

# THE JOYS OF COLLECTING & HOW WEDGWOOD RISES TO THE OCCASION

By Adele Ierubino Barnett



*Left: Bust, Josiah Wedgwood FRS: Basalt, modeled by Arnold Austin, c1940, from the collection of Lord & Lady Wedgwood. Right: Cameos Used in Jewelry: Jasper, 20th and 21st C, from the collection of Adele Ierubino Barnett.*

**W**hat sparks the collecting bug? Whatever the answer, once bitten the rewards are often multifold. The urge to collect is surely as old as the history of mankind and is a pursuit that is appealing to a diverse spectrum of modern society.

What to collect is a very personal decision. However, the first rule of thumb for the beginner is to explore a category that brings joy, both in the hunt and in the ownership - something you find attractive, entertaining or educational, relates to your lifestyle, and provides lasting value. Selecting a category based on perceived investment gains should not be the impetus for starting a collection. No one has a crystal ball and besides, that avenue alone provides very little enjoyment in the pure art of collecting.

For those whose passion is the decorative arts, and in particular, ceramics, Wedgwood is an ideal medium. No other pottery can make claim to as many distinctions. The diversity of wares produced over its continuous 250 years of history is mind-boggling, but it's just this attribute that offers something for everyone. Prices found on objects, old and new, range from \$5 to \$100,000 and more, and wide availability contributes to the popularity of collecting Wedgwood. Designs encompass traditional neo-classical to ultra-contemporary. Body compositions vary from hardy stonewares to delicate china. Colorways span the rainbow with hues from bold to muted. The objects offered can be utilitarian, commemorative, or purely decorative. Whatever the focus, people throughout the world and over the

centuries have found collecting Wedgwood rewarding and satisfying.

The Wedgwood company, a pottery founded and still operating in Staffordshire, England, has always responded to the influence of each era to meet popular demand, while designing product that consistently withstands the whims of fads and fashion. Objects produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be just as appealing as those of the 18<sup>th</sup>. This lends itself well to collectors with pocketbooks of all sizes. And there is something about Wedgwood that screams "Wedgwood" in terms of beauty and quality regardless of price range or age.

Setting the tone of the Wedgwood phenomenon was company founder, Josiah Wedgwood I. When Josiah, from a long line of potters, started his company in 1759, he

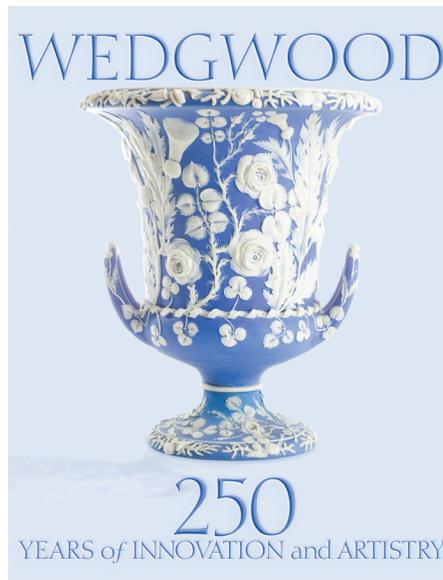
had had the experience of apprenticeship with his brother, and then as a partner with Thomas Whieldon. Ultimately ‘crowned’ the “Father of all English Potters” and “Potter to Her Majesty”, Josiah was a true genius in all aspects of operating a company. He possessed a keen perspective on the current marketplace, at that time an era of consumption with a strong thirst for novelty. Not only did he develop products to meet the demand, but did so with great manufacturing efficiency while producing higher quality products than his competition. Josiah Wedgwood was both scientist and artisan. He was aggressive and understood the power of public relations and marketing, yet was an innovative manufacturer providing employees with the best working environment and technology at the time. He had political clout that resulted in projects that accommodated his business successes. One of the best things he did for collectors was to ensure that all his products were marked “Wedgwood”.

Thus, lesson number one in collecting Wedgwood is that with very rare exception (primarily early trial pieces found mostly in museums), all Wedgwood is marked “Wedgwood”. Over the centuries, there have been a wide range of brand name marks. But all one needs to know to determine authenticity is the word “Wedgwood”. Most are marked simply “Wedgwood” and often along with “England” or “Made in England”. Also found are Josiah Wedgwood & Sons”, “Wedgwood of Etruria and Barlaston”, and on older rarer pieces, “Wedgwood & Bentley” (his partner in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century).

Now, where to begin? One of the most recent marvels of educational sourcing is the Internet. Google the word “Wedgwood” and see what happens. On eBay alone, one can view more than 50,000 listings of Wedgwood objects on any given day. By the way, some such listings are labeled “Wedgewood” (a common misspelling of the brand) from sellers who know little about the product. The purpose of your search exercise is to get a feel for the wide variety of Wedgwood wares available. Do not view the hammer price as an indicator of value. What an object is worth is simply what one will pay for an item, depending on



*Wine Cooler: Cane ware, c1800, from the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum.*



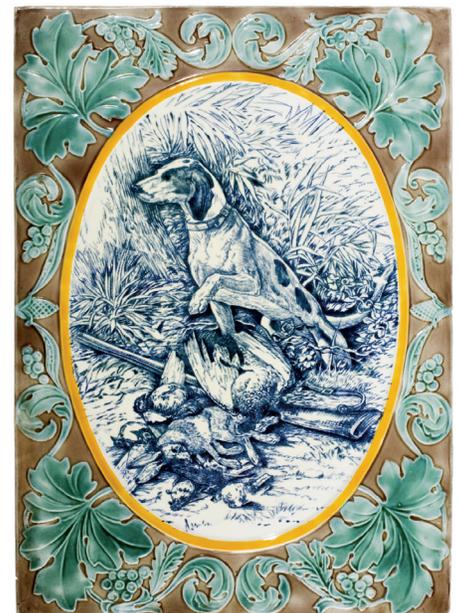
*“Wedgwood: 250 Years of Innovation and Artistry” 2009 Catalogue Cover showing a Krater Vase: Jasper with Free-form Relief, late 19th C, from the collection of Jeffrey S. Milkins.*



*Match Box Holder & Striker: Creamware with Transfer Print, 1877, from the collection of Alan V. Barnett.*



*Fairyland Lustre Vase: Bone China, decorated by Daisy Makeig-Jones, c1920, from the collection of Whoopi Goldberg.*



*Decorative Tile: Majolica with Transfer Print by Thomas Allen, 1876, from the collection of Joe Brame.*

desire and competition. The price swings on exact items sold a week apart can be stunningly wide.

I highly recommend an investment in several of the books published, which are still in print or available through sources such as Amazon.com. See list below. For more intense education, you may wish to join one or more of the Wedgwood related organizations dedicated to the study of Wedgwood, also listed below, many of which produce monthly or bimonthly newsletters.

So many categories and objects, so little space and money! Yes, you are likely to have to focus. But believe me, you can do so and still amass a substantial collection and have fun doing so. Define your objective and charge ahead. Here are a few examples of directions many of my fellow Wedgwoodians have undertaken – some such collections are compiled by body type, some by color, others by object category or use, and others, well, anything and everything marked ‘Wedgwood’!

### Jasper Ware

The flagship of the Wedgwood brand and produced massively in the familiar pale blue with white relief figures and scenes; virtually unlimited objects and shapes for both useful and decorative purposes. There have been more than 30 different colors of jasper produced over the centuries.

### Black Basalt

A stoneware available as useful wares, but mostly ornamental – urns, plaques, medallions, busts and the like. Found in solid, black on black-decorated, gold or bronzed gilded, and enameled with colorful patterns. Invented in 1768 but discontinued in the 1980s except for prestige pieces.

### All Stonewares

This encompasses the two above along with: Cane Ware, a deep mustard yellow, plain or adorned and found in mostly tablewares, made 1770-1940; Rosso Antico, a red clay made in both ornamental and table pieces, from 1765-1920; Parian Ware, a white marble-like clay for busts and statues, 1848-1880.



*Cover Jug: Creamware with Enamel, late 18th C, from the collection of Glenna & Robert Fitzgerald.*



*Bison Figure: Creamware with Colored Glaze, modeled by John Skeaping, 1959, from the collection of Ellis & Suzanne Rubin.*



*Vase: Terracotta with Streaked Glaze, by Michael Dillon, c1970, from the collection of Ronald Forrest Frazier.*

### Majolica

As a category, Majolica produced in Europe, America and elsewhere is highly popular and Wedgwood produced both bold-color traditional styles as well as a sub-category called ‘Argenta Ware’, often created with more subtle colors against a whitish background. Introduced in 1860 and produced on and off in various forms to include green glaze objects in more modern times.

### Medallions/Cameos

Ranging in size from ¼” to 4”, in a variety of shapes and body types, depicting portraits, mythological scenes and figures, historical events and places, and much more; from 18<sup>th</sup> century to current production. Also, Plaques and Tablets: in sizes up to 3 feet or more; again in a wide variety of body types, shapes, topic matter, and periods.

Fashion Accessories: A multitude of jewelry in every form imaginable – male & female, cameo-laden purses, powder compacts and lipstick holders, buttons, belt buckles and chatelaines, even shoes with Jasper heels, perfume bottles; from day-one to present time, some by famous designers.

### Tiles

Made in decorative patterns for utilitarian wall and floor coverings, but now highly collectible individually. Also many commemorative, historical, and advertising / promotional subjects in sizes from 3” to 10” made over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Wedgwood’s calendar tiles are highly collectible.

### Historical/Commemorative Wares

Wedgwood offers the collector a vast pool of items in this category, with many subsections. Offered in plates, cups, mugs, tiles, jugs, platters, boxes, and ashtrays, to name a few, subjects can be found such as historic sites, schools & colleges, travel souvenirs, armorial, royalty, annuals, cities and towns, special events, presidential and political, milestones, and much more.

### Artist Pieces

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of the art deco and art nouveau periods, Wedgwood didn’t let the trend pass it by.

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The firm hired outright, commissioned, or sponsored a large pool of talented artisans. Some were pottery specialists and painters on this medium while others had made their name as architects, portrait and landscape painters, sculptors, woodcutters, and other art forms. Among the famous names are: Keith Murray, Emile Lessore, Daisy Makeig-Jones, Eric Ravillious, Alfred Powell, Thomas Allen, Norman Wilson, Glenys Barton, Arnold Machin, Millicent Taplin, and John Skeaping.

### Tea Wares

Collectors of teacups in particular find Wedgwood a treasure trove for this collecting segment. Tea sets, and tablewares in general, have been made during the entire existence of the firm, and issued in virtually every body type. Even miniature sets have formed part of the Wedgwood array. Today most are produced in bone china or creamware (Queen's Ware). The patterns ornamenting these lines have totaled in the thousands and range from simplistic and contemporary to highly ornate.

### Tobacciana

There are general collectors of ashtrays, cigarette lighters, and related items, and Wedgwood-issued examples offer the collector an extraordinary wide selection of forms, in high quality, yet at very affordable prices. Much in this range is commemoratives offering an educational angle as well.

### Other Focuses and Directions

Jelly molds; medical and household tools; Peter Rabbit wares; advertising/promotional wares; Fairyland and other lustres; busts & statues; chess sets; ornaments; biscuit barrels;

trinket boxes; heart-shaped objects; glass figurines/paperweights (yes, Wedgwood owned glass factories too); plates (artist and unique china patterns); urns & vases; bowls; candlesticks; jugs & pitchers; a single body type or color; 18<sup>th</sup> century only (or other specific periods of manufacture); inkwells; thimbles, scent bottles; shell-shapes (Josiah collected real shells); or simply Wedgwood ephemera.

If your image of Wedgwood was simply blue & white Jasper, a la your grandmother's Wedgwood, you now know there are virtually infinite choices that will appeal to any age group or pocketbook. And you can be assured that whatever angle you pursue, each piece will be an object of beauty – a Wedgwood promise.

A special forum has been established, *Wedgwood: The New Generation*, comprised of company executives, an educational/collector society, museum curator, antiques dealer, auctioneer, retailer, and an under-30 Wedgwood collector. If you are a young, potential collector, we would love to hear your perspective on the subject. Write to: [WSofWDC@aol.com](mailto:WSofWDC@aol.com).

*Adele Barnett is the founder of the Wedgwood Society of Washington, D.C., Inc. She has been collecting Wedgwood since 1969, lectures frequently, is a casual dealer and appraiser, and published the "Wedgwood: 250 Years of Innovation and Artistry" catalogue. She sits on the boards of other Wedgwood organizations and has curated several Wedgwood exhibitions. She and her husband, Alan, also a collector, reside in Fairfax, VA.*

### Recommended Reading

*Wedgwood: A Collector's Guide*, by Peter Williams; Apple Press, 1992

*The Dictionary of Wedgwood*, by Robin Reilly; (1980, 1995, and 2-volume 1989)  
*Wedgwood Ceramics 1846-1959*, by Maureen Batkin; R. Dennis, 1982  
*Wedgwood Jasper*, by Robin Reilly; Thames & Hudson, 1994  
*Wedgwood*, by Geoffrey Wills; Chancellor Press, 1997  
*Wedgwood Jasper Ware: A Shape Book & Collectors Guide*, and *Wedgwood Jasper: Classics, Rarities, & Oddities From Four Centuries*, both by Michael Herman; Schiffer, 2003 and 2007  
*Wedgwood Ceramics*, by Daniel J. Keefe III; Schiffer, 2005  
*Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*, by Harry Buten; BMW, 1964  
*Beeson Wedgwood Collection*, by Elizabeth B. Adams; Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992  
*At Home With Wedgwood: The Art Of The Table*, by Tricia Foley; Clarkson Potter, 2009  
*Wedgwood: 250 Years of Innovation and Artistry*, by Adele I. Barnett; Wedgwood-250 Committee, 2009

### Wedgwood Organizations

Wedgwood Society of Washington, D.C. \*  
 Wedgwood Society of New York  
 Wedgwood Society of Boston  
 Wedgwood Society of Southern California  
 Wedgwood Society of New South Wales, AUS  
 Wedgwood Society of Queensland, AUS  
 Wedgwood Society of Australia  
 Wedgwood International Seminar  
 The Wedgwood Museum

\* Go to: [www.WedgwoodCapital.org](http://www.WedgwoodCapital.org) and click onto the 'Links' page for a list of these and other Wedgwood educational sources. Also visit: [www.wedgwood.com](http://www.wedgwood.com)

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