

# Faïencerie de Pornic by Judy Datesman

**A**LTHOUGH PORNIC TODAY is technically in the Loire-Atlantique region of France, in times gone by it was part of Brittany, and in spirit, it still is for many people. So it is not surprising to find a ceramic manufacture at Pornic whose decors are inspired by the Bretons.

## HISTORY

The *Faïencerie de Pornic* was born after World War II. After the privations of war, the French retail market was ripe for development, and new technology was making production faster and more efficient. At the same time, paid vacation time became part of the French work culture, which in turn meant that there was an increasing demand for souvenirs as the French started to spend their leisure away from home.

In the east of France, the *Faïencerie de Niderviller*, dating from the 18th century and now equipped with electric kilns, found itself with a surplus of biscuit and, for obvious reasons, a shortage of painters. The owner, who spent much of the war in Pornic and whose wife still lived there, decided to rent an old factory space and create a subsidiary for the decoration of ceramics; in August, 1947, the *faïencerie* at Pornic was born. This manufacture has never made its own biscuit, and for many years, the supplier was Niderviller.

The new manufacture created a number of jobs, and eighty people were hired and sent to Niderviller for training. In January, 1948, the new *faïencerie* officially became the *Manufacture Bretonne de Faïences Artistiques (M.B.F.A.)*, and in March, production began, as piles of biscuit arrived at Pornic by train. Table wares held an important place in households, and many a wedding trousseau contained a complete dinner service of 56 or 74 pieces.

**A complete table service of**

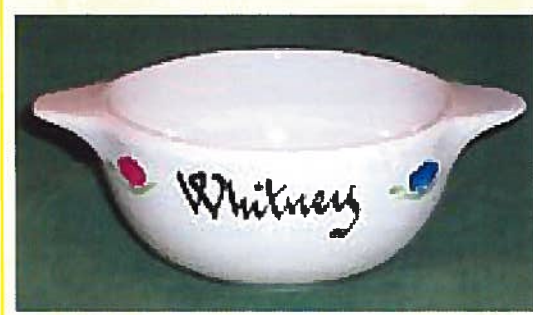
**56 pieces:**

- 24 dinner plates
- 12 soup plates
- 12 dessert plates
- 1 soup tureen
- 1 salad bowl
- 1 sauceboat
- 2 rapiers
- 1 dessert platter
- 1 round shallow platter
- 1 oval platter

For 74 pieces, include a coffee service for 12.



The *plat diviseur* is an original idea that has been adopted by many manufactures: the platter is marked with numbers around the rim. To cut a pie, tart, pizza, or whatever, into even slices for the number of people at the table, one need only slice at that number on the rim, starting of course, with zero.



The famous *bol-prénom* manufactured at Pornic is so widely known that at times it is mistakenly identified as Quimper pottery! Pornic has continued to expand its production of personalized bowls, both in the typical Breton style, with ears, and in the conical form commonly referred to as Parisian.

For more information and many more designs, visit the *faïencerie* on line: [www.faiencerie-pornic.fr](http://www.faiencerie-pornic.fr). Our thanks to the *Faïencerie de Pornic* for their permission to use photos from their web site and book. *Faïencerie de Pornic*, Rue de la *Faïencerie*, 44210 Pornic, France.



The Petit Breton of Pornic was created in 1950 by Raymond Cordier, head of the atelier. The Petite Bretonne joined him later, and they were at times presented in the costumes of other regions of France they have 68 costumes in their wardrobe! The original décor is still one of Pornic's most popular, and it continues to evolve.

However, as can happen with too-rapid expansion, Niderviller ran into financial difficulties, which naturally had an effect on Pornic. In 1949, all personnel except management were let go, and with restructuring, the atelier reopened with four decorators, a number which quickly grew to twenty. In the 1950s, the faïence market started to become saturated, and the bank became the major stockholder of Niderviller and therefore M.B.F.A., which continued to prosper, with a showroom in Paris and exhibits at professional shows.

In the 1960s and 70s, the faïencerie was producing 30 tons per month, which represented about 80-100,000 pieces, including 350 bowls with names per day. The head decorator won the title of *Meilleur Ouvrier de France*, and decorative as well as utilitarian pieces were produced. Things were not so rosy at Niderviller, and the bank sold both Niderviller and Pornic to a manufacturer of casseroles, which invested in the modernization of the factory.

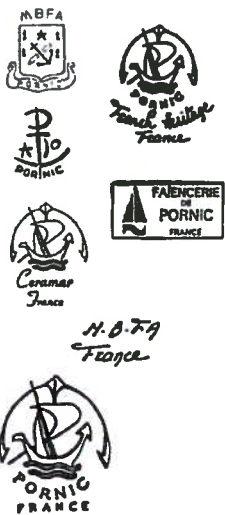
The 1980s brought tough times to the table wares market, which still represented 50% of Pornic's production. In 1986, the owner of the manufacture refused to cover the deficit at the end of the year, and bankruptcy was the result in June, 1987. Some of the 43 salaried workers accepted an offer to retire, and the remaining staff regrouped. The new group launched new collections and managed to increase the sales by 30% in six years. This was not sufficient, however, and in 1993 once more the company faced possible bankruptcy.

The only hope was to find a buyer for the business. In 1994, a former Villeroy & Boch export



Today, they stay in their Breton costume, and they have been joined by cousins from elsewhere in France.

rep was able to arrange to buy the faïencerie at Pornic without also purchasing Niderviller; the new company was simply called "Faïencerie de Pornic". Through his export savoir-faire and his professional network, he was able to develop the export market, notably to the USA under the label



Various marks of Pornic pottery.



**Some figures:**

- 30 employees, of which half are decorators.
- 800,000 pieces decorated per year, of which half are personalized bowls.
- 300 tons of biscuit used per year.
- over 100 decors, with 10 new ones each year.
- over 500 retailers in France.
- 10% of the sales from export .



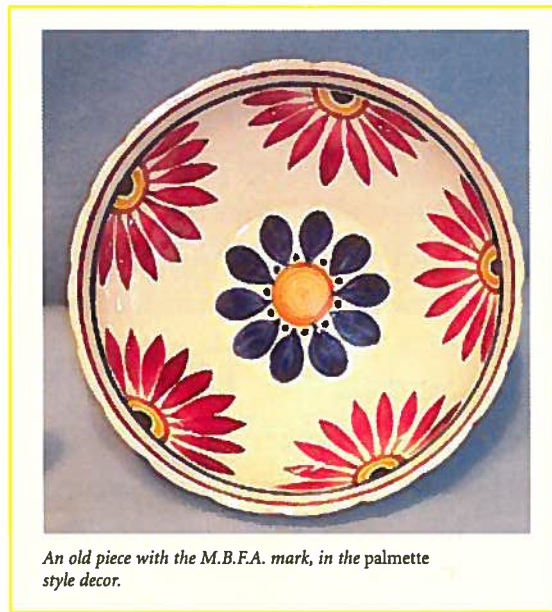
As with many faïenceries, Pornic has drawn upon the heritage of the faïence of other eras; these decors are no longer in production.

of "French Heritage". He retired in early 2004, after assuring the transition to new management, a former telecommunications executive.

## DECOR METHODS

Pornic uses several different methods of placing decors on biscuit, and these methods may be combined for a given décor.

- a stencil, which used to be cut from tin sheets and is now made from plastic; it is placed on the biscuit and is then filled in with a brush, a sponge, or by air brushing.
- a type of stencil familiar to Quimper collectors, the *poncif*, which outlines a design with tiny holes; the design is transferred to the biscuit with powdered charcoal and serves as a guide for painting by hand.
- a stamp, usually made of foam, leaves an outline to be filled in by the decorator; the outline is part of the pattern.
- a brush, for freehand designs or completing patterns as noted above; the *palmette* is based on the same principle as the Quimper *coup de pinceau*.
- chromo, a decal-type process, is generally used for the decors that are licensed to Pornic for production.
- a sponge, used primarily for borders.



An old piece with the M.B.F.A. mark, in the palmette style decor.



Pornic continues to work with artists, with something for everyone's taste, from the stylized Bigoudènes, to the almost-cartoon returning fishermen, to the exact replication of the boat of Eric Tabarly (considered one of the greatest sailors in France in recent years).



The charm of hand-painted decors.

Present owner Pierre Woda gives us this analysis of the Faïencerie de Pornic of today and tomorrow:

This is a difficult period for the ceramics market. The younger generation has less available income and prefers to spend it in areas such as electronics, and market preference in table wares has evolved toward more disposable items. Consequently, sales of table services and decorative ceramics have collapsed, with resulting financial difficulties for many faïenceries. Even the "Breton souvenir" niche has been invaded by cheap imports, there being no more quotas since 2005. With careful financial management, the *Faïencerie de Pornic* continues to be a viable manufacture. Its *bol-prénom* is still the market leader after almost 60 years, as it represents a real cultural heritage in the eyes of the public. In addition, the factory now gives tours, and the factory shop is being extended and renovated; both increase the awareness and interest of the public in this diverse ceramic production. ●