

# Carnival Glass



For many, the thought of grandma brings to mind fresh baked cookies, story-telling and big warm hugs. But not for me. My grandmother was all about big sparkly jewelry, flock-veiled hats and afternoons at the race track. As kids, our visits to her apartment were sporadic but she always poured exotic drinks for us from a huge pitcher into shimmering purple glasses that I thought were the most spectacular objects I'd ever seen. I didn't know it then but what my granny had was a fantastic collection of carnival glass.

Carnival, a pressed glass, was formed when molten liquid glass was forced into metal molds and as it cooled it conformed to their shapes. Once removed, and while still relatively hot, it was sprayed with metallic salts in liquid form, and then reheated. The result was its distinctive iridescent appearance.

Decorative art glass, originally marketed as Iridill, was first produced by Fenton Art Glass in 1907. It was inspired by Tiffany and Steuben art glass but as Fenton, and then Northwood Glass, flooded the market with this inexpensive iridescent ware it only succeeded in diluting the public's interest in all pressed glassware. The market collapsed and glass companies found themselves with huge stocks of almost worthless product. When the companies decided to liquidate, one of their biggest customers was the carnival midway industry which was always searching for inexpensive prizes for their games. Fenton and Northwood, which probably produced the best quality pieces, resurrected this glitzy glassware years later when interest resurfaced. Some other early producers were Imperial, Millersburg, Westmoreland, Dugan/Diamond and Cambridge.

Carnival glass was made in many translucent colors such as amethyst, marigold, cobalt, green, red, opaque white (milk glass) and translucent pastels. Some of the most collectible patterns are Poppy Show, Peacock on the Fence, Grape and Cable and Good Luck. But with over 2,000 patterns manufactured some ended up with names like Adam's Rib, Pinups, Big Fish and Charlie. But there's a lot to love about them all.

Although Fenton and Northwood more clearly identified their lines in the 1960's and 1970's, identifying early carnival glass is fairly difficult. Many manufacturers didn't add a maker's mark and some did for only part of their production. Knowledgeable collectors can try to match patterns, colors, sheen, edges and thickness to what can be found in old manufacturer's trade catalogs or to other known pieces. That there are so many patterns also complicates matters. As does the fact that many companies copied their rivals' most popular patterns. It can be frustrating, even for the experts.

The truly collectible items are products from 1907-1930. Fortunately carnival glass has held its value over the years. Prices vary widely, with some pieces worth very little while rare items command thousands of dollars. But use caution: make sure you are buying authentically old items if you are paying a lot. As with everything old that you truly value, avoid the dishwasher and keep it out of direct sunlight.

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