

A *mad* tea party

ECCENTRIC TEAPOTS ARE JUST HER CUP OF TEA

STORY BY DIANA TONNESSEN | PHOTOS BY DOUG FINGER

DROP BY CAROL Roberts' house for a glimpse of her teapot collection and you might feel as though you've fallen through a rabbit hole and landed at the Mad Hatter's tea party. Roberts has more than 100 ceramic teapots in her collection. But these are no ordinary teapots. They include some of the wackiest, most eccentric designs you'll find this side of Wonderland.

Roberts' collection — most of which is displayed on built-in shelves across from the kitchen in her Huntington home — includes teapots in the shape of a wringer washer, a bedroom dresser with a picture of Elvis on it, a workbench with tools... There's even a teapot in the shape of a tea-cart titled "Tea at the Ritz."

One teapot, "Crime Writer's Desk" consists of an oak desk with a vintage typewriter on it. Another teapot is fashioned in the shape of a 1950s sideboard with a TV on it. Yet another consists of a Punch and Judy puppet theater. A notice of the next puppet showing is posted on the back.

"I wanted them to be whimsical," says Roberts, 57, director of marketing for Bosshardt Realty. "That's big for me."

A longstanding tradition

Roberts started collecting teapots about 20 years ago. She bought her first — a black and white cat wearing a white bandana — on a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico. That teapot and several other early additions to her collection all were designed and made by American ceramic artists.

"But once you start to enjoy something, you tend to notice it more and more," says Roberts. What she began to notice were several British companies that specialized in the design and manufacture of novel and eccentric teapots. She wrote to the teapoteries and had new additions

to her collection shipped directly from England.

The British have a long tradition of designing and manufacturing weird and wonderful teapots. One of the most well known companies, the Teapottery, has been in the business for more than 30 years. According to the company's Web site, the tradition of brewing and serving tea in odd-shaped pots dates back to 18th century China, where the shapes were believed to have auspicious meanings. A peach-shaped pot, for example, was thought to bring long life and good luck. Tea served in a pomegranate-shaped pot was believed to bestow many healthy children.

When these early teapots made their way to Europe (along with the much sought-after tea from China served in them) the pots inspired European potters to develop new and different designs. But the British, more than any other Europeans, took to tea drinking and made the teapot their specialty.

In the 1700s, ceramicists such as Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Whieldon, took teapot design to new heights, offering a range of teapots in such shapes as pineapple, cauliflower and cabbage. The tradition continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a resurgence in the production of whimsical teapots, with teapots taking the shapes of racing-cars, pandas, ocean-liners and country cottages. Today, a handful of small British potteries continue to produce novel teapots "in the fine tradition of eccentricity and quality for which British teapots are noted," according to the Teapottery.

Mad about teapots

One of Roberts' favorites is the British Spivey, designed in the shape of a man holding open a trench coat full of wares, including butcher knives and television sets. The teapot in the shape of a bellman is significant because his picture is on the cover of one of Roberts' two coffee-table books about teapot collecting.

Alice's Dormouse — a depiction of the dormouse at the Mad Tea Party in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (the one that got stuffed into a teapot by the Mad Hatter and the



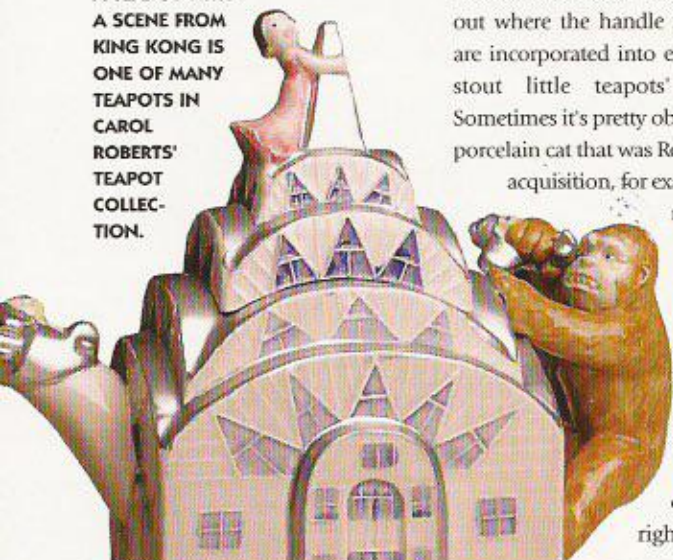


CAROL ROBERTS POSES IN THE KITCHEN OF HER NORTHWEST GAINESVILLE HOME WITH HER TEAPOT COLLECTION. THE FAT CAT TEAPOT AT LOWER RIGHT WAS HER FIRST PIECE.

March Hare at the end of the tea party) — was one of the first that Roberts purchased from the Teapottery.

"My daughter-in-law's favorite is King Kong," says Roberts. That teapot depicts the giant ape scaling a wall of the Empire State Building, complete with a damsel in distress on top.

A TEAPOT WITH A SCENE FROM KING KONG IS ONE OF MANY TEAPOTS IN CAROL ROBERTS' TEAPOT COLLECTION.



Roberts is also partial to a teapot in the shape of a wedding cake by teapot potter Tony Carter. The teapot was the centerpiece of her own wedding cake when she and her husband, Greg, married two years ago.

Here is my handle...

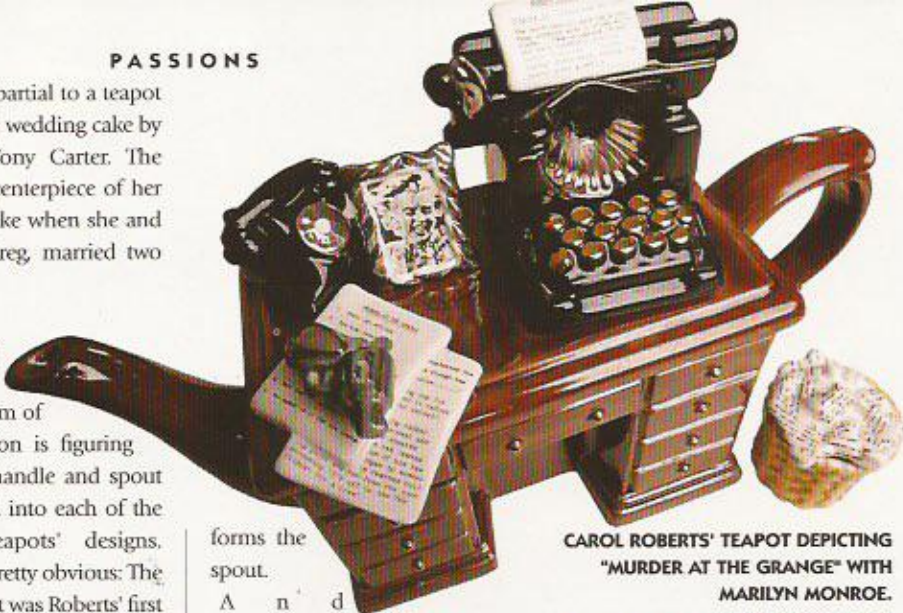
Part of the charm of Roberts' collection is figuring out where the handle and spout are incorporated into each of the stout little teapots' designs. Sometimes it's pretty obvious: The porcelain cat that was Roberts' first

acquisition, for example, has removable ears that serve as the teapot's lid. Its curled tail is the handle. Its right paw

forms the spout.

And although the handle and spout are clearly identifiable on the Crime Writer's Desk, the lid is not so easy to find. (Hint: try lifting the typewriter.)

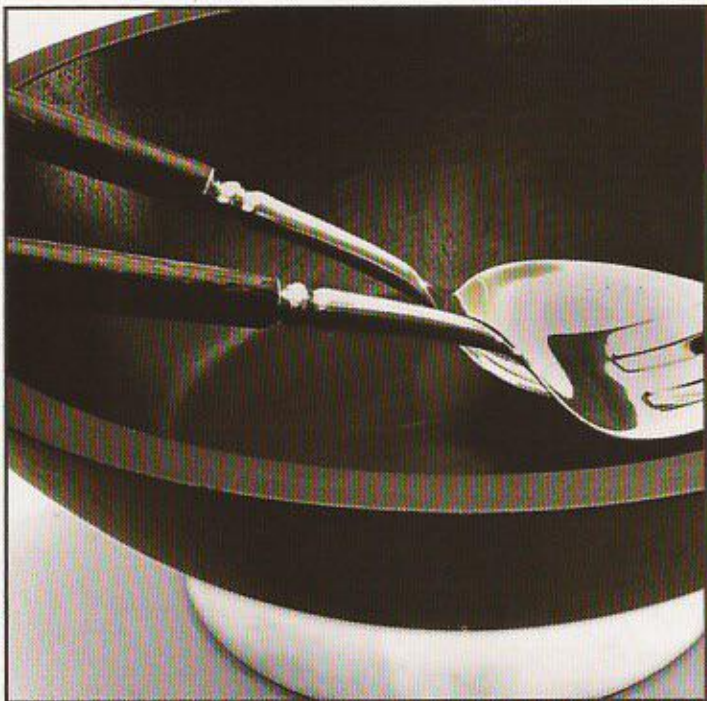
Each of the teapots in Roberts' collection is fully functional, though Roberts prefers to use them for display only. But then again, what else would you expect at a Mad Tea Party? Certainly not tea. *B*



CAROL ROBERTS' TEAPOT DEPICTING "MURDER AT THE GRANGE" WITH MARILYN MONROE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES:

- Cardew Club
www.cardewclub.com
- The Teapottery
www.teapottery.co.uk
- Tony Carter
Collectible Teapots
www.cartersteapots.com



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