



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

American Made Stencil Ornaments

Now that we are into November and we've had a few hard frosts, my mind turns from the garden to Christmas ornaments. Not that I'm ready to put my tree up. I won't start that until after Thanksgiving. But at Milaeger's we've started looking for more old ornaments, and fortunately we've found some that might bring back memories for you, just like they did for us.

We have a good number of American made stencil ornaments. This type of ornament began in the early fifties. Most earlier American ornaments were either round or very simple shapes, usually with one color. They were produced in very large quantities, and although some hand painting was done, it was simple and minimal. As quantities increased, hand painting was not viable, and the idea of stenciling ornaments was invented. That innovation opened a whole world of design ideas. Simple designs were the first to appear. Santa Claus, snowmen, and similar subjects were among the first designs. Later, entire winter scenes, nativity depictions, Christmas songs, circus animals, nursery rhymes, toys, and many other whimsical themes were used. These delightful designs captured the hearts of many, and most everyone that grew up



Stencil 1

in those times no doubt remembers these ornaments. Nowadays, some are being reproduced as part of the vintage collection by Christopher Radko, under the old Shiny Brite name. (Incidentally, Radko himself is no longer associated with the company that bears his name.)



Stencil 2

The very first ornament I owned is a stencil ornament, and I still have it. My sister, Kris, bought one each for my brother and I when we were newborn twins. I'm not sure if that was in my first year, but it was very early. It is a large blue ornament, now somewhat faded, but it's still a treasure for me. I'll have to ask my brother if he still has his.

Nowadays when we sell old ornaments at Milaeger's, we can only offer what we happen to find. This is an ongoing process, so we add more ornaments most every week and we never know what's next. So, it's a mixed bag of colors and designs, as well as sizes. For my personal collection I like to look for unusual designs and uncommon colors, such as purple. But that's just my thing. Most people like to collect things that remind them of what they had when they were growing up. There is no right or wrong in collecting. Whatever appeals to the collector is what's important. And that often changes over the years. I know it has for me.

You might be wondering how you can identify an American made ornament. Many have a cap that is stamped "Made in USA." But caps can be replaced, so that's not always a sure thing. Also, many American caps are unmarked. What is unique about American made ornaments is the "pike." This is the part of the



Stencil 3

ornament that the cap sits over. American ornaments have a much wider pike than European or Japanese ornaments. The pike is the most fragile part of the ornament and oftentimes it is less than perfect. Chipped or cracked, for example. Serious collectors will definitely want to inspect the pike, but sometimes the pike is damaged while checking it, so be careful. The pike isn't very important to me. But to high end collectors, it is. These are folks who commonly spend several hundred dollars for one ornament! I don't think you'll ever see a stencil ornament for anything near that. Those prices are commanded most always by European figural ornaments.



Stencil 4

Last year I often showed a few ornaments from my personal collection, just for fun. These aren't for sale, but

duplicates could turn up in our display in the store. I thought I'd continue showing a few from my collection, whenever possible. Here are a couple of my stencil ornaments. One is rather elaborate, an entire farm scene in winter. It bears the inscription "'Twas the night before Christmas." The other is larger, multicolored, and shows a number of different snowflake patterns. You never know what you'll find next.



Kevin's show and tell

Please [email me](mailto:info@milaegers.com) if you have any questions or comments. If you are interested in purchasing ornaments pictured in this blog, please contact Kelly, who handles mail order sales, at 262.693.2040 x101 or info@milaegers.com.