



november inspiration...hi ho silver!

I'm not exactly sure where my lust for silver came from as I wasn't exactly born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I didn't grow up eating from my grandmothers' silver flatware or inheriting their chafing dishes and coffee services. Perhaps the reason I reap such pleasure from the silver I have is that I remember where and when I found certain pieces, who was with me, which sister I had a "tug of war" with at the checkout counter - "I saw it first".

What makes silver so special is not only its beauty, the age or the quality of the item. When you own a piece of vintage silver, it was once a part of someone else's story and is now a part of yours. I once found a spectacular tray in an "antique" shop that was so black that the design let alone the markings was unrecognizable. I bought it on pure faith and the fact that the price was ridiculously low. What I discovered under all of those years of neglect was a magnificent object of extremely high craftsmanship and beauty. At the same store, but another time, I bought a tarnished but beautifully engraved Tiffany sterling silver porringer that originally was a gift from a godfather to his godson and then regifted when the young man became a godfather 30 years later. The proprietor said that it had been sitting in the case for years. "No one wants something with other people's names on it, happy to see it go", she whined. Obviously, she must have thought I was some odd duck!



My paternal grandmother was *Totally Modern Millie* and had no taste or sentimentality for anything "old". Her mother, my great grandmother, was the Head Housekeeper for the Gimbel family of Philadelphia, and for many years she collected dishes and other treasures that were passed on to her by that family. I know for a fact, that after she died, her daughter (my grandmother) packed everything away in boxes in her basement until, in one final purge, sent them to the annual church basement sale! (OMG!)

My maternal grandmother was more the artsy type- white hair swept up in a French twist and lots of silver and gold bracelets jangling. Her style of entertaining was much less formal- think Fiesta Ware and frosted glass ice tea tumblers with hand painted carousel horses. The only silver I remember her owning was a set of silver plate flatware that lived in one of her kitchen drawers along with her mismatched stainless steel utensils that she used daily. Her silver went the way of a lot of other families- unused and blackened with tarnish.

Since no silver of any consequence passed to my mother, the only silver I remember growing up with was my mother's sterling silver wedding flatware called *Damask Rose*. My mother treasured her silver flatware. She had only 8 place settings which meant that since there were 7 in our family, when we had company, one or two of us girls had to rough it and use the stainless. Usually, it was my youngest sister and we always set their places in the least conspicuous corner to distract from the place setting mismatch.

When my mother entertained, or for special family dinners, she would ceremoniously bring out the big wooden storage box that she kept hidden under the dining room server. When that box appeared, we all knew that it was a special occasion or that a guest was coming to dinner. We also knew NOT to put any pieces into the dishwasher but to wash it by hand. We would then dry it with a tea towel, lay it flat on the counter and like an abacas, we would count each piece as we returned the forks, knives and spoons to their designated spots. All of this ceremoniously had to happen before we took out the trash for the night just in case a fork, knife or spoon might have been erroneously thrown away. In all those years, not one piece was lost- that says something for running a tight ship.



Unfortunately, I wish I could say the same for my own silver flatware. One dinner party alone, I lost 4 teaspoons- ouch- and as I write this, two teaspoons just took a journey into the bowels of our kitchen garbage disposal. Both spoons now look more like weapons, with sharp shards of silver protruding like porcupine quills at the end of each bowl. (Sigh) I am also very cavalier about tossing my silver forks and spoons into the dishwasher, but I always wash my knives by hand which, in my opinion, is a small price to pay for such a reward.

Needless to say, I couldn't wait to select my *own* silver pattern. One thing that is for sure: my taste definitely has changed throughout the years. I started out in high school dreaming of *Wallace's Grand Baroque*. By the time I got married, my choice was Tiffany's *Hamilton*- a pattern on the opposite end of the design spectrum. After all, not unlike finding a husband, finding your very own silver pattern is a decision to last a lifetime and one not to be taken lightly. My family has used it every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner and we have never grown tired of it.



Soon after we were married, my husband and I traveled to Kansas City, MO for a business conference. We had an afternoon free and decided to do some shopping for our new apartment. Our first stop was to Williams and Sonoma to purchase dishes for our newly renovated kitchen. I remember feeling pressured by the salesperson (and guess who?) into purchasing a set of stainless steel flatware since "our *Hamilton* was accumulating.....at a snail's pace". I remember having serious doubts about the purchase knowing full well that if there wasn't a reason to keep the momentum going on the collecting end, I would be eating from stainless steel forks for the rest of my life. However, I was swept away by the moment and by my husband's delight to imagine himself finally eat from a fork, knife and spoon that matched. So along with our other purchases, we threw in a full set of "good quality" stainless steel flat wear.

It only took three blocks before I was attacked by an acute case of buyer's remorse. I know this sounds dramatic, but a feeling came over me akin to what I imagine you feel after you just sold your soul to the Devil. I allowed myself to be coerced; even when every fiber of my being was telling me *it was wrong*. I did an about face, ran back to the store, slapped the box on the counter and asked for a refund. My husband was dumbfounded, but not as much as the sales woman who had just scored the sale. When I returned to the store, she was still sporting her original "what a good salesperson am I!" smile on her face.



Of all of my silver stories, the one I love the best happened just this past summer. I accompanied a friend to a local consignment store in a small CT town looking for dining chairs for her daughter's new home. As I walked in the door, my silver radar went off and my eyes spotted a treasure trove of silver trays both large and small. That day, along with other items, I purchased 8 silver trays of all shapes and sizes.

The following Friday, I returned to the shop to pick up a bench that was purchased on my last trip, but wouldn't fit into my car. Of course, I took the opportunity to add a few additional items to a pile that I had stacked on the checkout counter as well as the floor below. I was wandering around the store when I overheard a conversation between the two sales women. I wasn't paying much attention but then I realized they were talking about me. When I realized I was the subject of their conversation, the first thing that ran through my mind was how to ditch everything and bolt without being noticed.

The first saleswoman said to the other, "Who does all this stuff belong to?"

The other woman replied, "A designer..... I guess she's a designer."

The first woman said, "What's with all the designers lately? Last Friday, a designer came in with a client and bought up most all the trays that Mrs. Barnes' granddaughter dropped off that morning. It was incredible! She kept piling them on the counter.....She just didn't stop!

I thought she would be interested in the Gucci tray with the leather handles so I brought it over to her. She just looked at it and sniffed....she was only interested in the old stuff! Go figure"

I was mortified! Like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar, I sheepishly walked over to the counter trying to avoid eye contact. Maybe they wouldn't recognize me or maybe think I didn't hear them....

"Hey it's you! ...She's the designer! "And look she is buying more silver trays! Sure you don't want that Gucci one?"



Silver mavens know the more you use your silver, the less you have to polish it, the more beautiful it gets and the happier your family and friends will be. Nothing elevates an omelette or a plate of pasta then digging in with a beautiful silver fork. And if you really want to wow your guests, try serving burritos from a lidded vegetable dish...ole! The mundane becomes special. Everyone will appreciate your attention to detail and the special treatment that you are giving them.

Think about it, all it takes is a dishpan of hot soapy water, a pair of rubber gloves, a soft cloth, a jar of Goddards silver paste and some good old elbow grease. I promise you, it will be worth your effort.

Happy trails!

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