



Very large Poole Pottery commemorative Festival of Britain plaque. (Courtesy of Poole Pottery Museum)



A Goblin Teasmaid on tray and two Melaware Melamine egg cups.



Huntley and Palmer's Cocktail Snack Tin. £8-£10.



Marilyn needs no introduction but early magazines with her on the cover can be worth between £20-£30.

## The Designer Decades - 1950s to the 1970s Part Two - The Flamboyant Fifties

by Judith Clarke

No writer looking back to the 1950s can ignore the impact made upon the country by the 1951 Festival of Britain. Proposed as a much needed 'tonic' for a weary nation the Festival was officially agreed to as early as 1947, only two years after the end of the Second World War. The celebrations took place over the summer months of 1951 and marked a turning point for British culture. It combined contemporary sculptural art and pioneering science with inventive frivolity and commercialisation. Britain welcomed the world that summer. It was such a success that it set a tone of optimism for the decade ahead. No serious collector of the Fifties should be without some colourful item from this optimistic event best summed up by the futuristic looking Festival motif designed by Abram Games.

Many official guides were published as well as stamps, postcards, posters, commemorative issues of magazines, newspapers and numerous other ephemera. The guide books for the Pleasure Gardens and the South Bank Exhibition are quite easy to come across now and in very good condition should not cost more than £3-£5. It is the more obsolete town guides that are now commanding higher prices and a Festival guide for one of the smaller towns can make between £10 and £20. On the more decorative front a Poole pottery hors d'oeuvres dish or a Festival of Britain clock would make for a special collectable piece of the 1950s era. Thousands of fashion accessory items were also produced bearing the Festival symbol and items such as compact, scarves and handkerchiefs make a nice themed collection capturing the spirit of the period.

Many products made in the 1950s reflected a naïve hope for a better world and advertising bombarded the senses with desirable objects and aids to living. Magazine adverts of the period are playful and colourful and the epithet 'gay' had reached saturation point by 1956. The freedom to indulge at long last in consuming the new foods, new products, new fashions, furnishings and fabrics stands in sharp contrast to the long decade preceding of rationing and making mend.

Although being 'à la mode' wasn't a new thing it now came within reach of the teenager and the housewife. With rock n' roll and almost full employment keeping the teens busy, the life of ordinary people was literally being switched on by all the new electrical and labour saving devices that now abounded and were above all affordable.



A Gaydon plastic tableware advert from the 1950s - Midwinter made a range of plastic tableware and Melaware is also popular with collectors.



Sunbeam Mixmaster (great rivals in the marketplace with Kenwood) and contemporary kitchen fabric.



Festival of Britain tin, Underground map - all with Festival logo.

The 1950s home witnessed dramatic changes, especially regarding the role of women in the kitchen. The Age of Formica had dawned! For the collector, kitchen implements in bright colours and new materials such as tableware plastics like melamine are relatively cheap and easy to pick up but instantly add that 1950s authentic flavour. Tala kitchen ware and Nutbrown utensils are functional and decorative and have seen a resurgence of demand lately. Colourful Pyrex glassware from the 1950s is also a popular collectable item though none of the above have any significant monetary value. Among the collectable electrical liberators for the 1950s housewife and equally essential for that true Fifties feel would be a Hoover Constellation vacuum cleaner, a Sunbeam Mixmaster, Kenwood mixer, and a bulky Hotpoint iron. The Goblin Teasmaid, designed in the 1930s but mass-produced in the 50s, has the feel of daring bedroom decadence. Ideally they should have their original plastic tray and matching cups and saucers to be worth anything as they are far from rare!

Books and magazines are also an essential part of recreating the 1950s look and those dealing with contemporary design have become greatly sought after by collectors. Copies of women's magazines and staples such as *Punch* on the other hand can be bought in good condition for as little as a pound apiece whilst upmarket publications such as *Vogue* are around the £10-£20 mark. Of course in the contemporary home you can't have magazines lying around cluttering the place up so you must have a 1950s magazine rack to put them in, preferably with the obligatory bobble feet. Upright examples can often be found for £5-£10 with the more unusual novelty shaped racks, in the form of an umbrella for example, being slightly more expensive.

Rock and pop played an increasingly important role. One of the ultimate 1950s acquisitions would be a period jukebox. Let us not forget though that the first all-electric 'jukebox' was made as early as 1927 by a firm in Chicago. Prices for these musical monsters reflect demand for a one-off showcase epitomising the rock and roll era and they can often command £5,000-£6,000 depending on the particular model. Record players and radios are a much more affordable musical option. Light and bright plastics replaced wood or Bakelite casings and portability became the order of the day. The Coronation of 1953 fuelled demand for televisions. A period Bush television will cost you anywhere between £100 and £200 depending on condition. A transistor radio would also be a requisite prop for an authentic fifties feel.

Along with the coffee bar the Fifties also witnessed the popularity of the home bar and an emphasis on cocktail making. Original novelty shaped bars such as those in the form of a boat's prow can be several hundred pounds for a nice example but cocktail shakers, ice buckets shaped as pineapples and apples and brightly coloured cocktail tins will also inject that sense of fun and new-found leisure time. Technology and science were the inspiration for many of the new images adapted and exploited as decoration, particularly on ceramics and textiles. The imagery of molecules, (the multi-coloured atomic bobbles to be found on the end of chair legs, plant holders, magazines racks or wall ties) use of asymmetrical design, flamboyant vibrant colours as well as black and white colour schemes are all typical of 1950s items. Lucienne Day, wife of the furniture designer Robin Day, captured the spirit of the decade with her spindly abstract patterns and bright imaginative whims and fancies, especially with Calyx, her most famous textile design. Leisure time and leisure activities were also popular motifs for textiles as well as images of abundant food and drink and foreign cultures.

Prices for a piece of the Fifties do vary around the country. For run of the mill items they have taken a tumble over the past year as supply outstrips demand. As with any collecting period certain names and items emerge as the most desirable whilst the market for the mundane naturally declines after the dedicated collectors have all acquired their pieces. Whether you choose to concentrate on one or two more expensive designer pieces such as chairs or sideboards, contemporary ceramics such as Midwinter and Poole, Scandinavian glass, genuine 1950s fabrics or travel along the cheap and cheerful route there's no doubt that the accessibility of 1950s style has provided much of its charm for younger collectors. There's nothing stuffy or antique-feeling about it and filling your home with flamboyant and fun items can sometimes be financially rewarding as well as greatly entertaining.



Woman's Own magazines from the early 1950s. £2-£3 each.



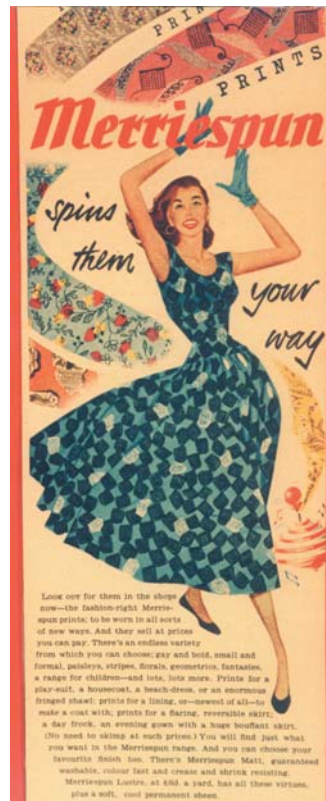
The Wurlitzer Company was originally founded in Ohio way back in 1856.



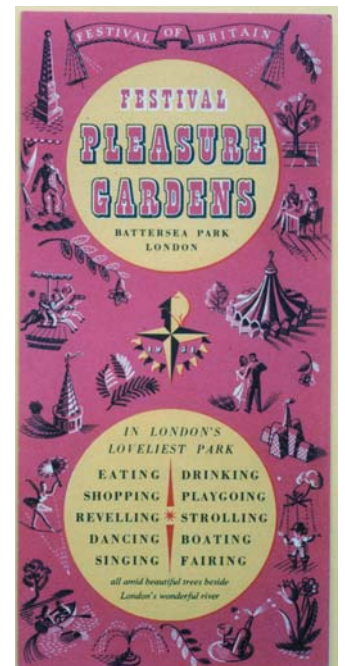
1950s advert for Tala Kitchenware products and ecstatic housewife!



Ericofon (nicknamed the Cobra phone) began production in 1954. £40-£60 each depending on colour.



1954 advert for Merriespun Prints - showing how 'geometric' and 'gay and bold' designs had filtered down to everyday fabrics.



Colourful four sided little Pleasure gardens Festival of Britain brochure/guide. £4-£6.