

# COLLECTING ART DECO WEDGWOOD WITH *Carl Landsberg*

It's the sleek lines and high style of 1930's Art Deco ceramics that fuels this Jo'burg collector's passion for these elegant works of art

What's clear, even before you enter this home, is that its owner loves all things Art Deco. The stylish double-storey, bay-windowed house looks like a grand 1930's ocean liner that's beached itself in present-day Johannesburg. From the minute I'm led into the beautifully decorated hallway, I'm transported to a streamlined world where sleek lines and high style are the order of the day.

Carl Landsberg, a former art history lecturer and passionate 20th-Century ceramics enthusiast, is brimming with interesting stories and background info on his collection and other ceramics of the period. "I've been a collector all my life," explains Carl.

"Collecting art and ceramics became a focus in my twenties. Initially the shapes of Keith Murray designs sparked my interest. As I started to learn more about the Wedgwood factory, its production process and the designers that reinvented these wares, my collection



started increasing. I acquired some of my collection locally at auction, but over the years, a lot of the pieces were bought online from the UK.

"I have favourites in my collection for different reasons. I love the Keith Murray bomb- and cone-shaped vases – the simplicity and style gives them a particular contemporary feel – they're true design classics. I try to collect these in pairs and different sizes and particularly appreciate the sophistication of the cream-coloured

**BELOW FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:** ● Slip-decorated bowl with fluted body and iridescent transmutation mushroom and blue glaze. ● Trumpet vase with faceted sides in matt straw glaze. Both designed by Norman Wilson.

## A BRIEF LOOK AT WEDGWOOD IN THE 1930s

The 1930s was a time of change for the company founded by Josiah Wedgwood back in 1759. The biggest was the relocation of the factory in 1936 from Etruria in Staffordshire to a purpose-built factory in Barlaston. The new factory, designed by New Zealand-born modernist architect Keith Murray, employed new methods of mass production, a change ignited by the new gas-fired kilns.

Master potter and works manager, Norman Wilson's work was helped along by new developments in glazes, enabling exciting new designs to be included in the company's mass-produced wares.

Many of the 1930's designs, especially the iconic Keith Murray shaped vases, were produced right up until the mid-1950s. Sadly, Wedgwood is no longer family owned and today is a brand of the Waterford Group.



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moonstone glazes. I also love the rich Japanese-inspired glazes of Norman Wilson's work. His work is rarer and highly sought after. I only have a couple of his pieces, which I treasure. When the two masters collaborated the result was pure Art Deco magic.

"Art Deco has been the revolving door of decorative styles and has fallen in and out of vogue more often than a Hollywood starlet falls in and out of love. In the 1990s, when I started collecting, it made a huge return and prices of anything Art Deco reached their peak. Today prices have evened out, but good Deco and Modernist Wedgwood pieces have become very hard to find. Collectors tend to hang onto to their collections. I don't collect for investment sake and won't part with my collection – I think the designs are elegant and timeless and I'm merely a custodian of these beautifully designed and crafted pieces of history."

**ABOVE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:** ● Keith Murray bomb-shaped vase with architectonic furrowing to accentuate the shape. This design has a distinctive 'moderne' quality synonymous with the Art Deco period. ● Annular ware globular vase with engine/lathe cut concentric rings and a moonstone glaze. ● Early edition Keith Murray (1933 – 1936) hand-thrown, post-1936 slip-cast vase. ● With iridescent taupe interior glaze, this Japanese-inspired bowl borrows strongly from a traditional Asian petal motif. ● Norman Wilson 1930's vase with turned body and stepped shoulder detail in shades of sky, turquoise and powder blue. **BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT:** ● Norman Wilson saucer bowl with moonstone glaze. ● Norman Wilson early 1940's vase with black slip and white moonstone glaze facet cut.

## TIPS FOR ASPIRING COLLECTORS

- "While condition determines the value of pieces, colour is also important in establishing value. Popular colours are moonstone (light cream), straw, pale blue and green. Black basalt is rare and bronze super-rare as it was an experimental colour," says Wim Castleman of Decades in Melville, Jo'burg.
- "If you're on a budget, start with Keith Murray mugs. They're reasonably priced and quite easy to find," says Tim Jones of Uncle Tim's Centre in Benoni. "Sculptor John Skeaping's 14 exotic animal figures for Wedgwood make a wonderful collection. The animal figures include a kangaroo, dassie, monkey, polar bear and various antelope. Also look out for Millicent Taplin's lovely floral hand-painted designs." 



**SOURCES** Decades 083 477 2430 Uncle Tim's Centre 011 967 1816 or [uncletimscentre.co.za](http://uncletimscentre.co.za)