

BEER STEIN CERAMICS SIMPLIFIED

by
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Over the years, I have seen Steinzeug (salt-glazed stoneware), called Steingut, Majolica, even Hafnerware, which of course are all earthenware. It is common to see Feinsteinzeug, another earthenware, identified as either Porcelain, or Stoneware. Germans seem to confuse Steingut and Steinzeug and in the U.S., even professionals resort to using the generic term "pottery" in order to avoid having to use specific terms.

You do not see coin collectors confusing Gold, Silver, or Copper, or using the generic term "metal" and they are no smarter than the average stein collector, so why is it so difficult to identify Stoneware, Earthenware or Porcelain? The whole thing is really very simple and perhaps the following will help. Let's start with some basic definitions.

CERAMIC: The broad term for all objects made of fired clay. The principle divisions are earthenware, stoneware and porcelain.

POTTERY: A generic term for all ceramic wares without exception, but in normal use it is used to designate all wares which are not porcelain.



EARTHENWARE: Objects made of earthenware are not fused, sintered, or vitrified, meaning they are porous and therefore require a glaze if they are to hold liquids. Most earthenware products are fired at 900 to 1000 deg. centigrade. Some examples are: Steingut, Faience, Majolica, Deftware, Hafnerware, Terracotta, Terra Sigillata and Feinsteinzeug. Soft-paste Porcelain which is made from white clay and glass frit, is not vitrified, so is technically an earthenware but, because it isn't used in the manufacture of beer steins, it will be of no further concern to us.



Steingut: Steingut is the German equivalent of English "Creamware." I know of two, possibly three, manufacturers, H. Waffler of Regensburg who apparently acquired the assets of Fritz Thenn in 1886 and produced steingut using some of the Thenn molds and the Dorfners of Hirschau.

According to Kirsner's "Beer Stein Book" the Gebruder Dorfner were in business from 1895 to 1914. Ernst Dorfner was definitely in business in 1903, suggesting that they were in fact, separate companies. Glaze colors varied from white to light beige, imitating both porcelain and ivory stoneware.



Faience: Faience, or Fayence in Germany, is tin glazed earthenware, especially that made in France, Germany and Scandinavia. The term is of French derivation and probably comes from the 16th century popularity in France of wares made in Faenza, Italy. The technique is exactly the same as Majolica and Delft, the only difference is the place of origin.



Maiolica: Maiolica, or in Germany Majolica, is a term that originated in Italy for the opaque, tin glazed wares of Valencia, which came to Italy through the island of Maiorca, now Majorca. Use of the term should properly be limited to wares of Italy. The technique as mentioned above is exactly the same for Delft and Faience.



Delft: Delftware, is tin glazed earthenware that originated in Delft, Holland. Delftware is also made in England and Germany where it was introduced by immigrant Dutch potters. Interestingly, the rise of the industry at Delft took place in the middle of the 17th century, when potters took over many of the Delft breweries as a consequence of the decline in the brewing industry. See, Faience and Maiolica.



Hafnerware: Hafnerware consists mainly of lead glazed tiles used in stove construction in Germany and the Alpine areas of Central Europe. Colors are basically limited to greens, browns and yellow. Silesian Hafnerware with tin glazes, made by the Hafner (or stove) potters, had designs cut with a knife to prevent the intermingling of the tin glazes employed. Other wares made by the Hafnerware potters included jugs and dishes.



Terracotta: Terracotta is usually found without a glaze, made of redish clay and lightly fired. Figures of Terracotta were usually the work of sculptors rather than potters. Terracottas are often single pieces made in a "waste-mold", or reproduced in very limited quantities in a "piece-mold." The illustrated piece is model 9712 by Johann Maresch. This particular piece is also found painted in full color.



Terra Sigillata: Terra Sigillata was originally ware made from allegedly medicinal clay from Samos and Lemnos and stamped with a seal (sigillum) of authenticity. Later the term was applied to Arretine and Samian ware, and more recently to a grey Maltese pottery and to Silesian red ware. It was also the name given to a line of red ware produced by Duemler & Breiden around 1910 as evidenced by the example.



Feinsteinzeug: Feinsteinzeug! Never was there a greater misnomer. Feinsteinzeug is not Steinzeug (stoneware) at all, but earthenware and it requires a glaze if it is to hold liquids. Feinsteinzeug was developed to replace the more expensive to produce Steinzeug and Elfenbeinsteinzeug. It came into general usage around 1910. Most common under glazes are white, grey and light beige, imitating Porcelain, Steinzeug and Elfenbeinsteinzeug.



STONEWARE: These objects are fully vitrified and do not require a glaze to hold liquids. Most stoneware products are fired at 1100 to 1300 deg. centigrade. Examples are, Steinzeug (stoneware, usually salt glazed) and Elfenbeinsteinzeug (Ivory Stoneware).



Steinzeug: Stoneware clays are found in a narrow band across north central Europe from Raeren in the west to Bunzlau in the east. Colors of the clay range from white to dark brown. Steinzeug was first produced around 1325 and salt glazing soon followed. The jug illustrated was produced around 1880 in Freising, Bavaria, from Westerwald clay and is in the style of Raeren.



Elfenbeinsteinzeug: Elfenbeinsteinzeug is made from exactly the same clay as Steinzeug, but is fired in a vented kiln which allows oxygen to enter the kiln during the process that oxidizes the small amount of iron in the clay causing the beige or ivory coloration. Rather than being salt glazed, Elfenbeinsteinzeug is covered with a glass frit glaze, safer for the environment and those who produce it.



PORCELAIN: Porcelain falls into three categories, Hard-paste, Bone China and Soft-paste which is not really porcelain (see earthenware). Porcelain is fully vitrified and only requires a glaze for aesthetic purposes. Most porcelain products are fired at 1250 to 1450 deg. centigrade. Bone china, while fully vitrified, is less durable than Hard-paste porcelain as it has had bone ash added to improve translucence and was/is generally the material of choice of American porcelain factories.



Porcelain: Porcelain has been around since about 700 A.D. when the Chinese first produced it. It took another 1,000 years for Europeans to discover the secret of its composition. The first European Porcelain was produced in Meissen in 1708. Most people can identify porcelain without a problem, but there have been cases of Hauber & Reuther porcelain being confused with Elfenbeinsteinzeug due to the browns and tans HR used to decorate much of their porcelain, which is often etched, or in threaded relief, thus adding to the confusion.