

Ceramics

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receptacle; cigarette lighters; and wall pockets were also manufactured.

Decorative holiday planters were popular: Over the years, Bucci has purchased planters that still retain pieces of Styrofoam, which suggests that they were used for artificial flowers on a seasonal basis before being stored away for the rest of the year. On the other hand, he pointed out that the only piece of Christmas ceramics that he enjoys on a year-round basis is a Santa planter in the shape of a log; he purchased it with a philodendron plant that, unlike the one he got in a matching planter featuring Mrs. Claus, will not die.

Angels, reindeer, and elves are among favorite themes, as are men and women dressed in their holiday finery, as well as Santa and Mrs. Claus, snowmen and snow-women, and boy and girl choristers. Sets with the letters "N," "O," "E," and "L" are popular among collectors as well.

Those who purchased these knickknacks in the 1950s did so for one reason: They bought what they liked and used them as decorations during the holiday season. This is in contrast with today's collectors, who might specialize in a specific line, design, or theme. And it is not unheard of for enthusiasts to have a "Christmas room" that is intact year around.

As for pricing, ceramics with original labels are good, but those found in their original boxes, sometimes with nesting straw, are even better. Collectors love when they find an intact foil sticker, bearing the name of the company that imported the piece and the

Below: This sweet-faced young lady is typical of the feel-good mood of Christmas ceramics. Collector Jimmie Bucci believes that a new generation of collectors are drawn to these mid-century knickknacks for their "kitsch factor." (Image by Barbara Miller Beem)

Right: A strange sight indeed: A ceramic Santa bobble head. This oddity was found at the Emmitsburg (Md.) Antique Mall and was priced at \$45. (Image by Barbara Miller Beem)



Above: Deck the halls with mid-century Christmas ceramics! (Image courtesy Jimmie Bucci)

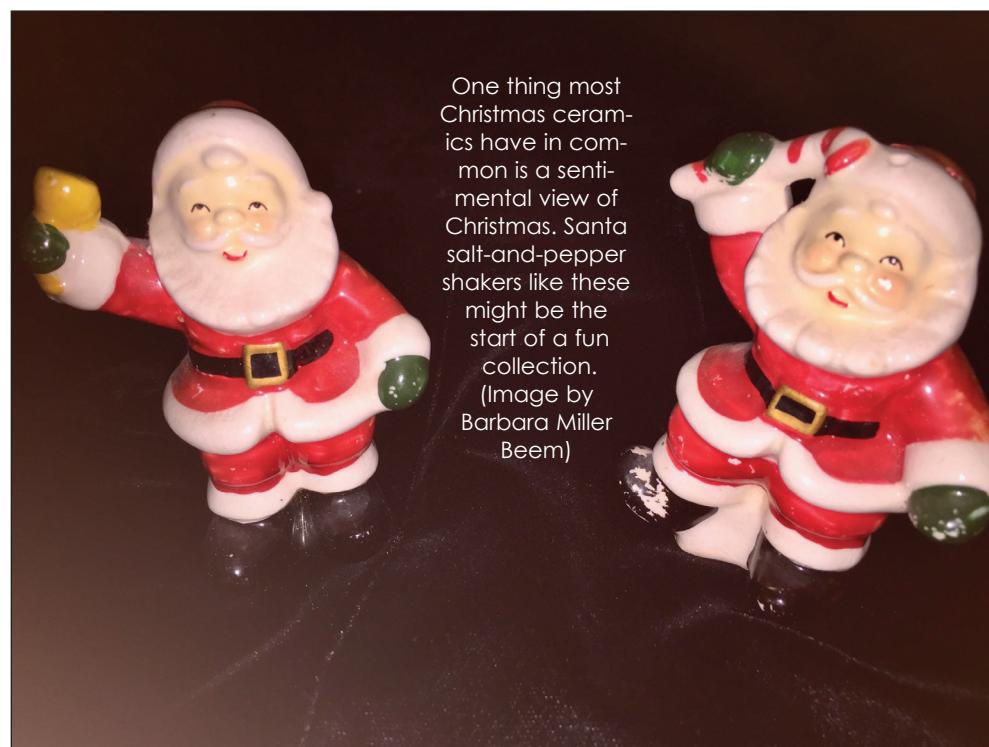
word "Japan." Condition is definitely an important factor. Sometimes, as a result of handling or cleaning, paint has been wiped away, leaving white spots on the otherwise painted wares; this condition is known as "cold paint loss." Even though these wares were mass-produced, they were hand painted, but unfortunately, the paint used was not of a quality that would endure a half century of exposure. Also affecting value is the addition of squiggly "spaghetti trim," netting, and feathers.

A collection can be begun with a simple \$5 angel figurine, and salt-and-pepper shakers might be purchased for \$10 to \$12. Simple "NOEL" letters begin at \$50 for a set. Prices for head vases with a Christmas theme, because of their cross collectability, reach into the hundreds. "NOEL" snowmen with ski masks are coveted by enthusiasts, and when "NOEL" is accompanied by pink poodles, "they might be \$300 or more." For those seeking inspiration, as well as a comparative guide to values, Walter Dworkin's book, *Vintage Christmas Ceramic Collectibles* is recommended. (Note: A few years ago, this book could be purchased new at a reduced price at bookstores. Today, it is once again in demand.)

Finally, Bucci believes that collecting mid-century Christmas ceramics that spread holiday cheer has its positive points. "The prices are fairly reasonable, they're easy to pack, easy to display, and they don't take up much room." He paused. "Unless you have as many as I do."



One thing most Christmas ceramics have in common is a sentimental view of Christmas. Santa salt-and-pepper shakers like these might be the start of a fun collection. (Image by Barbara Miller Beem)



Above: Until the philodendron dies, the Santa planter on the right will remain on display year-round in Jimmie Bucci's home. (Image courtesy Jimmie Bucci)



Above: A Christmas tableau in Jimmie Bucci's home. Not only is Bucci a Christmas ceramics collector but he is also president of the Vintage Tablecloth Collectors Club. Both collections work well together. (Image courtesy Jimmie Bucci)



Above: Santas and elves and choristers – oh, my! (Image courtesy Jimmie Bucci)

Below: A joyful corner in Bucci's home, featuring a display of planters. Head vases are particularly desirable because of their cross collectability. (Image courtesy Jimmie Bucci)

