

Advertise Your Good Taste in Poster Art

Like a gift from the gods, the thin stream of Italian olive oil falls from the sky onto a salad so bountiful, it would seem to sate all of Sicily's citizens. The ruby-cheeked bella donna gazes at the golden nectar so longingly, it's as if she's found her lifelong love. But there's another reason this buxom beauty is smiling. The poster she's printed on, virtually worthless when produced by Olio Radino in the 1950s, now nets a flavorful \$700.

Long before in-your-face TV ads, blaring radio promos and skyscraper-sized billboards, companies sold the virtues of their products with colorful posters, which were pasted along city streets, in metro stations and store interiors. Hawking everything from olive oil and hair tonic to sporting events and exotic destinations, the posters were typically printed on newsprint so they could be easily torn down.

These days, however, vintage advertising posters are considered highly collectible additions to home décor.

"A lot of new homes have vaulted ceilings and expansive rooms," says Mickey Ross of the Vintage Poster Gallery of Westport, which stocks 1,500 images from the late 1880s to the present day. "People are looking for bold new ways to decorate. The poster art medium is an interesting way to make a historical statement and it offers great eye appeal."

The very ads that, generations ago, charmed consumers into buying Tattinger champagne or Bally fashions are still working their magic; Ross's business has doubled in just three years. Unlike the generic photography so prevalent in today's advertisements,

vintage poster illustrations are like bold pages from a folktale, whimsically conveying the spirit of the product and the artist. The artists who created the art (illustrations by French sensations Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Jules Cheret, and Alphonse Mucha have increased worth), as well as the rarity of the poster, its condition, and the popularity of the image are key.

To qualify as a vintage poster, the piece needs to pre-date World War II, but Ross says there are swing factors. Coffee posters, for example, became more valuable when Starbucks arrived on America's street corners. To start a collection, the International Vintage Poster Dealers Association suggests you purchase posters from an accredited dealer. The majority of Ross's pieces range from \$200 to \$2,000; for a list of dealers, log on to www.IVPDA.com, though you may find a treasure much closer to home. Ross

says one Connecticut client recently showed up with a poster her father had rescued in the 1950s from a wall in France, illustrated by art-world sensation A.M. Cassandre. "I took one look at it and said, 'I'll give you \$6,000,'" says Ross.

If you hunt long and hard enough, you may find treasures at tag sales and antique shows. To determine an original from a knock-off, the dealers association suggests you make sure the poster is printed on inexpensive paper. Also, inspect the poster with a magnifying glass to make sure the image is composed of tiny colored dots (indicative of the photo offset printing process used prior to World War II), and measure the work to see if it conforms to standard sizes (American movie posters are generally 27 by 41 inches, for example, while theater posters are typically 81 by 41 inches). Above all, if you plan on prominently displaying the piece in your dining room or living room, make sure you love it as much as the luscious Italian lady loves her olive oil.

The Vintage Poster Gallery of Westport is at 571 Riverside Ave., Westport; 203-222-1525.

— Deborah Geigis Berry



The bountiful lady of Olio Radino, courtesy of Poster Photo Archives, Posters Please, Inc. (NYC), is worth a robust \$700. Winners from the International Poster Dealers Association include a 1920 poster by Alexandre Grun, center, and a 1905 Peugeot Bicycles poster by Thor.



Howard Bursen of Sharpe Hill in Port Republic reports he has good crops on all his vineyard. He has already picked his three acres of St. Emilion grapes. This early-ripening hybrid grape variety is used for Sharpe Hill's acclaimed Red Sea wine. He's not so worried about frost here because the cold air slips easily off the hillsides and into the valleys get the killing frost first.

Everyone is keeping his fingers crossed for a good harvest. Everyone is holding his breath. Everyone is watching the sky. The outcome of the harvest is in the Lap of the Gods.

FROM THE CELLAR

Vine Cliff vineyard is a small Napa Valley vineyard with a propensity for excellent wine. Tasting their 1998 Napa Valley Chardonnay was impressed by the wine's complex and clean profile. What impressed me even more was the lack of oak-heavy oiliness that often mask Chardonnay's subtle fruit. Like many top California Chardonnays, too much oakiness pollutes. For a world-class Chardonnay, Vine Cliff's at \$34 is a very special find. At half the price of many overpriced so-called "Grand Cru" Californian Cabernet Sauvignons, Vine Cliff's Oakville Estate at \$34 is a brooding powerhouse of myriad fruit—

currant, dusty licorice, late and coffee. You will find Vine Cliff's wines on the most prestigious wine lists in New York restaurants. You'll find Vine Cliff wines at R.J.'s Wine Shop and West Street Wine Spirits in Simsbury, and at Wright's Fine Wines in Farmington.

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