

50 Years of the Enigmatic Swirl, 1955–2005

Of all the designs produced by Chance for Fiestaware, there is no doubt that Swirl epitomised the avant-garde styles of the 1950s and 1960s, yet the hypnotic pattern has also courted much controversy, speculation and imitation.

The first item of controversy is the date. Was it first introduced in 1955? According to a document from the Design Archives (see box, below) a date of 1951 appears to have been attributed.

Designs from the post-war period suffered from a shortage of raw materials; for example, the use of gilt was limited. So the optimism in the designs that followed after restrictions were lifted in the early 1950s must have proved immensely uplifting to a recovering nation. Gone were the rather stark, utilitarian designs, to be replaced by stunning new shapes with bold, striking patterns. Certainly, these trends were also seen from many other manufacturers, such as Midwinter Pottery.

Swirl's Designer

One frustration concerning Swirl is the lack of a designer's name. Despite widespread popular belief, there are no records to substantiate Margaret Casson as being the Swirl designer. It is believed this misconception may have arisen from misreading of the following paragraph in Lesley Jackson's book *20th Century Factory Glass*:

"Swirl was followed by a knobbly-line pattern called Night Sky (1957), inspired by diagrams of stellar formations, which was designed by Margaret Casson, along with Green Leaves (1958)."

Although Jackson clearly does not attribute the design to Casson, readers may have misinterpreted this statement.

While the identity of the designer of Swirl is not certain, Robert Goodden has been suggested in Andy McConnell's *Miller's 20th Century Glass*. Although Goodden was responsible for Spiderweb and the Lotus pressed-glass patterns, any attributions linking Swirl to him should be treated with caution, as there are no records to support his involvement with Chance after 1948, when he took up a professorship at the RCA. Indeed, the obituary written by Victor Margrie for *The Independent* newspaper is quite emphatic:

"Also in the early Thirties began Goodden's involvement with the industrial manufacturers Chance Brothers, designing mass-produced pressed domestic glassware, a relationship that continued until 1948."

Correspondence with William Goodden (Robert's grandson) and other members of the family also confirms that Swirl simply does not feature in their memories. However, although Goodden kept many examples of his designs, space in the tiny cottage he bought in retirement may have prevented him including them all.

In all probability, the design was more of a collaborative affair initiated by the sales manager, Robert Barrington, who often engaged a third-party company to prepare artwork to his instructions. The inspiration for the design could therefore quite possibly have been Barrington's.

Commercial Swirl Dishes

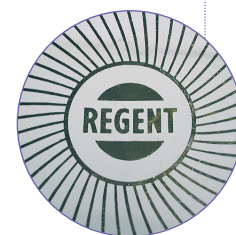
A few examples are known where Chance customised dishes for commercial purposes. The Boar dish in the photograph has been customised to include a seated boar in the central hole. This might suggest a dish made by Spiegelunion (the boar is quite symbolic in Bavaria) for its Filigranglas range. However, the spirals are clockwise, the gilt is just on the edges and the dish is Deffa printed, which all point to its being manufactured by Chance.



Chance also customised the Gold Swirl design. The large Regent Oil Company (to become part of the Texaco conglomerate in 1967) was supplied with promotional dishes featuring gilt Swirl on clear glass, which were probably given away at its petrol stations. This was a slightly unusual adaptation of Swirl, as there was a border inside the rim, but the design was certainly a commission to Chance from Regent.



The gilt Regent dish used the small boat shape

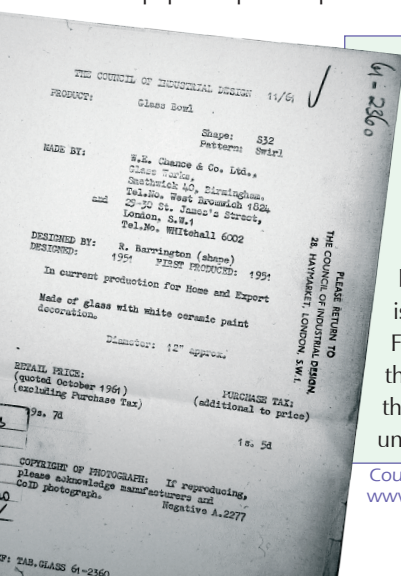
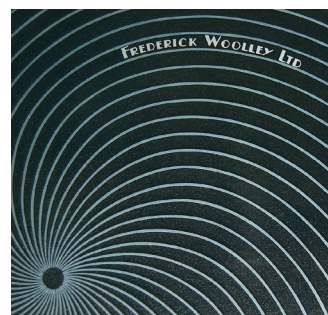


Swirl, 1951?

This document from the Design Archives, dated 1961, which was accompanied by a photo of a Swirl bowl, attributes a design date of 1951. But did this refer to the shape, the date when Fiestaware was first produced or the pattern? Although Swirl appears to be the primary reason for the submission, the shape is credited to Robert Barrington, sales manager in the Fiesta division. Similarly, the design date of 1951 and the date of first production would appear to indicate the Fiestaware range. While inconclusive, it would be unsafe to attribute a date of 1951 to Swirl.

Courtesy of Design Council/Design Archives, University of Brighton
www.brighton.ac.uk/designarchives

Another example is a standard fluted plate with the inscription Frederick Woolley Ltd (below), which was a Birmingham-based company. This plate is unusual in that it features both Deffa printed spiral arms and a silk-screen printed logo.

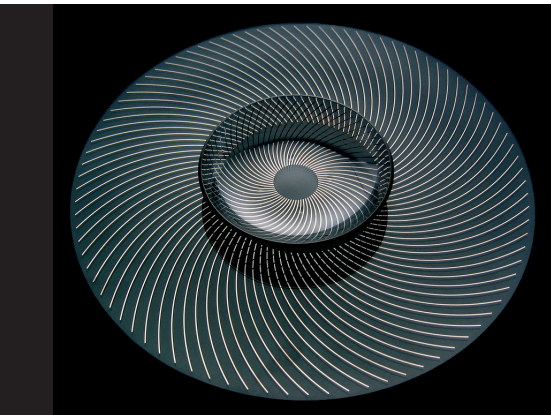


Fiesta Glass Ltd to Joseph Joseph Ltd

When the Chance factory closed in 1981, the designs were bought by Henry and Michael Joseph, who formed Fiesta Glass with former Chance employees, Tony Cartwright and Albert (Bert) Mann. After nearly 20 years of Fiesta Glass, Michael Joseph's twin sons, Antony and Richard, then formed Joseph Joseph Ltd in 2002 to continue production of slumped glassware.

New designs such as Bubble and Optic are perfect examples of Joseph Joseph's innovative range of contemporary design. Almost as a tribute to its glass heritage, the company also produced retro designs – none more so than the Retro Rectangle clock faces that could be homage to styles from the 1950s!

But of all the retro designs, one in particular has stood the test of time: the iconic Swirl. Joseph Joseph adapted the original design in a pattern called Swirls, and although the central 'hole' that serves as a focal point on the original design has been enlarged, the new pattern is still unmistakably Swirl.



A huge Joseph Joseph platter (41cm) and dip bowl in Swirls. Printed silver on grey glass
Photo © Joseph Joseph Ltd

Photo © Christine Hudson



Printing

Chance used two different printing methods for Swirl; Deffa printing, which was used until about 1962 and silk-screen printing, and very subtle differences can be noted between the two.

The direction of the swirl is not a conclusive differentiator between Swirl and its look alikes, as true Swirl is known to go in either direction; but it is probable that the Filigranglas swirls *only* turn anticlockwise. The gilt rim on Swirl should not generally overlap the edge, although some earlier Chance Swirl examples are known to exhibit this trait.

Swirl was most popularly made in white on clear glass, but gilt spirals on clear and ruby glass were also produced. Neither of these variants is known from any other manufacturer. A scarce variant called SunSwirl, featuring gilt spirals printed on bronze glass was only produced by Fiesta Glass. Only a few examples are known, as the glass was very expensive and prone to scratching.

Swirl has also been found in two other colours, red and blue, but only seen printed onto tumblers. These were probably experimental, although there is no conclusive evidence that they were produced by Chance and could have derived from Nazeing, who was known to have printed for Chance.

Spiegelunion Flabeg GmbH (Filigranglas)

The English cleric, Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832), once remarked that "*Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.*" Swirl was no exception, and any good design will always attract copiers.

Spiegelunion produced items decorated in Swirl, which were virtually identical to the Chance originals. Some shapes were so close to the Chance ones that this initially caused some problems with its supply chain, who assumed that Chance was selling to their competitors. However, there are some anomalies with the designs from Spiegelunion.

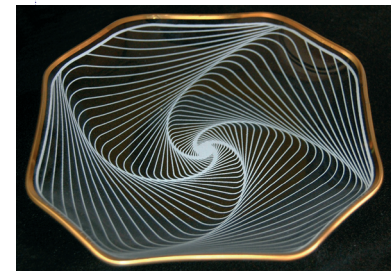
- ❖ direction of spirals is anticlockwise
- ❖ central hole is sometimes overly large
- ❖ spirals do not meet the edge
- ❖ fluting is more pronounced

The spirals on Chance items are known to radiate in either direction, and the photo (below) shows the irregular flutes of an unknown design that is definitely not Chance. The gilt is also very bright and overlaps regularly. A photograph from a Filigranglas catalogue is very revealing (see p.132) and clearly shows not only the alternate 'square-round' fluting, but also the diamond tray.



Swirl? The octagonal shape is not by Chance...

... and a non-Chance design; a Spirograph pattern printed on the same size and shape dish



Central Hole

The central hole in Swirl was used purely because the spokes in the Deffa transfer would otherwise have merged into an untidy blob at the centre, and application of the transfer would never have proved acceptable. However, it was also difficult to make the hole look tidy – a known Deffa-printed early example of Swirl has a rather ragged central hole.

Later Swirl patterns by Chance adopted a different design in which alternate lines were shorter to give a more regular and tidy hole in the centre (above, right). This style is only known on silk-screen printed items and probably dates to after 1970.

The Spirograph dish shown above has some of the characteristics of Swirl but it was probably made by Spiegelunion Flabeg. The octagonal shape in particular is definitely not associated with Chance, but it has been noted with versions of Swirl and Lace designs almost identical to those of Chance, but having an inferior finish.

