

Stein Collectors International

~ A Glossary Of Stein Terminology ~



This is a U-Build-It Glossary of stein collecting terms. We've seeded the Glossary with a few terms, but would like our visitors to suggest additional terms to be included, or to comment on the definitions we have provided. Please send your contributions to us by email to sci@steincollectors.org.

We would be remiss not to start by pointing out that the word **stein** is an English term which is applied to items which are typically German. In German the word means "stone", so if you ask a German shop-keeper for a stein, there is a fair possibility they will not know what you mean. The Germans use several different terms when referring to our favorite drinking vessels, *krug* (or the plural, *krüge*) or *seidel* being the most common. The word stein is an adaptation from the German word *steinzeug*, which means stoneware, and which is the most common form of ceramics used for beer steins.

The following terms are widely used by stein collectors, and many of them have taken on specific meanings which go beyond the normal dictionary definitions. We've tried to be precise, when precision is possible, but welcome your comments.

Stein	This is probably the term which English-speaking stein collectors most wish was used with careful precision. There have been numerous attempts at this definition, but the commonly accepted meaning is " a drinking vessel which has a handle and a lid ". The lid is frequently attached to the body and uses a hinge to open, but set-on lids are also allowed.
Unlidded Stein	The common use of this term indicates the importance of the lid to qualify as a stein, since it connotes a piece which would normally have a lid, but unfortunately does not. (Thus a stein which has had its lid torn off in an unfortunate accident becomes an unlidded stein.)
Master stein	This term is applied to pouring vessels which otherwise fit the definition of a stein. Historically, it was quite common for serving sets to be made in the same design; a large master stein and a set of smaller steins or beakers.
Mug	A <i>mug</i> is a handled drinking vessel which does not have a lid. Many mugs, but not all, can be called unlidded steins, if they were supposed to have a lid.
Cup	In usage this term is similar to <i>mug</i> , in that it implies a handle but no lid. It frequently is applied to smaller vessels, and always to items which were made for drinking tea or coffee. We have <i>tea</i> cups and <i>coffee</i> cups (or even mugs!), but <i>beer</i> mugs or steins.

Beaker	A <i>beaker</i> is the analogue of a water glass, having no lid and usually no handle. In shape it is taller than it is wide, and was intended for drinking some sort of alcoholic beverage.
Römer	The name Römer is generally applied to glass drinking vessels which have a large bowl and a hollow stem. The stem of the Römer is frequently formed in rings, or may be decorated with prunts. It has no handle nor lid.
Pokal	A pokal is a ceremonial drinking vessel, usually tall, with a set-on lid but no handle.
Tankard	It should be no surprise that given the various uses of this term going back to 13th century England, there is confusion over its meaning today. Historically it seems to have always implied large size, and most commonly, tankards had handles and lids. The term also strongly suggested that the object was made of metal. In 1984, SCI proposed that its members agree that the term would be used for "large drinking vessels, for beer or similar liquids, equipped with handle and lid, having a capacity of 2 liters or greater". This suggestion seems to have been met with resounding indifference. Today the term is commonly used when referring to a large serving pitcher (with handle but no lid!), especially those made of glass (see eBay).
Mint	This term has come to be widely used when referring to a stein which is "in the same condition as it left the factory". Unfortunately, that allows the existence of firing lines, smudges, bubbles, even torn decals. Make no mistake - these are defects, and depending upon their location and severity, they can be very distracting. Although there is no widespread agreement, the term "perfect" seems like a natural choice to describe a stein which is not only mint, but without flaw.
Handpainted	While it seems obvious, this term is frequently applied to transfer-decorated items, and it actually has several very distinct meanings. In its purest form we mean entirely hand-drawn and hand-decorated by the artist . These steins are custom designed, and while copies may have been made, each one is unique. However, many times transfer templates were designed for steins which required further customization. Two examples are student society steins, where the basic crest was the same on many steins, but the colors and society name needed to be customized, and regimental steins, which had similar basic design but required customization. While the term hand-painted is commonly used for these steins, what is meant is customized and colored by hand . A third example also arises where the transfer is actually complete in all respects, yet for artistic purposes certain areas are highlighted by hand - metal buttons on jackets, the foam on a beer stein, or other decorative touches. We understand these as highlighted by hand .
Handarbeit	(German) Hand made. The appearance of this term on a stein usually suggests that the stein was made post-World War II, and it's difficult to say precisely what it implies. The term was rarely used on steins from 100 years ago, because it was unnecessary!

Handgemalt	(German) Hand painted. The appearance of this term on a stein usually suggests that the stein was made post-World War II. While it is an appropriate term for some very finely decorated pieces, it is also found on relief steins where the glaze colors are applied by hand, an operation which bears little resemblance to what we think of as hand-painting.
Lithophane	An image in porcelain, made by varying the thickness of the porcelain, and viewed with a light behind it. Lithophanes were popular in the bases of porcelain steins, and they came to view when the stein was drained. Still made today, a popular use is night lights.
Mettlach	One of several factories of the Villeroy and Boch company, Mettlach had by far the greatest stein production, and their steins are generally considered to be of high quality and design. They are well-catalogued and highly sought after.
Earthenware	A non-vitrified (porous) ceramic, kiln-hardened at 850°C-1000°C, synonymous with "pottery". Requires glazing to become non-porous.
Faience	A tin-glazed earthenware. Faience was a predecessor of porcelain in Europe, and the glaze provided a "porcelain-like" ground for decoration.
Stoneware	True vitrified ceramic, lacking the fine white color and translucency of porcelain, fired at 1100°C-1300°C. Hard and impermeable after firing. Made in the Rhine valley in Germany as early as the 15th century.
Porcelain	A glassy white, vitrified ceramic with a degree of translucency, extreme hardness and a very fine surface, ideal in color and texture for decorating. Porcelain is fired at temperatures above 1350°C. Glazed items present a hard, shiny, glass-like surface. Unglazed items have a non-shiny finish known as bisque. Because of its strength, porcelain wares are made with a thin cross-section. The first European porcelain was made by Johann Friedrich Boettger in Dresden in 1708.
Etched	This term properly applies to designs created by removing material, whether by grinding, engraving, acid, diamond point or other means, most often done on glass. The term is also commonly used to refer to steins where the design is formed in an outline appearing to be incised into the body. Technically, since these lines are formed as part of a molding process, they should not be called etched.
Acid etched	Glass may be decorated by etching the surface with acid. The surface is first coated with a material which will resist the acid, then the design is formed as this protective covering is removed. When acid is applied to this exposed area, it etches the surface of the glass.
Copper wheel engraving	Most of the etched beer steins we encounter were etched using copper wheels of various sizes and an abrasive to grind a design into the surface of the glass.

Cased glass	Sometimes called cameo glass , cased glass results from layering one color or glass over another. Layers may be created by using two different colors at the time the gather is placed on the blowpipe, or by blowing a new color inside a piece after it has been formed. Sometimes as many as four different colors may be used. Cased glass is always cut in some fashion, so that the underlying colors are allowed to show through the upper layers (otherwise, what's the point?).
Flashed glass	Similar in its artistic ends to cased glass, flashed glass involves the application of a very thin layer of glass onto an object of a different color. The outside layer is then cut or etched in some fashion, leaving the underlying color exposed to form the design. We frequently see ruby flashed beer steins which have been cut to the clear base glass. Flashing is so thin that over the course of 100+ years it is frequently found with small scratches.
Prunt	A prunt is a separate piece of glass which has been applied as decoration to the exterior of a glass object. Prunts may be found in a variety of shapes, including a nipple, a starburst or a raspberry, and are frequently in a different color than the base glass.
Transfer	A technique invented by the English to decorate pottery which involved printing a decoration on tissue, then transferring the decoration to the biscuit (unglazed) ware. The tissue was removed and the oils holding the colored decoration burned off in a low temperature firing before the final glaze was added and the piece refired. Frequently called PUG (Print Under Glaze), transfer techniques are very similar to decals, and they were popular because of their consistency from piece to piece and their lower cost than hand decorating. Some transfer designs were either partially or entirely left uncolored, to be colored later by hand (hence "handpainted PUG's").
PUG	This term is an acronym for Print (meaning "transfer") Under Glaze.
Incised	Sharply impressed into the body, as a trademark or form number on the base of a stein. Base markings were normally applied by impressing a metal die into the clay while it was still in the "green" state.
Reverse etched	Sometimes called "threaded relief", this term refers to designs which are formed in a raised outline, similar to a thread.
term	more to come