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The Kamm Collection

Teapot Collectors of Astounding Proportions

Text by Sharon McDonnell
 Photography Courtesy of The Kamm Teapot Foundation

Gloria and Sonny Kamm, a couple in Los Angeles, California, have collected well more than 17,000 teapots. Theirs is considered the world's largest collection and extraordinary for its sheer depth and variety of styles, materials, and themes. Ranging from the 17th to the 21st centuries and from famous European producers (such as Meissen, Wedgwood, and Royal Worcester), China's Qing Dynasty, and contemporary artists to industrial designers, the teapots are made from every imaginable material—clay, glass, silver, copper, brass, wood, stone (including lapis lazuli and jasper), beads, and even coconuts. Themes depict everything from history, animals, and flowers to people. Many are pure art, non-functional teapots—the Kamms have commissioned more than 1,100 of these. Recently, the Craft in America Center in Los Angeles showcased dozens of their arty teapots in *Tea for Two*, an exhibit from May through September 2025. The pair were also profiled in the PBS documentary series *Craft in America*, which the center produces, in a December 2024 collectors' episode.

A teapot is “the single most collectible item in the pantheon of domestic ceramic products, although also collected in silver, glass, . . . and a host of unlikely materials besides. Collecting teapots is a growing obsession,” writes Garth Clark, a leading scholar of modern and contemporary ceramics and author of *The Artful Teapot*, a 2001 book featuring more than 250 photographs of the Kamms' teapots. “Nowhere is this exhibited with greater vision and spirit of adventure” than in their collection (a mere 5,000 teapots at the time), he adds, not to mention a sense of fun—Sonny's license plate was TPOTMAN, and Gloria hung a “No more teapots” sign (with a crossed-out teapot) on the garage door leading to their Encino home. Their mailbox is shaped like a teapot. “For a few days we didn't get mail, since the postman didn't know what it was,” says Gloria with a laugh.

The Kamms have often loaned their teapots to museums since 1984, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Long Beach Museum of Art, and Huntington Museum of Art in Southern California;

Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts; Dixon Gallery in Memphis, Tennessee; Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina; Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts in Alabama; and various museums in Europe. For the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus design movement in 2019, they loaned a streamlined silver-plated brass teapot, whose practical handle of ebonized wood prevents heat conduction, designed circa 1927 by Marianne Brandt, to Berlin's Bauhaus-Archiv Museum in Germany. For an exhibit about the Dutch Bauhaus network (that encompassed 60 artists), held at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, Netherlands, they lent tea sets by Otto Lindig, Theodore Bolger, Christian Dell, and Marianne Brandt.

Sonny, now a retired lawyer, and Gloria, a museum docent for more than 30 years, first collected contemporary art, from glass to paintings and ceramics. (They also co-owned a glass art gallery from 1980 to 1992 in Los Angeles.) At contemporary art shows, they noticed how many artists were designing teapots and how the familiar, humble household items excited their imaginations, becoming "containers full of ideas," in Gloria's words. In 1985, they owned just 15 teapots. But when Sonny left estate planning law and became general counsel to a corporation in the early 1990s, his weekends were freer, so he began frequenting flea markets, buying any teapot that struck his fancy. Soon, the collection "grew like Topsy," he notes, and the pair began to acquire ten to 20 teapots a week from galleries, estate sales, auctions, and online sellers. "Gloria has a better eye than I do," Sonny admits. "I was more the acquirer; Gloria was more the appreciator."

Ask the Kamms their favorite teapots, and they are tongue-tied. "It's like asking your favorite child," Gloria quips. "The next one," jokes Sonny. Ditto for asking their favorite style. "We've embraced them all with open arms," says Gloria. But ask them to describe some "interesting" teapots, and they're voluble.

One of the Kamms' rarest teapots is a "No Stamp Act" teapot, an orange earthenware piece made circa 1766 in, ironically enough, England, to support abolition of the despised Tea Tax, which provoked tea party protests in Boston and other cities in the North American colonies. Emblazoned with "Success to Trade in America" on one side, the teapot is being loaned to the Museum of the City of New York for an Americana exhibit honoring our country's 250th anniversary, which opens on May 1, 2026. The teapot's maker is unknown, but it is similar to several "No Stamp Act" teapots in the Smithsonian, the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, and the Peabody Essex Museum, which are each a bit different.

(Opposite page) Gloria and Sonny Kamm have been collecting teapots for more than 40 years. (Right) Rare Böttger hexagonal stoneware teapot, measuring 4 x 5.25 x 3.5 inches, was manufactured circa 1715 at Meissen Porcelain Factory in Germany.



Photograph by Laszlo Bodo

(Above) Earthenware "No Stamp Act" teapot was made in England circa 1766 and measures 4 x 6.25 x 3.5 inches. (Right) "Success to Trade in America" is emblazoned on this rare teapot's reverse side.



Photograph by Laszlo Bodo

Even rarer is a red stoneware hexagonal teapot with pierced panels, made circa 1715 by Meissen in Germany and modeled after Chinese Yixing clay teapots. Called the "Böttger teapot"—as Johann Friedrich Böttger, the first in Europe to develop the recipe to make hard-paste porcelain like China's wildly popular porcelain, was then director of Meissen—it is very rare because only two other hexagonal-shaped Böttger teapots are recorded. Also, while piercework (with interior walls behind it) was a common technique in Chinese teapots, Böttger wasn't known to have made other teapots this way.



Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer



Photograph by Tony Cunha



Photograph by Kamm Teapot Collection

A pure white porcelain example shaped like the Chinese god of laughter and plenty known as the “Laughing Buddha,” who holds a snake to form the spout and handle, is another very rare teapot. Made circa 1745 to 1749 in England by the Chelsea Porcelain Factory, it is one of just five recorded examples of the Laughing Buddha. (The rest are in The British Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Colonial Williamsburg, and a private collection.) The Kamms purchased the teapot through Sotheby’s from a consignor who bought it at auction years prior from Princess Diana’s mother, Frances Shand Kydd.

An unusually ornate, silver-and-gold, Chinese export teapot, where pine, plum and peony blossoms, animals, and fisherman designs in high relief embellish six panels divided by silver-gilt bands, was made circa 1662 to 1722. This hexagonal ginger jar-shaped teapot, whose handles and spout are modeled after bamboo, was crafted during the reign of Emperor Kangxi, a Qing Dynasty era marked by openness to the West and a flourishing trade in China’s blue-and-white porcelain, which took Europe by storm.

Another rare antique teapot, fashioned of silver and engraved with heraldic images for Archbishop James Sharp and the See of St. Andrews in Scotland, was made circa 1675 in England by silversmith Robert Smythier. A shield has a diagonal cross on the left for St. Andrews, two crosses over a star for the Sharp family arms on the right, and the bishop’s hat above it.

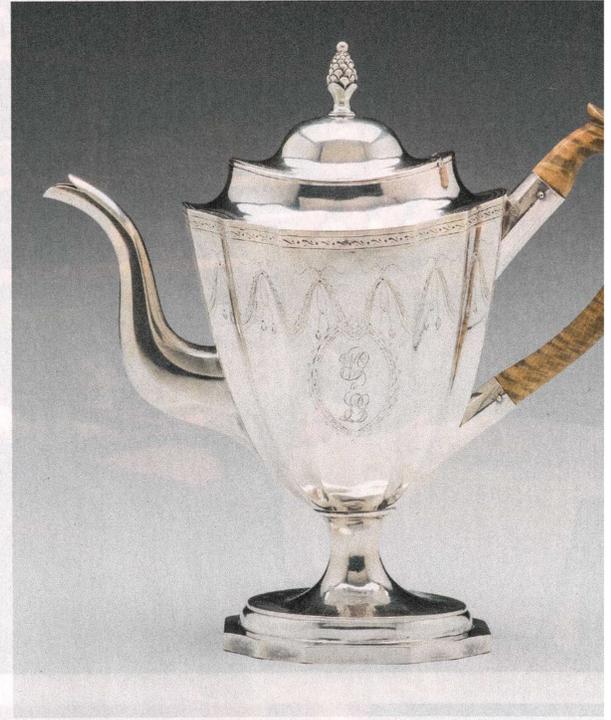
The satirical “Lady Craveing’s” teapot depicts Lady Elizabeth Craven, infamous for her many affairs and the subject of ribald cartoons in British newspapers. “She was a young trophy wife wed to an elderly lord, known for her afternoon ‘tea parties’ where not much tea was poured, so tea leaves are at the base,” says Gloria of the colorful teapot with a flesh-colored spout, made circa 1779 to 1783 in England and attributed to Derby Porcelain Factory. “As she was fond of young men in uniform, she’s dressed in the red uniform of her favorite soldier’s platoon.” The English noblewoman’s racy nickname is inscribed in gold on her blue sash on the teapot, which the Kamms bought at a Bonhams auction in London.

The couple also collects tea-related ephemera of all sorts, from a teapot-shaped music box topped by a Chinese man sipping tea and a miniature London tram replica bearing a Lipton Tea banner to a Beatles photograph in which the Fab Four hold teacups. “It shows how universal the tea and teapot image has become, from toys to playing cards to clothes,” says Gloria.

(Top) Laughing Buddha porcelain teapot was made circa 1745–1749 in England by Chelsea Porcelain Factory and measures 6.88 x 7.38 x 4.75 inches. A snake forms the spout and handle. (Bottom) Created for export to the Western or European market, this silver-gilt teapot, measuring 6.75 x 7.5 x 4.5 inches, was made in China circa 1662–1722. High-relief emblems of pine boughs, plum and peony blossoms, animals, and fishermen decorate the six panels.



Photograph by David H. Ramsey



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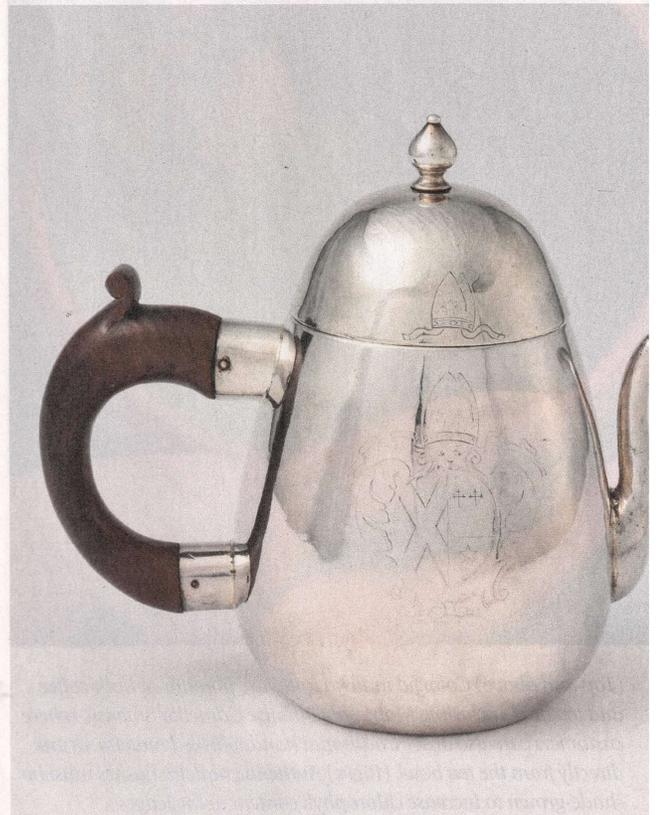
(Above left) Attributed to Derby Porcelain Factory, the satirical "Lady Craveing's" porcelain teapot was made in England circa 1788–1791 and measures 6.5 x 7.75 x 4.5 inches. (Above right) Elegant neoclassical silver-and-wood teapot, attributed to the shop of Paul Revere, Jr., in Boston, Massachusetts, was made circa 1811 for Louisa May and William Goddard. The engraved teapot measures 11.75 x 12 x 5 inches. (Below) Made in England circa 1675 during the reign of King Charles II by silversmith Robert Smythier, the 6.25 x 7.125 x 4.125-inch teapot has an engraved heraldic image for Archbishop James Sharp and the See of St. Andrews.

Most of the teapots are housed in the Kamm Teapot Foundation in Statesville, North Carolina, 50 miles from Charlotte, where they are carefully catalogued by collections manager, Mary Douglas, a former curator at Charlotte's Mint Museum. After a nationwide museum tour of the Kamms' teapots drew huge crowds in the early 2000s, people wanted to build a museum for them in the state, but funding plans fell through. Since thousands of teapots had already been shipped to a warehouse, the Kamms decided to keep them there and set up a foundation to preserve them.

Today, the Kamms display only about 275 teapots in their mid-century modern Encino home. (Gone are the days when they crammed 3,000 teapots in a two-bedroom condominium.) "The teapots enhance our home but don't take over it. They're part of our lives and sometimes go out in the world to give pleasure to others but come back. We're always delighted to share," Gloria says.

Hundreds of teapots from the collection can be viewed online at kammteapotfoundation.org as well as on the foundation's Facebook and Instagram pages. 🍵

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