

#439 Fatima Individual Ash Tray

Eric Tankesley-Clarke

I was rummaging through our Heisey collection the other day —What? You don't rummage in your Heisey? Then you're missing part of the fun of having it. Anyway, here I was rummaging around, looking for ideas for another smoking gear article. That's when I landed on Fatima. Fortunately, she didn't complain too much.

The #439 Fatima ash tray is first mentioned in a typewritten addition to Price List 206 (about 1923), and makes its first illustrated catalog appearance in Catalog 102 (about 1924). Production continued until about 1937. The last illustration of it appears in Cat. 211 (seen in Vogel, Volume 3, and also in the Bredehoft blue book covering color). By the time Cat. 212 was published, #439 had been dropped. Despite around 14 years of production, Fatima is not seen that frequently. Part of the reason may be that this ash tray is not marked and so this little slab of glass goes unrecognized as the noble product of Heisey that it is.

As with many of these ash trays during this period, the name was chosen by researchers later on, not by Heisey.

At first this choice puzzled me. When I see the name, I want to stress the first syllable (FAT-i-ma), as in the Portuguese apparition honored in many Catholic churches as Our Lady of Fátima. Why on earth, I wondered, did this suggest itself as the name for a piece of smoking gear? As I've mentioned before, I am not a smoker. Nevertheless, I grew up when tobacco advertising was all around. So you might think I'd have heard of the Fatima brand of cigarettes. But you'd think wrong. A bit of quick research revealed that the Fatima cigarette brand was an old one, a prominent radio sponsor in the 1940's, and sold by Liggett & Myers until about 1980. And that it is pronounced fa-TEE-ma. Presumably, she is the veiled Turkish woman on the package, embodying the Turkish tobaccos that went into the original blend. Not quite believing the sources I'd found, I even dug up a few old Dagnet radio ads and listened to them. They proved the point and induced a mild state of nostalgia while I was at it. Not that I want to get emotional about it. Just the facts, ma'am.



#439 Fatima Individual Ash Tray, Moongleam

Now we know how to say it. ("What's this 'we'?" I hear more knowledgeable tobacciana collectors saying.) What about the ash tray itself? While called an individual ash tray, Fatima has two cigarette rests, side by side. Several other individual ash trays have multiple rests, but they are usually arranged around the sides. I always assumed that was so there would always be a rest pointed more or less in your direction whenever you chose to put your cigarette down. Perhaps Fatima was for side-by-side smokers, or to give a place to rest an expired butt while moving on to a fresh cigarette.

The ash receptacle is scooped out cylindrically, rather than spherically. (My geometry teacher would be so proud.) The shape is obvious in the Cat. 102 illustration, but not so clear in the Cat. 109 one. The bottom is ground and polished completely flat. The photo with this article gives the illusion of a concave bottom but that is just internal reflection of the ash receptacle. The sides are also ground and polished, a finer point not often seen in other little ash trays.

Grinding and polishing was expensive, especially when more than the bottom was involved. Fatima's price reflects that. In 1933, the much larger and heavier #366 Salem wholesaled at \$5.80 per dozen, either crystal or Moongleam. Its more intricate shape may have made it harder to get out of the mould, which also would have contributed to the cost. #365 Rhombic, again much bigger than Fatima, was \$5.00 per dozen. One ash tray nearly the same size as Fatima, the #358 Solitaire, was only \$2.00 per dozen. Fatima herself, dainty and small though she was, taking little glass and surely easy to un mould, commanded an eye-popping \$8.00 per dozen—it took a lot less to make eyes pop back then. Only the massive White Owl, the complicated Irwin, and one other ash tray combo got more. That may be another reason #439 isn't seen that often; sprucing up with extra polishing priced her out of the market. Fatima may have been small, but Heisey still took pride in making it the best it could be.

Bredehoft reports that Fatima "usually has a full ground and polished bottom" which implies there are unground specimens out there. If the bottom isn't ground, then the sides probably aren't either. Perhaps Heisey did offer it fire-polished only as a less expensive alternative. The price lists I have are silent about that, but the illustration for Cat. 211 does go out of its way to say the ash tray was "cut." Either way, #439 Fatima is not easy to find.

I did say Fatima was available in color. But not much, as it turns out. It is found only in crystal and Moongleam. Find either one and you're halfway there to a complete set. I will guess that Moongleam is harder to find than crystal, since most price lists don't show anything but crystal listings for Fatima. I am not aware of any other colors.

There is at least one look-alike, so nearly the same size that the difference is trivial. In one example, it was ever so slightly taller and broader than #439 Fatima; in another, just a tad smaller. The look-alike's finish is coarser, especially in the ash receptacle. The examples I have seen have the frosted silhouette of an elephant on the bottom.

Now it's time to plunder pillage thoughtfully contemplate the collection again for a new idea. Oh, who I am I kidding. I'm going to get right in there and ransack the shelves.

Vital Statistics

#439 Fatima individual ash tray: Length, 3"; width, 1½"; height, 9/16". Ground bottom. Unmarked. Crystal or Moongleam.

Some say "po-tay-to," some say "po-tah-to." (Does anyone really say "po-tah-to"?) What's your favorite Heisey mispronunciation? Let's hear about it at heisey@embarqmail.com.