

Mattajade Pattern

Mattajade is one of Enoch Boulton's crowning achievements at the Devon Pottery. On its release in 1932 it represented Fieldings 'best of the best' in terms of quality, design and finish. And it has remained on the top shelf ever since, keeping good company with Mattasung, a variety of Mattita patterns, Orient and a stable of remarkable lustre wares produced between 1930 and 1939. It was populist art pottery at its best, and it fetches premium prices at today's auctions.

The main distinguishing feature of Mattajade was the jade green 'waved' ground. It seems that Boulton was impressed with the effects that Maling achieved with waved grounds on its lustre wares in the 1920s. The Maling 'thumbprint' went on to become a signature of that company's designs for more than two decades. Maling secured the services of designer, Lucien E. Boullemier, in 1926, and he is credited with the reintroduction of this decorating method to the United Kingdom. Boullemier brought a new design confidence to the Maling factory and introduced the waved designs in his first year as company designer.

Contrary to popular belief, the application of waved grounds required considerable skill, involving the careful and deliberate rendering of short, circular brush strokes to create a 'swirling' effect not dissimilar to finger painting. The example shown opposite, Maling pattern 3016, titled Plum and Orchard and dated 1926, illustrates the richness of this technique.

True to his form of taking established design techniques and transforming them into something altogether new and exceptional, Boulton introduced more structure into the application of the brush strokes. Mattajade usually has four parallel circular lines in each brush motion, giving a starker contrast between the darker and lighter jade colours and mirroring a classical Art Deco motif, that of the semi circle expanding into larger loops.

The Mattajade ground was hand applied and this explains the differences in texture and finish found in various examples of the design. Some painters had a heavier hand and drew more paint on to the brush. This created more texture and contrast but diminished the subtlety of the lines. Other painters were more economical with paint and produced semi circular lines that were more delicate and defined. On some of the larger pieces, such as the 15 inch Malfrey Pot opposite, a full circular effect was achieved rather than semi circular pattern.

In creating a Mattajade piece, an outline was used as a template for the painting in of the underglaze colours that formed the base of the pattern. Then the piece was decorated with the wave design, the painter starting closest to the rim and worked in an anti-



Maling 'waved' lustre Plum & Orchard Pattern 3016



Mattajade 'Fantazia' Pattern



Mattajade Dragon Malfrey Pot with full circle wave design ground



Mattajade 'Coral Trees' Pattern



Exquisite Fairy Castle Pattern Charger



Mattajade Covered Vase



Floral Geometric Vase

clockwise direction, slightly overlapping each arc on the previous wave. The painter then worked the pattern down to the base of the piece. After glazing, extensive overglaze enamelling was added to highlight the design, and both hand painted and transfer gold was used to bestow a detailed and luxuriant finish

Boulton probably got the idea to introduce matt glazes from Germany, as the Germans had long been familiar with the techniques involved in producing matt effects. The consistent satin feel of the Mattajade glaze was achieved by firing the wares in a mouffle. The mouffle, or 'muffle' as it was known, was a kiln with an inner chamber that prevented direct heat or fire from touching the wares, doing away with the need to place the pots in protective saggars. The firing temperature was lower than that of highly glazed wares, but the lower temperature in no way led to problems of durability and Mattajade still looks fresh seven decades after it was produced.

Boulton chose very carefully a range of traditional and contemporary shapes upon which Mattajade was rendered. Bulbous ewers, vases and candlesticks; other modern profiles such as vogue shape bowls, star and square rimmed vases; shallow geometric bowls; classic Chinese style covered vases, potpourri jars, lamp bases, ginger jars, large covered malfrey pots and clean lined chargers were selected to show off the style of ground and accompanying designs to greatest effect.

Some of Boulton's most striking Art Deco patterns were selected to compliment the Mattajade effect. Coral Trees, Fantazia, Chinese Dragons, Fairy Castle, Swallows, Floral Rockery, a select number of other floral patterns and an updated version of Sylvan appeared on Mattajade.

It is not at all difficult to see why the Mattajade series was sought-after by aficionados of decorative design. The combination of the jade green 'waved' ground, striking underglaze colours supporting beautiful designs, fine enamelling and lavishly hand applied and overprinted gold appealed to the discriminating buyer. In choosing some of his most outstanding designs to decorate the Mattajade series, Boulton clearly intended the range to capitalise on the awakening, albeit delayed, interest being expressed in Art Deco by the British upper classes. Queen Mary purchased quite a number of Mattajade pieces at the British Industries Fair in 1932,

owing less to noblesse oblige and more to the fact that she was quite taken with the beauty of the ground and the richness of the designs.

Today, the reputation of Fieldings for both quality and design rests much on the magnificent 'excesses' of its Sybaritic Art Deco period between 1930 and 1939. Enoch Boulton's family of 'Mattas', particularly Mattajade, Mattasung and Mattita, are design triumphs that support the Devon Pottery's renown as a producer of high quality decorative ceramics. Mattajade, with its uniquely waved jade colouring, rich underglaze tones, delicate enamelling and lavish gold highlights demands attention of the keenest eyes, making it one of the most collectible and valuable of all Fieldings wares.

