

Stein Collectors International

~ Caring for Your Steins ~



Caring for your steins is pretty straightforward if you understand some of the basics about how they were made, and apply some common sense. Don't display them on a low table where your children or grandchildren might be tempted to play with them. Don't try to clean them with harsh chemicals or abrasives. Don't try to see how many you can carry at one time, like the waitress in the *Hofbrauhaus*. Don't clink them together in a toast, if you drink out of them. Don't put them in the dishwasher. Treat them the way your mother treated her finest crystal, and you'll be OK.

Handling

Stein collectors learn very quickly that the hinged lid creates a significant vulnerability in their steins. If the lid is allowed to swing closed by itself, it will normally close with a bang, risking damage to both rim and lid. If the stein is handled without care, the lid may unexpectedly swing open, possibly damaging the lid, the thumblift or the handle of the stein. The way to overcome this is to develop the habit of firmly holding the lid with the forefinger of the hand holding the stein, and to use two hands when opening and closing the lid. This will allow you to turn the stein in every direction to examine it, while holding the lid in place.

Be careful when moving steins around on a shelf. Base chips can result from knocking the base of one stein into another, or by banging it on the edge of a glass shelf. Handle cracks may arise from similar "bumps". Thumblifts and finials are regularly bent by lifting the stein and hitting the shelf above. Just remember the fragility of your steins, and handle them carefully.

Cleaning Glass, Ceramic or Pewter

The following paragraphs apply only to glass, ceramic or pewter steins whose surface decoration is intact. If there is any pre-existing damage, especially paint-flaking, washing the stein may make it worse. Steins having a lot of surface crazing (like faience) should not be immersed for washing, as the water may penetrate the crazing. Instead, these steins should be cleaned with only a soft, damp cloth. Never wash wood or ivory steins; they require special cleaning techniques.

Many old steins have spent a lifetime (or perhaps several lifetimes!) sitting on a shelf in someone's home. Over the years they naturally pick up dust and dirt, which may be mixed into a coating of tobacco smoke or cooking oils, and this will detract from the appearance of the stein. Fortunately, this is easily washed off with warm water and one of today's grease-cutting cleansers, with a possible assist from a toothbrush to provide some mild scrubbing action and to get into hard-to-reach spots. This is especially useful around the pewter attachments, and for the complex surface of a pewter lid.

Most steins made of glass or ceramic have had the decoration fired on, such that it becomes fused with the body. These decorations cannot be washed off. On the other hand, use of an abrasive cleaner will induce scratches in glass, ceramic or metal, and can seriously mar the surface.

Portions of the design which have been decorated with gold deserve special care. Gold is a very soft metal, and unlike enameled decoration, will wear off. Always treat gold decoration gingerly.

Partially fill the kitchen sink or utility tub with warm, soapy water. Do not let the water get too hot, as this runs the risk of cracking the stein. Consider placing a towel in the water to act as a cushion for

the stein during its bath. Letting the stein soak will soften even heavy deposits of dirt and oil. Think "SLIPPERY", because that is exactly what you will encounter after placing the stein in the soapy water. It cannot be over-emphasized that handling the wet, soapy stein will be difficult. Gripping it by the handle, when possible, usually provides a secure grip. Use your hands, a sponge or a toothbrush to complete the job. Rinse the stein, inside and out, in WARM WATER, and then dry it thoroughly. A few drops of water may continue to accumulate on the inside, so you might want to leave the lid cocked open for a few hours while the stein air dries.

Cleaning Pewter

Over time, if exposed to the air, pewter will oxidize and acquire a patina indicative of its age. Most collectors today prefer this patina to the original shiny appearance, so polishing pewter is not recommended. However, you can clean pewter by washing it as described above, or by the limited use of a mild abrasive (soft scrub) to remove dirt and grime. This should be done sparingly and slowly, checking the pewter as you proceed, to ensure that no damage is done. Be sure to rinse the pewter thoroughly in clear water when you are done.

Damaged Pewter

Pewter is a soft metal, and it damages very easily. It also has a low melting point, and it changes from solid to liquid state very quickly, so attempts to solder it are best left to the experts. Bent thumblifts, finials and rims can sometimes be improved by applying heat (hot water is one possibility) to soften the pewter, and then gently trying to bend it back into its original shape or position. This must be done with patience, however, with only slight changes at a time, since the older pewter gets, the more brittle it becomes. Probably as often as a thumblift is straightened another is broken off entirely, so think about this carefully before attempting it.

Exposure to Heat (and Cold)

Extremes of heat and cold induce stress in glass and ceramics, and should be avoided. We noted above not to use hot water when washing steins, but care should also be taken not to display your steins where they will be subject to prolonged periods of direct sunlight, which can heat them up quite a bit.

Insurance

Steins are not cheap, and every collector should consider obtaining insurance. While you may not be able to obtain coverage for breakage resulting from dropping a stein, you can obtain insurance for theft, fire, flood and acts of nature, including earthquakes. Try searching for "collectors insurance" on the Internet, or contact the company that handles your homeowners insurance.