**A History of Teapots**

**The Invention of Hard-Paste Porcelain**

Pottery was obviously not a new trade or art form in Europe -- however, the thin, burnished walls of the Asian ware, the form and detail (usually sprays of plum blossom, dragons, etc.) were very much admired. Achieving the delicacy of the Asian pots became a goal, desired by the wealthy who could afford the pleasures of tea and its emerging etiquette. Two important movements related to teapot manufacture evolved in the early 18th century.

Around 1686, John Philips and David Elers, Dutch silversmiths, arrived in England. They were later sued for stealing the secret of "redd porcelain" from John Dwight of Fulham, stoneware techniques based on German models. The two produced unglazed red stoneware teapots, and other items such as tea canisters and mugs, that were sold in London's Cheapside and became extremely popular because they were relatively inexpensive and of a much finer quality than much of the pottery available. Their work was thinly made and often stamped with plum blossom designs. Eler's ware, as it came to be known, influenced English pottery through the Victorian era terracottas. There are no authenticated pieces of Eler's ware extant today.

In Germany, Johann Bottger of Meissen worked as an alchemist for King Augustus of Poland. Augustus had a penchant for Chinese pottery and wanted gold to buy, among other things, fine teapots. Soon Bottger was instructed to throw all of his energy into discovering a European equivalent to the kaolin rich clay and petuntse rock of Chinese porcelain. The Chinese had been firing pieces of hard porcelain as early as 618 CE -- their idea of porcelain was defined not by color or translucence, but rather by the musical note achieved when a piece was struck. Between 1708 and 1710, Bottger invented a fine stoneware that could be burnished on a lapidary's wheel. But Bottger wanted to make a "hard-paste" material instead of merely imitating and refining earthenware. Around 1710, he found the proper balance of materials to mix into what was to be the first true European porcelain, white with a smooth texture and translucent quality.

The etymology of the word "porcelain" is traced to the term "porcella," the Italian name for cowrie shells. Porcelain had the same shiny veneer and whiteness as these natural objects. "Soft-paste" porcelain refers to works produced with glass-like materials before Bottger discovered the method for producing European "hard-paste" porcelain, a substance strong enough to withstand cutting with steel.

The great achievement of a European formula for hard paste porcelain allowed for innovation in decorative techniques -- painting with a wider range of colors, gilding, and so on. However, the size of teapots remained small (five to nine inches tall), like the YiXing pieces, and possibly due to the costliness of the tea made in them. Porcelain itself was expensive, and only potentates could afford to start up factories to produce the luxury items. The first workshop outside of Meissen was the Du Paquier establishment in Vienna; the next factories sprang up in Venice and Berlin. These businesses produced ostentatious teapots with elaborate detailing. Widespread porcelain production did not occur until the second half of the 18th century.

There were other invaluable influences that led to the creation of hard paste porcelain, in addition to YiXing teapots and Chinese porcelain. Hispano-Mooresque wares made during the Moorish occupation of Spain in the 8th century were earthenware pieces covered with white, opaque glaze made of tin ashes. This glaze served as a base for painting details and designs, often in quite brilliant colors. The Moors, Berbers and Arabs living in Northwest Africa, had reacted to the Ming pottery of 1368-1644. These Mediterranean works developed into 16th century Maiolica (Majolica), Italian ware produced in Faenza and then shipped to Majorca, Spain. Thus the French and German used the term faience for early pieces of fine pottery; the English used the term delftware, because of the earliest Dutch examples of finer glazed stoneware. In Marseilles, factories called Chinoiseries made soft paste porcelain of delicate design based upon western fantasies of Asian culture. All of these methods -- Hispano-Moorish, Italian and French -- required much skill to turn the pots, as well as decorate the wares, since the designs had to be made quickly upon the absorbent glazes; any mistake meant the ruin of a piece. Because of the increase in world communication via trade, these examples of early European "porcelains" made it back to China and would raise the popularity of white porcelain in Asia in the 18th Century.

Teapots were also wrought in silver during the 1700s, and the Queen Anne and Georgian styles in England replaced earlier, more Gothic and triangular ewer shapes. Silver teapots were also popular in Scandinavia. Because of the durability of metal, examples of wrought teapots are more numerous than those of early stoneware and porcelain tea wares.

The cost of tea was reflected in the cost of the teapots, and gradually whole tea services were required to properly serve the delicacy, including tray, spoons, creamers, sugar bowls and storage canisters. By the late 18th century, tea had replaced ale at the wealthy English breakfast table. An etiquette was forming around the drink that would become rooted in British, and also in Dutch, culture. The Netherlands remains the only continental European country with steady tea consumption; coffee became the preferred beverage on the rest of the continent in the mid-18th century. Britain became a tea-crazy kingdom that innnovated tea rituals and teapot design. Today, tea is second only to water in terms of worldwide popularity as a drink: 50 billion cups are served each year. *(To learn more about the culture of tea in the Britain, India, North America, Africa and other areas of the world, read about* [*Colonization and the Spread of Tea*](http://www.teapots.net/colonization_and_tea.html)*.)*

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