



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## Year 'Round Christmas Ornaments

Kevin Milaeger

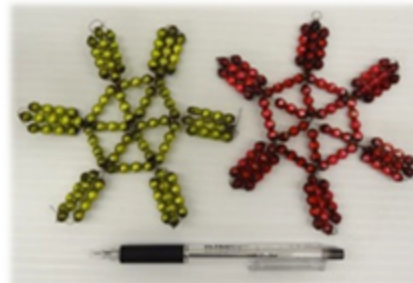
As red and green are generally the first colors that we think of when we hear the word "Christmas," other symbols also come to mind---the Christmas tree, the nativity crèche, angels, Santa Claus, and on and on. Over the years, many types of Christmas ornaments have graced our trees, and most of them look very "Christmassy." But there are a number of ornaments that, though they look perfectly wonderful on the Christmas tree, could also be used throughout the year. By



themselves, they are highly decorative, and it is not until they are placed on the Christmas tree that they take on the Christmas association.

I am speaking of certain types of glass ornaments that originally came from Czechoslovakia, but were later also made in Japan.

These are often referred to as "Czech beaded ornaments." They are typically made of round beads and sometimes tubular glass. These tiny pieces of glass were strung together on thin wire to make various designs, sometimes featuring a familiar



Christmas theme such as a star, sometimes common everyday objects, and sometimes design for its own sake. At my house, I hang a number of these delightful ornaments around the house all year 'round.



In Czechoslovakia, most of these ornaments were produced in a cottage industry. That seems like a romantic notion, but it was probably a tedious and dangerous task. Artisans spent hours bent over a flame, working with hot glass, and later diligently stringing the colored glass beads into intricate shapes. Craftsmen went on for years

in this manner, but things changed in the 1930's. Of course, the Great Depression weakened Europe as it did America. Then World War II had a devastating impact, and the glass ornament makers were greatly affected. They had difficulty finding a market for their product. Because the ornaments were largely produced in people's homes, they had a hard time getting their product to the consumer, especially in the case of foreign markets. Ultimately, they found a solution. Ornament designers created ornament samples and presented



them to customers at wholesale markets. Many designs were offered. Based on the interests of those buyers, a relatively small number of designs were chosen every year. These designs were then turned over to the individual artisans, and they produced the ornaments in their cottages. In this way the wholesale buyers could expect uniformity in the products they purchased. To a degree, creativity was stifled, but this scheme ensured that the ornaments actually got made and sent around the world, ending up on

our trees. By the time this process was in place, it was just after 1950.

Which of these ornaments are from Czechoslovakia and which are from Japan I am not entirely certain. I think those that include glass tubing are mostly Czech. And I think most of those that are made up entirely of glass beads are probably Japanese. The Japanese ornaments tend to be heavier, and less ornate. Although the origin of ornaments is of interest to me, I don't exclude one or the other from my personal collection. The appeal of the individual ornament is what matters most. If you have a question about the origin of a specific ornament, please ask. Our beaded ornaments are priced from about \$12-\$25.



Some more elaborate beaded ornaments, such as bicycles, airplanes, and



Ferris wheels often sell for much more, well over \$50, but we are not offering anything like that at this time. Keep in mind that these ornaments have some age and some of them have some minor flaws. (At least, I consider the flaws minor, and the ornaments are priced accordingly.) We can take more photos for you if you need them, or better yet, stop in and have a look. We have had them on the floor for a few days now so some that are pictured

here may already have been sold. But with any luck, I will be able to offer more in the coming weeks.