

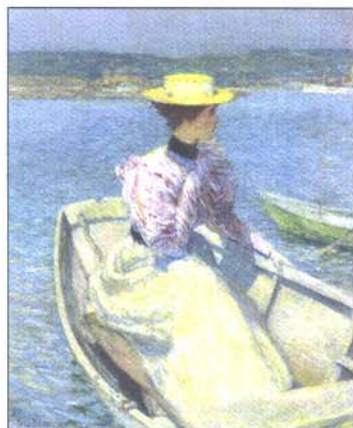


ANTIQUES ROADSHOWTM INSIDER

News, Trends, and Analysis from the World of Antiques and Collectibles

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ON THE LOOKOUT



HIGH PRICE OF HASSAM

A bidder at Sotheby's on Dec. 3 paid \$3.67 million for a 26 x 21-inch oil on canvas by Childe Hassam called *The White Dory, Gloucester*. The Impressionist work (above) features a woman—thought to be Hassam's wife Maud—sitting in a boat on shimmering waters. Hassam painted the work in 1895, when he “was at the height of his powers as an Impressionist,” as the Sotheby's catalog noted.



On the same day, Christie's sold a Hassam piece, *Rainy Day*, for \$782,000. The 24 x 18-inch oil on canvas (left) depicts a city street scene during a shower.

APPRAISER FAVES

The holiday season lives! In following up last month's cover story, we offer up several more pieces of favorite holiday-related art as chosen by *Antiques Roadshow* appraisers. See p. 3.

ON THE INSIDE

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A COOKIN' COLLECTIBLE

If you like your antiques sturdy, useful, durable, and affordable, consider cast-iron cookware.

By Don Fluckinger

The heyday of American cast-iron cookware production ran from the late 1800s up to about the 1950s. During that time, two companies in particular—Griswold Mfg. Co. of Erie, Pa., and Wagner Ware of Sidney, Ohio—were prolific in making cast iron pieces. Today, collectors actively chase skillets and other kitchenware from those firms along with a few others, including

Lodge, Wapak, John Wright, and—known particularly for its muffin pans—G.F. Filley.

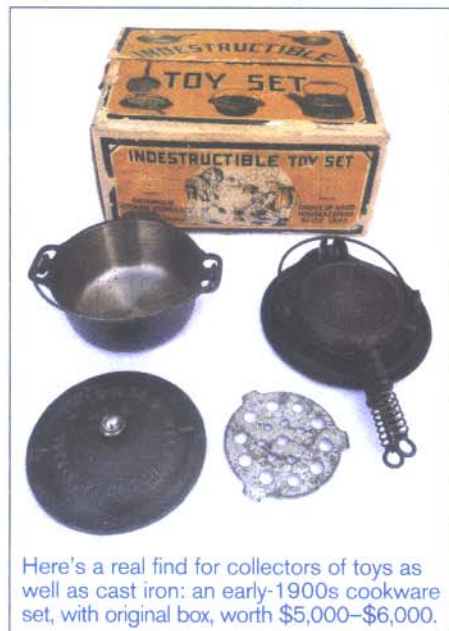
One major appeal of antique and vintage cast iron cookware is that most pieces cost less than \$50, with a good share under \$20. “You can pick up #8 skillets [10 inches in diameter] for \$10-\$20,” says Greg Stahl, a Clinton, Mass.-based collector and founder of the Wagner & Griswold Society, or WAGS.



Smaller and larger pieces of cast-iron cookware are more valuable than those in the middle. This tiny rarity, a Griswold #1, is worth \$3,000-\$5,000.

Another appeal of this collecting niche is that because it involves objects made of cast iron, many pieces survived the decades in very good condition.

Cont'd. on p. 13



Here's a real find for collectors of toys as well as cast iron: an early-1900s cookware set, with original box, worth \$5,000-\$6,000.



Don Fluckinger is a freelance writer based in Nashua, N.H. A longtime *Insider* contributor, he covered antique and vintage flashlights in our July 2009 issue and Pez dispensers in January 2009.



Cast-Iron Cookware

Cont'd. from p. 1

Plus, there's a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and forms within the category. Skillets, muffin pans, Dutch ovens, trivets, and coffee grinders rank as the most popular.

FIRING UP THE STOVE

People buy cast-iron cookware pieces not just for their decorative appeal but because of their usefulness. Collectors who cook with their skillets, Dutch ovens, and muffin pans often pass recipes back and forth and test them, says Stahl, whose collection numbers 2,000 pieces and counting. So prevalent is recipe-sharing at the WAGS online forum (see "Sources & Resources") that a commercial publisher recently approached the organization to develop a cookbook based on its members' "greatest hits."

"Every piece I have ever bought, I have used—something as cheap as a \$2 skillet up to a \$7,000 muffin pan," Stahl says. "I love to cook... and [with cast iron], quite

frankly, things just seem to taste better."

Experts say that old pieces truly are much finer than those counterparts produced today. Vintage pieces were hand-cast in sand; they're tantamount to works of commercial art. Modern pieces, by contrast, have rougher surfaces because today's mass-production methods can't match the quality control of early examples.

BEYOND SKILLETS

The single most popular cast iron collectible is the skillet. Both the very smallest (#0, for Griswold) and very largest (#20) can sell for high prices, topping \$10,000 on occasion, the prices driven by a combination of rarity and condition. Manufacturers made more of the most popular everyday sizes (imagine the 6- to 10-inch skillets you use in your home today) and fewer of the largest and smallest. Find one of the rare ones in unused condi-

Muffin pans are among the most popular targets for collectors of cast iron cookware. Pictured at left: a seven-cup W.C. Davis muffin pan. Pictured above: a Griswold #130 Turk head muffin pan.

tion, and it's a jackpot.

With skillets, the numbers represent the size. On other items, such as muffin or bread pans, they represent pattern or catalog numbers.

In fact, knowing the numbers is what separates the beginners from the experts. Recently, a Griswold #28 bread pan sold on eBay for \$15,000, and then re-sold to a private collector for \$25,000.

Muffin pans come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from traditional breakfast-muffin shapes to breadstick-style cornstalk shapes for corn muffins to hearts and stars and oval and rectangle and popover shapes.

Jon Haussler, an Alabama collector, started focusing on the niche of Griswold muffin pans around 15 years ago, when he began cataloging pieces in his own collection. During the course of his research, he realized he had more variations than were known to exist, so he wrote a book about them: the aptly titled *Griswold Muffin Pans* (Schiffer).

Muffin pan collectors gravitate to the most fully marked pieces, Haussler says. Early pieces may be unmarked, but as time passed, Griswold put the pattern number, trademarks, "Erie, PA," and other marks on its pans.

"There are 200-and-some variations of Griswold pans, and very few people have the means to collect them all—either a place to put them or the money to

Here's the bottom of the Griswold #1 skillet shown on p. 1.

ON THE LOOKOUT

CONDITION ISSUES

The following factors make a cast-iron piece less desirable to a collector: **hairline cracks** (check skillet handles carefully); **pitting**; **warping**; or the dreaded **broken-off part or deep chip**. If you're buying plated pieces, make sure the plating is intact both inside and out.

RECESSION ECONOMICS

Buying and selling cast-iron cookware via online auctions or sales can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, cast-iron pieces are expensive to ship because of their weight. On the other hand, they're fairly inexpensive to begin with; you'll find all kinds of worthy examples for less than \$50. Because the hobby is still growing and prices are generally low (compared to, say, fountain pens or pocket watches), it hasn't yet been ravaged by the down economy.

"The common stuff is becoming cheaper,"

says Alabama-based collector Jon Haussler, but the desirable pieces are holding their value.

ALUMINUM AND BEYOND

Many old-time cast iron manufacturers also made parallel cookware lines out of cast aluminum, too. When collectors of cast iron first started defining their hobby, aluminum pieces were looked upon as poor cousins. Not so anymore; while they still aren't quite as in-demand as cast iron pieces, they're going up in value. The upward trend is partly because aluminum pieces are lighter and easier to schlep around, our experts say, but it's also because once a veteran collector completes his black cast iron collection and widens his scope to include aluminum, he effectively opens up whole new sets to chase.

Another variation to classic cast iron is "porcelainized" cast iron, finished in many different colors. —D.E.



This Griswold #13 Turk head muffin pan is worth around \$1,100–\$1,500.

Cast-Iron Cookware

Cont'd. from p. 13

acquire them," Haussler says. "So they might want to get examples of each number and of the most highly marked."

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Our experts offer the following tips for antiquers who'd like to start their

own collections of cast-iron cookware.

• **Buy a book.** There are many reference and price guides that show in detail what the more valuable pieces look like. Whether something's worth a little

or a lot can come down

to a number (or lack thereof) on the bottom of a piece, but the importance of marks isn't necessarily apparent to flea-market dealers or estate auctioneers, so there are potential big scores out there to be had. "I always advise people to buy at least one reference book," Stahl says. "The \$25 you spend will save you a lot of money and time."

• **Buy 'em to use 'em.** Start your collection with a Griswold skillet bearing the "Erie" mark on the bottom (which signifies the company's heyday, from 1865–1909) and use it for cooking. "Everybody's gotta eat," says Connecticut-based collector Roy



Meadows. "Use it and see if you like it."

• **Narrow your collecting theme before you start.** It's easy to collect cast iron because there are a lot of varied categories out there. But before too long, you'll

find you have way too much cheap stuff and that it takes up too much room. So start with the end in mind and pick up a few good pieces instead of a bunch of so-so ones.

• **Get to know the molder's marks and trademark variations.** Some collectors like to pick up pieces from certain molders who "signed" their works with individual marks. Griswold pieces feature many different trademark variations, including the coveted "Spider" style (photo above).

• **Find pieces that are both unusual (such as teakettles, coffee grinders, or feed scoops) and in good condition.** Don't settle for just one of those characteristics.

• **Don't worry if there's "baked-on crud,"** as Haussler puts it, on a piece you want. But do pass on buffed or sandblasted pieces.

• **Look out for reproductions.** Some rare pieces actually get copied; if you take the time to nose around at collector sites (see "Sources & Resources") you'll figure out pretty quickly how to



This small Griswold #0 toy waffle iron (shown both open and closed) is valued at \$1,900.

Photos by L. Canale/Courtesy of The Greg Stahl Collection

INSIDE INFO

CAST AND PLATED

Legend has it that the Griswold family—denizens of Griswold, Conn., even though its factory was located in Erie, Pa.—marketed nickel- and chrome-plated cast-iron pieces to wealthy customers who considered black kitchenware déclassé.

"It might be a wives' tale, but this is the way the story goes," says Roy Meadows, a Connecticut collector specializing in nickel- and chrome-plated cast iron. "Black cast iron looked very common. [Buyers] wanted something shiny, something plated, which was more becoming to their lifestyle."

Meadows and his history-minded peers have determined that Griswold began nickel-plating pieces around in 1886 and added chrome to its cookware line around 1929–30. Chrome plate, Meadows points out, is really chrome over nickel on cast iron. Griswold used three different processes for chrome plating, from the mirror-like Chromeware to less-bright

finishes called DuChro and Silverlike.

Plated pieces, when originally offered, sold for twice the price of black cast iron, but today it runs about the same. That's up from a decade ago, when it wasn't coveted as much as black cast iron.

Meadows advises buyers to make sure pieces are plated both inside and out. If something appears to be plated just on the outside, you can be sure that at one point it was probably plated inside too and probably is worth significantly less now that it's worn off.

An important note about nickel- or chrome-plated pieces: avoid cooking acidic foods (like anything with tomatoes in it) because that can adversely affect the plating.

CLEAN IT RIGHT

There's a right way and a wrong way to clean cast iron. Following the explicit directions at collector sites (see "Sources & Resources," p. 15) for lye baths or electrolysis can actually

raise the value of a piece. Other means, such as sandblasting, grinding, or buffing, can devalue it forever.

One great resource appears at the Griswold & Cast Iron Cookware Association's website. Type in the address gcica.org/clean-iron.html and get step-by-step directions (along with before-and-after photographs) within these articles:

- "Cleaning Cast Iron Using the Lye Method and Self Cleaning Oven";
- "Cleaning Iron Cookware Using a Self-Cleaning Oven";
- "Cleaning Iron Cookware."

Collector and dealer Greg Stahl says that cleaning a cast iron piece can be as involved as you want it to be. The simplest way: "Spray it with Easy Off, or another oven cleaner, seal it in a [plastic] bag so it won't dry out, and let it sit for a few weeks." The hardest part of that method, he says, is resisting the temptation to un-seal the bag and peeking at it.

spot them and not get rooked. Pieces that aren't in books and price guides might be worth even more; the hobby's knowledge base is still growing.

What's the payoff for collectors who keep their eyes open for rarities? Well, Haussler recounts the tale of a fellow collector who picked up a rare Griswold bread pan at a flea market for \$18 and

was offered \$3,500 for it soon after. Haussler himself recently found a piece for \$50 at an antique shop that wasn't germane to his collection, so he flipped it—for \$500.

Stahl says that \$2 pieces in the wild can "quite easily" turn into \$200 in the collector market. He himself has scored on finds like a Griswold #0 toy set, a rare piece collectors consider a cast iron classic. A #0 Griswold can be worth a few thousand dollars or more.

"They're still out there," Stahl says of cast iron finds. But, as with any worthwhile collecting pursuit, "you have to know what you're doing." ●

There are just two known examples of the Griswold #17 cast-iron skillet (shown above and at left), says collector Greg Stahl, making it difficult to value. "I'd suggest in the thousands, perhaps \$3,000–\$5,000, but that is a guess," Stahl says. The other known example "was found in Pennsylvania just this year [2009] at a barn auction," he adds, "so rare pieces are still being found."



SOURCES & RESOURCES

Here's a selective list of dealers and clubs specializing in cast-iron cookware.

• **Dave "The Pan Man" Smith:** panman.com. Smith has been collecting cast iron items for more than 30 years and has written or contributed to a number of books on the subject, including *The Book of Griswold & Wagner*. His site provides cleaning techniques, collecting advice, and photographs of reproduction pieces and how they differ from real ones. Besides offering cast iron cookware for sale, the site also offers books and vintage catalog reproductions.

• **Greg Stahl:** griswoldandwagner.com. Longtime collector and dealer Stahl offers all kinds of information and photographs at his site, along with a wide variety of cast-iron antiques and collectibles for sale, from skillets, muffin pans, griddles, and waffle irons to roasters, trivets, toys, and display racks.

• **Griswold & Cast Iron Cookware Association:** gcica.org. This club has a forum, yearly convention, and useful website that includes instructions on cleaning cast-iron cookware.

• **Wagner and Griswold Society (WAGS):** wag-society.org. This collector club's website hosts an active online forum as well as an "Eye Candy" section, cleaning and seasoning information, and more. WAGS also sponsors an annual national show.

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