

## NORITAKE DECORATING TECHNIQUES

This article briefly describes two extremes in the decorative repertoire of Noritake – full hand painting and full lithography.

### A Hand Painted Vase



Here is an example of Noritake's mass produced hand painted style. It is towards the lower end of the factory's hand painted style: the vase is rather small at 105mm tall and is made of white glazed hard paste porcelain.

The reverse side of the vase makes clear that there has been the use of aerography to spray rose and lemon coloured bands to define the sky, horizon and the earth. In the main design, a small area of brown aerographing defines the ground

behind the foreground and in the middle distance. A simple purple washband defines the horizon and the same colour has been dabbed to define a clump of bushes behind the bird.

The main interest, of course is a bird (*Cardinalis cardinalis*, an endemic species originally of the south-eastern United States) that perches upon a bare branch that is adorned by two berries with persistent bracts (possibly *Vaccinium* species in the source illustration). The bird and the branch are fully hand painted. The bird has been outlined in black to give it greater definition but the necessity this step does not bespeak a high level of technique – such cartoon-like executions would not be a feature of Noritake's best work . It is not evident that a printed outline underlies the bird but an extreme regularity of execution in numerous examples would point to this.

No gilding has been used.

The backstamp is of great note: this piece is a “factory second”. The standard source<sup>1</sup> states, “ 1924. This backstamp was used on those which failed to reach the quality level of Noritake in terms of body and painting. ... For export.” From this we learn that the vase was painted no earlier than 1924 (and before World War II). The vase turned up in Australia. Why is this piece a “second”? Some possible reasons are canvassed:

- the body of the vase is of excellent standard so this cannot be the reason;
- the painting is of fair standard (there is a little colour smudging to the right of the bird’s head) but a couple of small points of spatter are seen below the bird (probably from the kiln during firing); and,
- a flake of paint was lost from the branch under the bird. This is the likely reason for the rejection of the vase.

The lack of gilding of the rim of the vase probably reflects the fact that it was regarded as a “second”. The next step was to apply the backstamp. The vase was sent to Australia for reasons that are not clear – Cardinals are not present or even known here.

### **Noritake Tea Ware**



The rather attractive remnants of a middle market tea set, here illustrated in part, were evidently produced in 1949 for the domestic market. (The backstamp used is number 135 in Noritake History of the materials

development and Chronology of the backstamps, Noritake Co. Ltd, 1997). Japan was still occupied by allied troops at this time.

Some features are worthy of note.

The set is executed in Noritake's standard hard paste porcelain, marking an advance in quality compared to the softer porcelain seen in some pre-World War Two products.

The decoration is of interest more for its cultural than technical aspects. The technical level is extremely high: the set needed just four firings. The first firing was for the glaze, the second for the white glaze, the third for the decoration, and the fourth for the fine line of burnished gold around the rims, handles and finials. The decoration involved the application of the lithographs on glaze that depict stylised Japanese horse chestnuts (*Aesculus turbinata*) juxtaposed to decorative devices such as might be seen on fabrics and some interior decorations. That is, the very traditional designs are placed on a Western tea set. No hand painting was needed but the gilding would have been applied by hand. The finials are gilded so as to depict a stylised chrysanthemum (an imperial symbol, a symbol of loyalty).

This tea set points the way to the future – from 1949, hand painting would be largely the realm of Noritake's studio wares. Noritake made increasing use of lithographs and simple lithography from this time. Lithography under glaze to improve durability would not appear regularly for some years.

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### Reference

Noritake History of the materials development and Chronology of the backstamps, Noritake Co. Ltd, 1997