



Walter Moorcroft, *After The Storm*, Limited Edition Centenary vase, woodland landscape on a grey ground, 105/200, impressed marks, signed with blue painted Walter Moorcroft signature, 51.5cm high. *Charterhouse, Sherborne. Apr 08. HP: £1,600. ABP: £1,882.*



Large Moorcroft vase 'After the Storm', signed by Walter Moorcroft, 52cm high, made for the 1997 centenary, Ltd Edn of 200, with certificate. *Potteries Specialist Auctions, Stoke on Trent. Mar 08. HP: £1,350. ABP: £1,587.*



Large Moorcroft rain forest design vase, 1992, by Sally Tuffin, limited edition, No. 3 of 150, impressed/inscribed marks, S T Des, 3/150, 13.3.1992, 42cm high. *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Mar 04. HP: £800. ABP: £941.*



Moorcroft Limited Edition Daffodil vase, 186/250, 36.5cm high, boxed with certificate. *Charterhouse Auctioneers, Sherborne. Nov 08. HP: £620. ABP: £729.*



Moorcroft South Pacific pattern vase, designed by Sion Leeper, limited edition 178/300, decorated with a turtle, jelly fish, sea horse, fish and other marine life, 14.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 05. HP: £480. ABP: £564.*



Moorcroft 'Carousel' pattern charger, by Rachel Bishop, No. 80 of a limited edition, signed and with certificate and box. *Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Feb 07. HP: £440. ABP: £517.*

Moorcroft Limited Editions - Getting It Right?

by Roland Head

William Moorcroft planted the seeds of the Moorcroft pottery in 1897 when he was given his own studio at James Macintyre & Co, a much larger pottery. Within a few years, Moorcroft's conspicuous success and (at the time) unusually egotistical tendency to label all of his wares with his signature or initials resulted in a split from Macintyre.

In 1912, Moorcroft founded his own pottery in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, and laid the foundations of a business that continues to thrive today. William Moorcroft developed and perfected the technique of slip-trailing, using slip (liquid clay) to mark out a pattern on a clay body, allowing each section to be painted in different colours without the colours running into each other. This technique, coupled with his floral designs and rich glazes, created a style that is instantly recognisable and has proven to be very long lived. When, in 1945, Walter Moorcroft took over the running of the factory upon his father's death, he continued to manage the design and manufacture of pottery along much the same lines as his father, albeit with some gradual modernisation.

By the mid-1980s however, the pottery was in poor shape and suffering from an ill-fated attempt by then owners, the Roper Brothers, to move it into volume production. The Moorcroft family had sold most of their shares in the pottery and Moorcroft was on the verge of receivership. What makes Moorcroft unusual amongst British potteries is that it survived this ordeal and is now prospering.

A Turning Point

From 1897 until 1993, there had only ever been three design directors at Moorcroft pottery, William Moorcroft, his son Walter Moorcroft and, from 1986 until 1993, the well-known designer Sally Tuffin, who had, along with her husband and the Edwards family, purchased a share in the pottery to save it from receivership. When Moorcroft came under the sole control of the Edwards family in 1993 (Sally and her husband Richard Dennis left to found Dennis Chinaworks) a new designer was needed. Rachel Bishop, a talented 24-year old, was appointed to fill the void. Four years later, in 1997, the pottery celebrated its centenary and opened the Moorcroft Design Studio, appointing a number of designers to work under Rachel Bishop and develop their own designs, a situation that remains today.

Moorcroft Today

Since that fateful time in 1986, Moorcroft's fortunes have steadily improved. It has recaptured its reputation for manufacturing quality and design excellence. The pottery has retained the original production techniques that have served it so well but has expanded the range of design subjects and colours in use.

Moorcroft's marketing has been very successful, too. Export demand remains strong - the pottery actually exports more pieces now than it did in the 1920s, its previous peak and the introduction of limited edition ranges has provided more exclusive choices for discerning collectors.

The limited edition concept is simple but has proven to be extremely successful. Each year, a number of new designs are released in strictly limited quantities - typically 50-200. This limited availability has created extremely strong demand for these pieces amongst collectors. There is 'something approaching a frenzy when new patterns are brought out', according to Moorcroft dealer Nina Holland, who runs the Cotswold Shop in Gloucestershire. Nina says that the 2009 limited editions *Wood Nymph* (Moorcroft's first female nude), *House of Flowers*, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Fowlers Orchard* "were instant sell outs and are now near impossible to find."

Moorcroft's Design Studio concept has enabled it to bring a far wider variety of talent and influence to its designs than was the case with a single designer. This is evident from the increasing diversity of the pottery's designs and the

ever-expanding palette of colours at the designers' disposal. Any fears that the Design Studio approach would result in 'design by committee' have proved unfounded. Each of the designers is well known to collectors by name and produces distinctive, individual ranges of designs. In addition to Rachel Bishop, who continues to lead the Design Studio, designers such as Emma Bossons and Kerry Goodwin have built a strong following amongst Moorcroft collectors.

Moorcroft and the Secondary Market

One of the more interesting aspects of the resurgence in interest in Moorcroft pottery has been the strength of the secondary market for limited edition pieces - even for those that are no more than a few years old. Moorcroft has encouraged this by reducing the size of many of its limited editions. In the mid-1990s editions of 500 were not unknown. Today, few editions are greater than 200 and some are as small as 50.

Dealer Nina Holland believes that "a successful piece will retain its popularity and be sought after in the future." Yet there are plenty of examples where this has failed to be the case - either because of changing tastes or lack of exclusivity. Moorcroft appears to be getting this right more than some other British potteries. Notwithstanding these remarks, buyers of Moorcroft's limited editions cannot guarantee their pieces' future collectability or value. Some will endure better than others.

On the other hand, if we look a little further back we find limited edition pieces that may well be the pride of someone's collection. Item **1** is 51.5cm high and is entitled *After The Storm*. It was designed by Walter Moorcroft and is number 105 of a signed limited edition of 200, issued to mark the company's centenary in 1997. This must surely be one of the last designs Walter Moorcroft worked on and will be likely to appreciate, making its April 2008, £1,600 hammer price look realistic, if not good value. However, it's worth noting that **2**, another example of the same vase, sold for a similar hammer price of £1,350 in March 2008. Either the piece was sold straight on or two out of 200 of these pieces hit the market at the same time. Further research finds that yet another example of this piece sold at auction for just £800 in December 2007. These three sales took place over a five-month timeframe - too short to be sure of a long-term appreciation in value.

Two *Spirit of the Lakes* vases also come up, at **8** and more recently at **11**. The January 2009 sale fetched a lower price than that of November 2007, but I'm not sure the difference is large enough to be significant, suggesting that £300-£350 is about right at present. Finally, the Moorcroft *Carousel* limited edition charger (**6**) by Rachel Bishop fetched a reasonably good price at £517 including buyer's premium. Moorcroft plates tend to be unattractive to buyers but large chargers can do well.

Conclusions

The Moorcroft train appears to be unstoppable at present. Despite the difficult economic climate, Nina Holland says she has seen 'an explosion of interest' in Moorcroft pottery at her shop and that she could have sold some of last year's limited editions many times over. (Of course, this is the secret to limited editions - if you satisfy all of the demand, value and desirability are reduced!)

It's refreshing and cheering to see a genuine British pottery success story - Moorcroft remains based wholly in the UK, in Burslem, and is in British ownership. Its success is no doubt in part due to its appeal to the top end of the market yet unlike some potteries, it has managed to capture more modern tastes without straying from the production techniques and styles that give it its unique identity.



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Moorcroft Limited Edition vase, decorated daffodils, signed Rachel J Bishop, 77/200, 2001, 27.5cm high, boxed. *Charterhouse Auctioneers, Sherborne. Sep 08. HP: £420. ABP: £494.*



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Moorcroft pottery, Limited Edition, shouldered vase of tapered form, rolled lip, splayed footrim, decorated in the Spirit of the Lakes design, impressed/painted marks, incl. reference to The Centenary of Theeby & Bothom, 5.75in high boxed. *Amersham Auction Rooms, Bucks. Nov 07. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



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Limited edition Moorcroft Otter pattern ginger jar and cover, 44/150, 8in, boxed. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 09. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



10

Moorcroft 'White Road to Tuscany', pattern trumpet vase by Sian Leeper, limited edition 104/300 decorated with sunflowers before an Italian landscape, signed and numbered, 9in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Jul 09. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*

Prices quoted are actual hammer prices (HP) and the Approximate Buyer's Price. (ABP) Includes an average premium of 15% + VAT.



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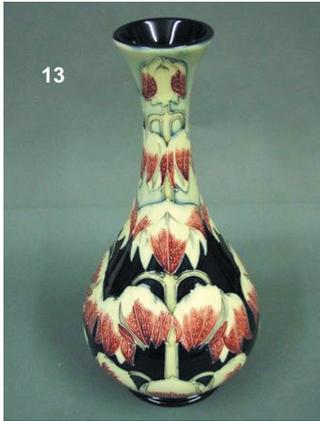
Moorcroft Spirit of the Lakes, Limited Edition vase, 165/250, signed by D J Hancock 22.9.00, 14.5cm high, boxed. *Charterhouse Auctioneers, Sherborne. Jan 09. HP: £270. ABP: £317.*



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Moorcroft Cymric Dreams pattern vase, designed by R J Bishop, limited edition of 250, after an original Liberty design, 21cm high. *Hamptons, Godalming. Mar 02. HP: £260. ABP: £305.*

Ceramics



Moorcroft pottery 'Desert Orchid' bottle vase by Anji Davenport, tubelined with claret and ivory flowers on a deep cobalt ground, limited edition 174/300, impressed/painted marks, signed, 12.25in high. *Fieldings, West Hagley, Worcs. Jun 05. HP: £200. ABP: £235.*



Moorcroft limited edition pottery vase of baluster form tubelined in the Tulips pattern on an ivory ground, 37cm high, impressed and painted marks, numbered 47/150. *Bearne's, Exeter. Jun 05. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*



Modern Moorcroft 'Amphis-baena' vase, by Kerry Goodwin, limited edition 55/100, Celtic dragons on a blue ground, 14.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Jul 09. HP: £150. ABP: £176.*



Lisa Moorcroft 'Violet' pattern, Limited Edition vase, No. 277/750, painted and printed marks, 16cm high. *Cheffins, Cambridge. Feb 05. HP: £100. ABP: £117.*



Moorcroft Limited Edition ewer, decorated with lilies, 96/250, signed Philip Gibson, 2001, 24cm high, boxed. *Charterhouse, Sherborne. Sep 08. HP: £200. ABP: £235.*



Moorcroft pottery Limited Edition, 'Underwood' pattern vase, designed by D Hancock, slip trailed and painted with mushrooms, horse-chestnuts and seed pods, impressed, printed in black and green, signed and numbered 313/350 in brown, 7.25in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Aug 08. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*



Moorcroft Pottery vase for Macintyre, c1998, limited edition No. 241/350, cream ground decorated with flowers and mushrooms in colours, factory marks, artists initials and monogram to underside, height 18.5cm. *Rosebery's, London. Mar 06. HP: £110. ABP: £129.*



Moorcroft 'River of Dreams' pattern baluster vase by Sarah Cowan, limited edition, 210/350, facsimile signature, decorated with Irises and Poppies on a aquatic ground, 14.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Jul 09. HP: £100. ABP: £117.*



Moorcroft vase, 'Angel's Trumpet', by Anji Davenport, produced for Moorcroft Collectors Weekend, c1998, limited edition No. 134, painted in shades of green and yellow on cream ground, 19cm high, factory, artist and date painted to underside. *Rosebery's, London. Sep 04. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*



Moorcroft Macintyre Limited Edition, pottery vase, tube lined in the Fountains Abbey pattern, designed by Philip Gibson, impressed marks, numbered 144/250, dated 2002, signed twice in gilt and brown, 10in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Dec 08. HP: £170. ABP: £199.*



Moorcroft Pottery vase, c1998, limited edition, No. 18/100, dark blue ground decorated with wild flowers in colours, factory marks and artists signature and monogram to underside, height 19cm. *Rosebery's, London. Mar 06. HP: £110. ABP: £129.*



Moorcroft Limited Edition Year plate, second series, fifth edition, 1996, 316/500, 21.5cm wide, boxed with certificate. *Charterhouse, Sherborne. Nov 08. HP: £70. ABP: £82.*



Moorcroft wall plaque, Limited Edition, No 54/200, tube-lined in the Balloon pattern (s/f), 14in dia. *Dee, Atkinson & Harrison, Drifffield. Nov 04. HP: £60. ABP: £70.*