

by Les Paul

In the last issue I introduced various types of common and inexpensive miniature beer steins. In this and following issues, I will write a short article concentrating on just one specific type of miniature stein. The topic this time is mini-steins made of alabaster.

I thought alabaster and soapstone were the same thing, but my friend, Steve Smith, corrected me with the following information:

**Al-a-bas-ter**

Pronunciation (al'u-bas"tur, -bä"stur), - n.

1. A finely granular variety of gypsum, often white and translucent, used for ornamental objects or work, such as lamp bases, figurines, etc.

2. Also called Oriental alabaster, a variety of calcite, often banded, used, or sold as alabaster.

**Soap-stone**

Pronunciation: (sOp'stOn) - n.

A massive variety of talc with a soapy or greasy feel, used for hearths, washtubs, tabletops, carved ornaments, etc. Also called steatite.

Okay, that may be more information than I wanted to know, or can remember. Gypsum, calcite, talc, steatite; Oh well, these mini steins don't feel greasy, so I learned they are all alabaster and we can just forget all about soapstone.

My miniature alabaster steins measure from about 1-1/2" to 2-1/2" tall. They were all formed by cutting, shaping and hollowing the cylinder out on a lathe. The lid and handle are a metal, usually brass, which are mounted at the top rim.

The most common decoration on an alabaster miniature stein is a transfer verse (figure 1). Sometimes the name of a city is added, by handpainting, to these little souvenirs.

It's much harder to find decorations of figurals or scenes (figure 2). The first two city souvenirs in this photo depict the Munich child and the chimney storks of Strassburg.

The plain stein on the right was added to make another point. I've seen enough



figure 1



figure 2

off. I'm sure the plain steins had decorations too, but when they became too faded or worn, the remaining decoration was removed.

A few of these little containers had another practical purpose (figure 3). Packed full with a dense hair like material, this mini stein was used to clean the tip of an early fountain pen. And with that little tidbit, my pen is running out of ink and I can't think of anything else to say about alabaster miniature steins, except that I like them.



figure 3

