

# Domino Sugars

When I was six or eight years old and playing with my double-six set of dominos, I had no idea they were shaping things to come. Surely, those carved dragons on the back sowed seeds of my adult interest in classical Chinese art. I had great fun laying the pieces end to end in never-repeated patterns. This possibly led to an appreciation for Dorothy Parker, who famously remarked, "If all the girls who attended the Yale prom were laid end to end, I wouldn't be a bit surprised." Though I may have become the intimate of dragons and a friend of Dorothy, how could I know that the very word "domino" would take on such different meanings for me later?

"Domino" the word has had a torturous path. From Latin "master" to monks to the hoods they wore to Venetian Carnevale masks to the tile game to sugar bricklets to the containers that held them, it's an involved story. It reminds you of the child's game where you start a sentence around the room and each little kid whispers into the ear of the next until you hear what comes out at the end. The end has little to do with the beginning and hilarity ensues.

Heisey had its own sense of hilarity, making several domino sugars that look as though they belong together in one pattern, but stringing them out over four pattern numbers so they could sit back and laugh at future collectors trying to make sense of it. Heisey offered six different domino sugar trays. Well, let me rephrase that. Heisey made seven different trays that held domino sugars, but they used the term "domino" for only six of them. The seventh is so different from the rest of the trays that I will hold it for another article. But six of them clearly had a lot in common so we'll stick to them for the rest of this piece. Regardless of the pattern number, these six pieces share broadly fluted sides as a major design element. They seem so closely related to each other that I decided to take them all at once as a group rather than splitting them out in separate pattern articles. That's why you see little or no mention of them in earlier articles on #354 Wide Flat Panel (December, 2011, and February, 2013) or #355 Quator (December, 2010).

Some of the Heisey domino sugar trays or holders appeared around 1910 or 1911. Heisey first applied for a domino patent in 1912, and two more patents over the next two years. The Domino Sugar Co. supposedly introduced individually wrapped sugar "tablets" in 1916, but they must have been around sometime before then. So it isn't clear whether domino sugar was already popular and Heisey was providing suitable holders for it, or whether the sugar company was indulging in

cross-over marketing of a new product by encouraging Heisey. (Sugar was a big deal commercially. The predecessor of Domino, the American Sugar Co., was one of the original companies included in the Dow Jones average.)

Nowadays, we think of individually wrapped sugar as almost strictly for restaurants. Around the time of the domino sugars, a time when "correctness" was paramount and formality revered, advertisements showed the homemaker that the well-appointed table should use sugar in cubes or dominos. Leafing through the pages of *Ladies' Home Journal* or *Woman's Home Companion*, the housewife might see the #354 Wide Flat Panel or #355 Quator dominos filled with the little wrapped ingots, invitingly placed in a genteel setting. If anything, the #393 Narrow Flute footed domino was seen in ads even more often. No doubt the dominos were sold to hotels and restaurants, too, but they certainly weren't the only market.

As we so often do, we can turn to Catalog 75 to get started. In that hefty book there are drawings of three different pieces for domino sugars. #354 Wide Flat Panel is represented by two domino trays (one of them patented), and #393 Narrow Flute by one (also patented). Hard on its heels, Catalog 76 shows us the other three dominos, one in #355 Quator and two in #394 Narrow Flute, all three covered by design patents. Even though these last three were not pictured in Catalog 75, they are listed in Price List 175, the price list which accompanied the catalog. Five of the six dominos were made through at least 1924, and some for several years longer. None of them appear in Catalog 109 or Price List 209 (1929 or so), but a handwritten note in a copy of Price List 210 mentions the Quator domino, and one pattern was made in color. All told, then, most production was probably over by about 1928, but sales, at least, lasted into the early 1930's. (There is always the possibility that handwritten note was to help get rid of old stock on hand.)

#354 Wide Flat Panel is one of two patterns that includes two dominos. The more common Wide Flat Panel piece holds a single file of domino sugars and has a handle at the back. I always thought it looked something like a park bench. It was the first one patented and possibly the first one produced. It was the only domino sugar listed in Price List 164 (1910 or 1911). You can't look at it from just one angle and get the full effect, so Heisey took the unusual step of illustrating it three times on one page of Catalog 75. They show it front-ways, almost sideways so you can see the handle, and then again loaded up with domino sugar, just so you're sure to get the point.

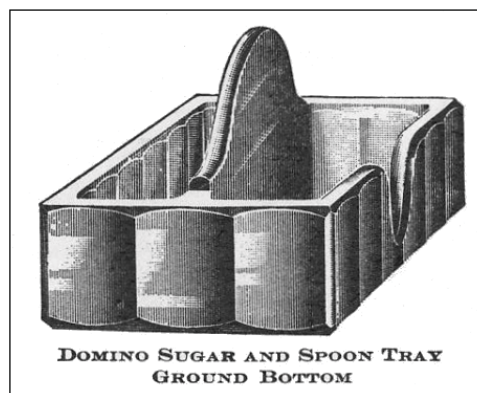
The single-file piece is hollow beneath the tray itself, with panels suitable to the Wide Flat Panel pattern skirting the piece all the way around. But then, they stick a Quator-style handle on the back. The thick bottom edge is all ground and polished. Underneath, right in the middle of the tray, is the Diamond H mark. At least some of these have a patent marking, too. Unlike most patent notices, however, this one is nearly hidden rather than being put out in plain view. Turn the sugar tray over and look inside the bottom in the sharpest fold. Right where the handle joins, you'll see "PAT'D 10/8/12" although the date may be hard to make out. It's almost impossible to see the patent marking when the tray is turned right side up. You occasionally see this domino with silver overlay, but more often it is undecorated.



#354 Wide Flat Panel Domino Sugar

The odd tray out in the entire domino group is the other Wide Flat Panel piece, a combination domino sugar and spoon tray. First of all, no other domino is a dual-purpose tray. Secondly, just try and find one. Despite several pleas, I have not found anyone who has this tray. There are at least two good reasons for that. First, this tray is shown only in Catalog 75. It does not appear anywhere else. At best, it was probably made for only a year or two. Second, it does not appear in any price list I have seen. Not one. Not even in Price List 175, the one that gives all the gory details of every piece in Catalog 75 and then some. Price List 175, and several others, too, have sections devoted to domino sugars.

Every single time, the section will list five different dominos, not six, and never the combination domino and spoon tray. Try looking in any other part of any of these price lists, and you won't find it there, either. Not in sugars. Not in miscellany. Not under #354. Not anywhere. Every price list from then until dominos were dropped completely lists the same five items, and never this one. I have never seen this situation for any other piece of Heisey I've ever researched. So it seems the combination domino and spoon tray never had much chance of selling. The illustration had to beguile a prospective customer into asking about it, because the price list certainly wasn't going to prompt a sale.



Why would A.H. Heisey & Co. bother to put a drawing in a catalog and then not even price the item? I suspect the explanation lies in timing. Heisey sometimes put things in price lists before they got illustrated in catalogs. That is just what happened with the #354 single-file domino, and also with the #355 Quator double-file and #393 Narrow Flute footed domino sugars. Presumably there are missing price lists between 164 and 175. It is possible one of them includes the #354 Wide Flat Panel combination tray. Catalog 75 may have been prepared with the intent of continuing the combination tray's production. But by then something about it—poor sales, difficulty in manufacture, or something else—caused the company to withdraw it after the layout for Catalog 75 was finished but before Price List 175 was printed.

Another possible explanation is that the piece was never made at all. The company might have changed its mind at the last moment. I doubt this last one, though. Generally, each catalog item seems to have been drawn from life. There was probably a real combination tray sitting in front of the artist as he sketched it. Moulds from that time often did not survive, so they can't help us decide.

If you are lucky enough to come across the combination tray, you will notice that the two sides are not identical. It's a little uncertain from the drawing whether the two sides are of equal width. The spoon side, however, is distinct because there is a cut-out on the side of the tray

to make picking up a spoon easier. The combination tray has a full ground bottom according to the catalog. If it is marked, which it very likely is, I will guess that the combination tray stands a good chance of being doubly marked, either on the inside bottom of each compartment or on the divider itself. Other locations are possible, of course. From the drawings, we can guess that the combination tray was about the same length as the one-handed piece.

#355 Quator also had a domino sugar. This one is two-sided, or double-filed. On that account, at least, it can't be confused with any of the others. There is really no connection, however, between the design of the Quator domino sugar and the rest of the pieces in the pattern. Once again, Heisey refused to be so predictable. If you really look at it, the #355 Quator domino has a Wide Flat Panel body with Narrow Flute handles. So, of course, you wouldn't want to put it in either of those patterns, would you?

Just like the Wide Flat Panel single-sided domino, the Quator double-sided domino has a hollow body; the panels skirt the bottom and are ground and polished on the bottom. This domino is double-marked, a Diamond H underneath each side of the tray.

The #355 Quator domino was patented 1/6/14. I haven't seen the patent date used on the piece itself. It wasn't until Catalog 76 that Heisey put the Quator domino in a catalog, but they kept illustrating it up through Catalog 102. Apparently it was available up until about 1933.



#355 Quator Domino Sugar

#393 Narrow Flute has an individual domino sugar, the only one that is footed. The short tray sits on a typical Narrow Flute stem and foot. At the back they placed a handle, once again borrowing the Quator-style version rather than using the style usually seen in Narrow Flute.

An unusual feature of the Narrow Flute domino is the way the piece is finished. Every one I have seen has a puntied, ground and polished bottom, exactly like you see in the early candlesticks. I'm not sure why that should be. The catalogs and price lists never mentioned grinding or polishing for this piece. Narrow Flute



#393 Narrow Flute Domino Sugar

stemmed pieces with this kind of foot, such as goblets and the like, always have your ordinary, fire-polished foot, and the bottom of the foot is the typical place for finding the mark. Again, Heisey was toying with me. For the longest time, I never saw this domino with a mark. This led me to assume that the mark was on the bottom of the foot, just like in the other stems of the pattern, but that it was polished off when they ground the foot. I started asking around, and everyone else seemed to have marked dominos, with the mark placed up on the stem. Since then, it seems the marked ones are the only ones I can find, so I guess my early sightings were a fluke. Both examples in the photo are marked, and the eagle-eyed may be able to see the mark on the stem of the decorated one, right at the top of the stem. If you happen to have a #393 Narrow Flute domino that does not have a polished foot, I'd like to hear about it, and I'd like to know if there is a mark on the bottom.



The #393 Narrow Flute footed domino shows up in price lists all the way from 1913 through 1928, so was made at least 15 years, and probably a little longer. As seen in the photo, they were sometimes decorated, but most are found without.

#394 Narrow Flute is the last pattern in this group. Don't blame me for the same pattern name spread across two pattern numbers. For once, that is not some researcher at work, but Heisey's description of the two patterns. Not really a name, perhaps, but the old price lists use that description for both patterns. For Heisey, the line between descriptions of patterns and names of patterns was not very clear.

#394 adds two dominos to the list. (If Wide Flat Panel is a piece of outdoor furniture, then these two must be an overstuffed living room suite.) Both are tab-handled, flat pieces, one long, one short. The catalog says they have ground bottoms and usually they do, but not always. The long one is the only domino available in color. It can be found in Moongleam, Flamingo, and Sahara. I am not aware of an individual #394 in color. Both of them, however, were in production at least until 1930, so it might be possible that the individual sugar was made in color. Simple cuttings are found on these dominos from time to time.

The simple design for #394 Narrow Flute was protected by yet another patent, granted 6/2/14. Both sizes are often, perhaps always, marked "PATENT APPLIED FOR." Maybe to give broader protection, this design was patented simply as a "dish" rather than a sugar tray. Given that four out of the six dominos were patented, A.H. Heisey & Co. were obviously both proud and protective of these particular pieces.



#394 Narrow Flute Domino Sugars

Since we've gotten this far, I may as well tell you that the seventh domino, the one they called something else, is the #473 Narrow Flute with Rim loaf sugar. Besides looking much different, it has a companion cream. None of the other dominos do. See, I told you it doesn't really fit in. We'll get to it later, when I write about the #473 pieces all together.

The dominos add variety to the shapes in your typical sugar and cream collection. They give you a nice way to sift out your true collector friends from the merely polite onlookers; how often have you seen dominos identified as holders for business cards or spoons? Five of the dominos are common enough to give you a chance, but challenging enough to keep it interesting. As for that sixth one, that combination sugar and spoon tray, I'm determined to find it someday. Preferably decorated. With a dragon. Like dominos should be.

### Vital Statistics

As usual, measurements are of actual pieces. For the #354 combination sugar and spoon tray, however, measurements are estimated from the catalog illustration.

#354 Wide Flat Panel single-file, one-handled domino sugar—length, 6 1/8"; width at base, 2 1/8"; width including handle, 3 1/2"; height including handle, 2 3/4".

#354 Wide Flat Panel domino sugar and spoon tray—length, 6"; width, 3"; height of side, 1 1/4"; height to top of handle, 2 1/4".

#355 Quator double-file, two-handled domino sugar—length of body, 3 3/4"; length with handles, 5 7/8"; width, 3 3/8", height, 2 1/4".

#393 Narrow Flute individual footed domino sugar—length, 3 1/4"; height, 2 1/8"; depth from front of holder to back of handle, 3 1/8".

#394 Narrow Flute tab-handled domino sugar—length, 8 1/4"; width, 2"; height, 1 1/8".

#394 Narrow Flute individual tab-handled domino sugar—length, 4 7/8"; width, 2"; height, 1 1/8".

Usually marked. Usually ground and polished bottoms. All crystal except some #394 full-sized.

*For the ancient Chinese, dragons of all sorts were very real, even though never seen. How real is the combination domino and spoon tray? Help dispel the myths and tell me all about yours if you have one, at [heisey@embarqmail.com](mailto:heisey@embarqmail.com).*

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