

Perfect 10

Rating Vintage Tablecloths

Barbara Miller Beem
Images courtesy of Jimmie Bucci

Floral, souvenir, holiday. Small enough for a card table or large enough for a family dinner table. Colorful and stylish or over-the-top and amusing. Vintage tablecloths were an easy way for mid-century homemakers to exude charm and express their personality. And their colorful designs and appealing graphics still continue to attract collectors, both young and old alike.

For the most part, vintage tablecloths were made in America and date from the 1930s through the early 1970s. Some collectors, however, focus on linens made in Ireland and England, as well as Sweden and Germany. The manufacturing process was simple,

as rolls of fabric were machine printed, even though some labels inaccurately stated otherwise. The ends of the cloths were then hemmed, with selvage edges remaining as-is (a clue to detecting a reproduction). Affordable at the time, these cloths were intended for informal use.

With the stated mission of "making the world a cozier place, one table at a time," the Vintage Tablecloth Lovers Club was formed in 2002, and its membership continues to grow in numbers. Approximately 125 like-minded enthusiasts share information and friendship online at vintagetableclothsclub.com. A database, established

in 2009, identifies more than 1,700 different vintage tablecloth patterns (each one once owned by a club member) with images and a documentation of the label, if present. To date, over 300 manufacturers and 18 designers have been verified. Vintage tablecloths are considered to be in "mint" condition when they have never been used and bear an original paper label and a sewn-in tag. An original price tag makes the "find" all the more exciting. Some

minor flaws are often overlooked.

According to Jimmie Bucci, president of the club, desirability is determined by the rarity of and demand for the design, and serious collectors are constantly upgrading their collections. Best of all, collectors enjoy displaying and using their tablecloths, even if they don't always serve red wine at dinner.

Bucci shares some favorites with us.



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Rated "10," best, is this "very kooky" tablecloth, "Sunny Side Up." Featured in the center of the cloth are smiley-faced eggs; connecting additional happy eggs are wavy pieces of bacon. Musical notes complete the picture. The color scheme is bright and cheery: red, yellow, blue, and black on white. Bucci said that the cloth is of a good quality, likening the heavy cotton to that of a fine dress shirt. Measuring 48" x 50", this example is "a decent size," versatile as it could be placed cater-cornered on a table or over a solid cloth. This tablecloth is something of a mystery: Because of the color scheme (no pinks or turquoises) and its anthropomorphic graphics, Bucci guesses it was made in the early 1950s. But, he added, "I can't even begin to guess who made it." Absent of tags and labels, it remains a one-off; to date, no one has ever seen another one like it. It is in "perfect" condition, with no stains, holes, fraying or fading. As to its value, Bucci declared it "priceless." What's not to love about a happy tablecloth that makes you sing?



Rated "8," better, is the Wilendur "Lobster" tablecloth, designed in 1957 by Sergei Bogdanovich. With red lobsters, gray clams and what may be seaweed (Bucci thinks the turquoise-y plants look like parsley), "it sets a great table." Not rare but always sought after, this cloth was made in a variety of sizes, for both card tables and full-sized dinner tables. The motif was repeated on tea towels (both cotton and terry cloth), aprons, and napkins. Its appeal is broad, not just regional, and its popularity is enduring. Noted Bucci, this tablecloth "is not rare but sought after." Examples can be difficult to find, because when collectors add them to their collections, "they don't get rid of them."



Rated "6," good, is what is known among collectors as the "Birthday Tablecloth" for obvious reasons. Very popular, it was made by California Hand Prints (CHP) and retains its original sewn-in tag. This cloth measures 50" x 52". Because of its fine quality, Bucci estimated that this cloth probably retailed for about \$10 when it was first sold in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Offered in blue, pink, and mossy green, the rayon-cotton blend "has a little sheen to it." As for its design, the tablecloth ties up the tabletop with a big bow, which is encircled by roses. Especially charming are the messages on the little tags: "Just for You," "Birthday Greetings" and, of course, "Happy Birthday." Hard to find and "really collectable," these tablecloths are displayed regularly by those who own them. Bucci concluded, "I can't think of one person who wouldn't want one."

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