

# Greek Key Jugs

## By Eric Tankesley-Clarke

Heisey catalogs are wonderful things. Page after page of beautiful designs, pieces seen and unseen. All those luxuriously spaced drawings done with almost photographic accuracy, "almost" being the operative word. One of the first whole-catalog reprints I owned was that of Catalog 75. It took a while to absorb. There are over 300 pages of illustrations, after all. Soon, though, some questions came up. One of them had to do with Greek Key. And it's because of some of those "almost" accurate drawings.

Cat. 75 was the first and only catalog to show the Greek Key line in so many pieces. It devotes two pages to jugs and one page to tankards. The tankards are simple enough. But it's those jug pages that have caused confusion for collectors. Two sets of jugs, two pattern numbers, and they look alike—almost. It took me a while to sort out what they were trying to show, and those same pages have troubled others, too.

Page 246 of Cat. 75 shows the jugs, four sizes, under #433. See Fig. 1. Turn over to p. 253 of the same catalog (Fig. 2) and there are four more jugs shown under #433½; they display only slight differences from the first set.

Are the differences real, or is it just two sets of drawings that don't quite match?

Examine the drawings closely and it appears likely that the jugs shown on the two pages were drawn by different people. For one thing, the shading techniques differ. The artist of the #433 jugs, for instance, showed the handles with subtle shading, whereas the artist who drew the #433½ jugs preferred more striking, sharper highlights and he put them in other places. (Each artist was responsible for individual drawings, not entire pages. One non-jug drawing was used twice on these pages. Right in the middle of the #433½ page, Heisey shows a #433 tumbler, clearly labeled as such, and it is the very same illustration as shown on the #433 page. The intent was probably to show the prospective buyer that, regardless of which jug



Fig. 1. Catalog 75, page 246



Fig. 2. Catalog 75, page 253

was being purchased, the same tumbler would do. I bet whoever drew the tumbler didn't get paid double.)

Two different artists will see details a little differently and that may have helped contribute to the confusion. For example, the bottoms of the #433½ jugs in the illustrations appear to be flatter than the ones in the #433 illustrations. Does that mean the bottoms were actually different, or was it just the way the artists saw them? The way the sides curve in #433, is that different from the sides of #433½? You look at the #433½ drawings for a while and then the #433 drawings and back again and your eyes begin to play tricks: are the sides of those #433½ jugs gently curved or are they straight?

Two different artists, but that doesn't prove anything. Are there two different sets of jugs or not? People have come to various conclusions.

Some have thought the difference was in the bottoms. Since the #433½ bottoms look flatter, some have decided they were ground and #433 jugs were not ground. I've looked at quite a few Greek Key jugs and I have never seen one that wasn't ground. This difference, at least, seems to be in the two artists' perceptions of their models. Anyway, the catalog and the price lists say both patterns are ground. As we well know from other patterns, that isn't a guarantee that bottoms were always ground. Furthermore, catalog captions sometimes were wrong. In this case, however, I think the captions are right and the production jugs were ground. I suppose there might be a few unground Greek Key jugs out there, but I've never known Heisey to give different pattern numbers based only on that. Besides, you have to be careful when considering unground bottoms. A piece meant for sale with an unground bottom would probably be fire-polished underneath. One that left the factory under more dubious circumstances and not really meant for production might have a rough, unfinished bottom. Any with unfinished bottoms wouldn't really count and certainly wouldn't have had their own pattern number. If any Greek Key jugs exist with unground bottoms, I don't think that explains the two different pattern numbers.

Others have concluded that there is no difference at all between #433 and #433½ and that all of them should be considered under one pattern number. But that seems odd; why would Heisey devote two expensive catalog pages practically next to each other to show different drawings of the same jugs? The differences in the drawings are small, but they are consistent. For instance, look where the handle joins the jug, right at the rim. All the #433 jugs look slightly flared; they make sharply acute angles with the handles. The #433½ jugs do not flare and so the handles do not hug the rim so tightly. The sides of the #433 jugs seem bowed gently inward. When you examine the drawings of the #433½ jugs, the sides seem more straight. The colonial panels of the #433½ jugs look more vertical, without an inward taper or bowing in. Do those differences mean anything? Or is this just a case of one artist seeing it differently from another? And if that is the reason, then why would Heisey have gone to the trouble of paying for two separate sets of drawings and labeling them with two different pattern numbers?

It wasn't until I spotted a real Greek Key jug looking—oh, I don't know—*odd*, that the mystery unraveled. Since then, I've been on the prowl for more examples. After several years of looking at Greek Key jugs wherever I encountered them, I have two conclusions: (1) the #433 jugs are distinct from the #433½ jugs, and (2) the #433½ jugs seem to be much less common, almost rare.

"Well, all right," you may be saying. "But show us the proof. So far it just sounds like speculation to me." Or you may think, "Are you just now figuring that out? I've known that for years." If you're in the first camp, you can call my bluff and read on. If you're in the second, you can call me a late bloomer and do as you like.



Fig. 3. Greek Key jugs #433 (left) and #4331/2

midsections that the difference becomes apparent. The jug on the right has completely vertical sides, from the panels all the rest of the way up. The jug on the left has sides that bow in and then, when they reach the upper band of Greek Key motif, they flare outward again. To eliminate distractions of the spout or the handle, I've included another photograph (Fig. 4) of the same jugs with the handles turned toward us. The jug on the left clearly shows the gentle curve of the sides.

The jug on the left is #433, the jug on the right is #433½. As you can see, the differences aren't great, but they are real. More importantly, the differences are exactly those that the drawings were trying to put across.



Fig. 4. The Same Greek Key jugs, handles facing Greek Key jugs

The differences also explain why Heisey used two different numbers. Especially when you see the two styles in person, you can tell that each needed a different mould. The "½" helped the factory and its customers to know when the straight-sided jug was meant, instead of the curved sided one.

A fair question to ask at this point is this: were two sets of moulds really necessary? It is easy enough to produce straight and flared versions of many pieces from the same mould with just a little shaping or tooling by hand or machine while the glass is still hot. But here, the whole body is shaped differently in ways that would have made routine tooling impractical at best. The #433 jugs show no signs of tooling to make them bow inwards; the shape of the panels is not distorted in any way. It wouldn't make sense to design a mould that produced only straight-sided jugs and then have to tool most of them to have the curve that we see in the #433 jugs. Fashioning a straight-sided #433½ jug from a #433 curved-sided mould makes even less sense. If the jugs were hand-tooled, you would expect to see some intermediate shapes, for example, some bowed in more than others. But you don't. They are always definitely bowed in and to the same degree, or not at all. Finally, tooling did not usually result in a different pattern

number. Just the fact that Heisey assigned two different numbers indicates the likelihood that two different sets of moulds were required to produce two different kinds of jugs.

In one regard, it does seem the artists of the two different patterns just didn't see things the same way. The actual bottoms of the two jugs are pretty much alike, both ground and polished, both swelling out in a smooth curve just below the lower Greek Key motif. In the drawings, the transition from side to bottom is drawn more sharply for the #433½ jugs. This is probably what gave rise to the notion that they were ground but #433 jugs were not. That sharp transition appears to be a matter of an illustrator's interpretation. In other parts of the catalog when showing a pattern that truly has a sharp edge between side and bottom the transition is drawn even more emphatically. The abruptness of the edge in the drawings of the #433½ jugs could even be the result of a layout artist cutting a little too close to the artwork! Whatever the cause, this is one place I think we can safely disregard apparent dissimilarities between the two sets of drawings.

All right, that's a few questions touched on. We've seen a pair of real examples of the two different kinds of Greek Key jugs, so we know they made them. It looks as though Heisey used two sets of moulds to produce them. And the bottoms seem to be the same, but the sides are not. We're left with another question—Why are #433½ jugs so hard to find? I think there are at least two reasons.

First, I'm guessing that contemporary buyers didn't see much reason to distinguish the two styles of Greek Key jugs and chose to ignore the #433½ jugs. That means there probably weren't that many of them made. Price List 175, the one that originally accompanied Cat. 75, lists both patterns. PL179 does not mention #433½ jugs, and I find no mention of them in any other price lists, either. It is likely that #433½ jugs were made for only a short time, no more than a year or two, perhaps even less. From their easy availability, the #433 jugs were obviously made over a longer time, although even they were gone by PL200 (1917). Since we have gaps in available price lists, the exact dates can't be certain, but I'm guessing the #433 jugs were made for at least five or six years and they must have been popular during much of that time.

Second, just as buyers probably didn't think the difference was worth their time, collectors may not have given them heed either. Think about it. There probably weren't very many #433½ jugs made, so most of the jugs have been the same, other than size, and there was no need to pay close attention. Even if a collector was looking for the differences, there has been confusion about what the two kinds looked like, what number to put on them, or even if two different styles existed. The odds are good that some mis-identified Greek Key jugs are scattered through some collections, lumped all together under one number or the other.

When you don't have handy pictures to compare, how do you know whether you're looking at a relatively common #433 jug or a much harder-to-find #433½? For one thing, the straight-sided panels of #433½ give it a stockier profile than the sweepingly curved #433. That was the "oddness" that first struck me about the #433½ jug when I saw one in real life. The flared tops of the #433 jugs are distinctive, too. Keep in mind, though, that the flared tops probably did involve some handwork, since #433 jugs have varying amounts of flaring at the tops. The combined gentle curve of the sides and flare of the top are most pronounced at the spout. Once you've seen the two jugs for yourself, you can tell they are not alike, even if you may not be able to describe it exactly. For whatever reason, the differences seem more pronounced on the real jugs than in the drawings. Out of countless Greek Key jugs examined, I have only seen a few examples of the #433½ jug, no more than three or four. Maybe you've been more lucky.

Before we leave Greek Key jugs altogether, I suppose I should address the name. I touched on it when I wrote about the #433 sugars and creams (April 2011). As do many collectors, I use "Greek Key" most of the time. There are those, however, who prefer to call it "Grecian Border." Is that the name that Heisey used? Well, let me answer that with a resounding "Maybe!" The phrase doesn't appear in catalogs or advertisements, at least not in any I have seen. The patent for the crushed fruit jar mentions "bands or borders of Grecian design" and another for a sherbet says a "Grecian band or border" will appear on it. But that doesn't really prove anything because pattern names weren't used in patents, anyway. The price lists are where "Grecian Border" is used. Even there, the term is used infrequently and ambiguously.

Price lists were organized by both piece and pattern number. If you were interested in a given pattern, there would usually be a section where all that pattern's pieces were listed together. Whenever all the #433 or #433½ pieces were listed together, only the number was ever used, never a pattern name. In other sections of the price lists, things were organized by piece rather than pattern. So, for example, if you were interested in goblets, you might find a list of many different patterns of goblets. It was in sections such as those where the term "Grecian Border" is found, but in context looking more like a description than a name, tacked on to other basic information about the particular piece. In these by-the-piece sections, the intent seemed to be "the pieces that have a Grecian Border" rather than "the Grecian Border pieces." Which is the same way it was used in the patents. (They did use "Grecian Border" in a price list subheading for plates at least once, but apparently that, too, was intended as a description rather than a name. Just a page over, the #1127 plates, the ones we know as Fine Tooth, have a subheading of "With Saw-tooth Bands" and that certainly doesn't look like a name.)

Throughout the price lists in which #433 and #433½ appear, A.H. Heisey & Co. was erratic about when they bothered to use the "Grecian Border" phrase at all, another indication they didn't see it as a name. During the time those patterns were being produced, the company rarely used names for any of their patterns. It's doubtful, however, they made a sharp distinction between descriptions and names. If calling #433 "Grecian Border" suits you then stick with it. At the very least, you know Heisey never used "Greek Key" as a description or a name for the pattern and you can chide the rest of us for straying from the company line.

*Chide if you must, but please don't resort to anything tawdry or tacky. Because that would just be chider cheese. Chiding may be sent to [heisey@embarqmail.com](mailto:heisey@embarqmail.com).*