your glass?

Barware is usually designed with groups in mind. Heisey would gladly sell tumblers and shot glasses by the barrelful. Decanters often came with sets of four, six, or more cocktails, tumblers, sodas, or what have you. “The more the merrier” surely had its strongest proponents in cocktail-fueled gatherings. Think the 522B Cocktail Party etching. At the very least, Heisey anticipated there would be at least two for drinks. Think the 9013 You, Me, Us etching.

Smoking is frequently seen as a more solitary activity. “What is sadder than drinking alone?” you hear people say. But no one says that about smoking. Sure, you could smoke in a crowd (back in the days of Heisey ash trays, if not always now). But no one faulted you for doing it alone, either. There is even something romantic, or at least romanticized, about retiring from the festivities for a contemplative smoke. Heisey was there to help.

The 358 Solitaire ash tray (the name was supplied by later researchers) amplified that solitude. The 357 Duck ash tray, the first numbered in this series that Heisey produced in the late 1920’s, took some basic shapes and functions and dressed them up in duckified garb. Its liveliness so invited comment that it was positively noisy. In contrast, Solitaire took two basic shapes, put them together—and

stopped there. Its simplicity discouraged garrulous chatter and emphasized the calm of being alone.

Even though the Duck ash tray has only one cigarette rest and really isn’t that much larger, it is identified in Catalog 109 only as an ash tray. Solitaire is specifically called an individual ash tray.

Take a look at the page out of Cat. 109 that showed so many ash trays. As I’ve mentioned before, that page is not in the copies of the catalog that have been reprinted. But it is in the Bredehoft color era book (the blue-covered one), on page 259. It is also in Vogel III, pg. 26. There is hardly a plainer piece than a Solitaire ash tray. A simple, rounded bowl sits on a slightly raised base. From the side, a plain, half-pipe shaped cigarette rest lets you know the purpose of this little piece. The glass, utterly smooth, takes no unexpected turns, curves, or corners. The thickness is virtually the same throughout the piece. Even though Solitaire is contemporary with Art Deco, there is scarcely a nod in that direction. Perhaps the simplicity itself is enough. Taken out of context, however, I doubt that someone unfamiliar with Heisey’s production history would see this as a Deco piece.

Just as you would expect, Solitaire is available in colors. It was made over long enough time (about 1928-1938) that you can find it in Moongleam, Flamingo, Marigold, and Sahara, as well as crystal. It has even been seen in that rare shade of Marigold known as Gold. It is reported to be unmarked, and the few I have seen have not had marks. The slight rim on which the ash tray sits is ground and polished, leaving a slightly concave bottom. It is surprising that a mark seldom was placed there. The Bredehoft book notes that it is “not usually” marked, so you may be lucky enough to have one that is the exception.

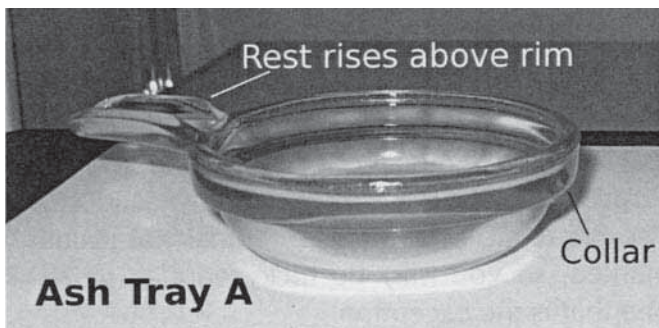
In keeping with 358 Solitaire’s simplicity, it is not decorated. At any rate, I haven’t seen it with any or even seen references to decorations on it. It

wouldn't be too surprising, though, if it were to be found with very simple cuttings or maybe a little metallic edging.

At this point, I'd normally be drawing to a close. However, no such luck today. There appear to be at least two look-alike ash trays. I can't say who made them. It isn't as though I have a restraining order. I just don't know. The look-alikes are similar enough that they have fooled more than one Heisey collector, so it seems worth the time to explore them a little.

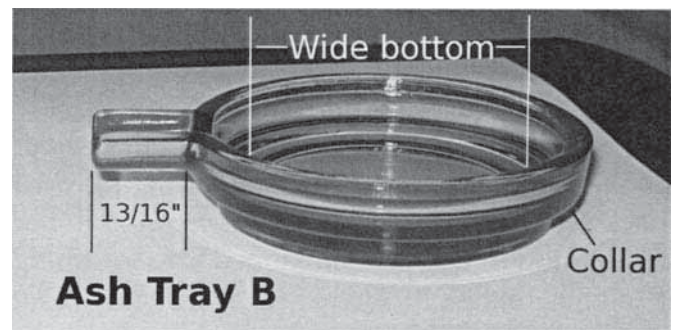
Someone generously shared with me photos of the two of them. I'd call them impostors (the ash trays, not my benefactor), but that is misleading. Who knows which one was made first, and whether one company copied from another or not. So let's just call them Ash Tray A and Ash Tray B.

Measurements are going to be important here, so I'll mention the key measurements of the genuine 358 Solitaire first. They'll be summarized at the bottom of the article, too, for convenience, so you can put down your highlighter. Solitaire has a bowl that is 3" across the top. The outer diameter of the ground ring beneath is about 1 5/8". The cigarette rest is 1" long, for a total width of 4". The example in the photo is just shy of 1" high. The usual vagaries of handmade glass, what with the handling, cooling, grinding, and mould wear, could make some of these measurements slightly different on other examples of Solitaire.



Let's consider the larger look-alike first. That's Ash Tray A. It comes in at least green and pink, and both colors look disturbingly like Moongleam and Flamingo. The general shape of a round bowl

with a projecting cigarette rest is similar, so confusion is quite understandable. Ash Tray A is 3 3/8" in diameter across the top of the bowl, as opposed to the 3" of Solitaire. That may not sound like much, but it really makes a difference. That means Ash Tray A is more than 25% larger than the genuine Solitaire. That may just be enough to make Ash Tray A look "off" when you are on the hunt. If you don't have a ruler handy, there are a couple of other significant differences. In Solitaire, the cigarette rest is on the same level as the bowl of the ash tray; that is, the entire top is level, so that if you turned the ash tray upside-down, it would lie flat. The cigarette rest of Ash Tray A rises above the rim of the bowl; turn the ash tray upside-down, and it would lie at an angle. You could even make a nice mnemonic out of that. If it isn't on the level, it isn't Heisey. (However, you can't say that if it is on the level, it is Heisey. See below.) The look-alike also has a broad, thick collar around the bowl; imagine the reinforced rims you see on clay mixing bowls. Solitaire's bowl is completely smooth with no thickened rim or collar.



Then there is Ash Tray B. I'm told the glass quality is as good as Heisey's. The top diameter is 2 15/16". Well, that's no help, either, because that's nearly the diameter of Solitaire, too close, really, to say they are different. But it also has a wide, reinforcing collar around the bowl, which Solitaire doesn't have. Another big difference is that the shape is more squat. The bowl of Solitaire is gently rounded to curve toward that comparatively small bottom of 1 5/8". Solitaire's bottom is barely half the size of its top. The bottom of Ash Tray B is 2 1/2" across, only half an inch smaller than its top. This makes the shape of Ash

Tray B more like a skillet than a bowl. The cigarette rest itself is stubbier on Ash Tray B, only 13/16" long. Because the top of the cigarette rest is at the same level as the top of the bowl, turning Ash Tray B upside-down won't help you distinguish it from Heisey's Solitaire—except that you'll see that broad bottom. Ash Tray B comes in pink, which apparently looks close enough to be taken for Flamingo. Given the popularity of green at this time, I wouldn't put it past the makers of Ash Tray B to have made it in green, too.

On the whole, you can always recognize Solitaire because of the complete simplicity of its design. All on a level, no collars, smoothly curved shape. If it isn't all on a level, it isn't Heisey. If it has a collar, it isn't Heisey. If it is not smoothly curved, it isn't Heisey. From the standpoint of design integrity, Heisey wins the competition easily. Where other companies frequently couldn't resist taking a perfectly good shape and adding a frill here, a furbelow there, Heisey truly excelled at making clean, elegant, simple designs, and that makes me suspect that theirs was the original. On the other hand, it just could be that someone from A. H. Heisey & Co. picked up one of the others at Woolworth's and thought, "We could do better than that."

Vital Statistics

358 Solitaire individual ash tray

Diameter, 3" at the top, 1 5/8" at the bottom;
Width, 4" across including the cigarette rest;
Height, 15/16" ; polished concave bottom. Not usually marked.

Is Heisey hunting a solitary sport for you? Or do you prefer to take a gaggle of friends with you? Let me know your best hunting stories at heisey@embarqmail.com.