

Salt and pepper shaker (part of a set) - Part of the Town and Country tableware set

Ceramics and Glass Collection

Accession Nr.:	2020.58.1.1-3 
Artist/Maker:	Zeisel (Stricker), Éva (1906 - 2011) / designer
Manufacturer:	Red Wing Pottery (Red Wing, Minnesota, U.S.A.)
Date of production:	ca. 1945
Place of production:	Red Wing (Minnesota, U.S.A.)
Inscription:	jelzetlen
Materials:	hard earthenware; plastic
Techniques:	cast; graphite glaze
Dimensions:	height: 11,2 cm maximum width: 8 cm height: 7,3 cm maximum width: 5,8 cm

Resembling bent gourds or amoebae, this salt shaker and pepper pot are coated with a glaze of a slightly metallic sheen. They are the best known and most popular pieces in the dinner set Town and Country, designed around 1945 by the world-famous Hungarian-born Eva Zeisel (born Éva Amália Stricker).

Eva Zeisel and her husband left London for New York in 1938, to leave behind a Europe on the brink of war. In America, the design career of Zeisel, who was a potter by training, took off incredibly fast. Initially designing sets of ornaments and souvenirs for small factories, she went on to teach ceramics design at the Pratt Institute from September 1939, with a highly practical and innovative approach. The work of Zeisel's students attracted a lot of attention, because modern European trends arrived in America with some delay. Eliot Noyes (1910–1977), an architect, designer and theorist who at the time headed the design collection at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), also took notice of the work of Zeisel and her students. He went on to recommend her to the Castleton China Company, who were looking to produce a modern service that would meet the requirements of formal dining. In 1942–1943, Zeisel created the Museum set for them, an extremely elegant, airy and sophisticated dinner service. The silhouettes of its pieces are clean, the lines delicately curved, the styling equally modern and classic. Made of snow-white porcelain, the pieces were not decorated, as the classical forms and the ceremonial nature of formal dining called for unadorned objects. The set was put into production and sold at a very high price after the war. The Museum set made its debut at the MoMA in 1946, where Eva Zeisel became the first woman designer to have a solo exhibition; the Modern China show was a huge success (see [here](#)).

Zeisel received the next commission from Red Wing Pottery in Minnesota, who requested a multi-purpose, casual, 'Greenwich Village' dinner set for informal meals. She came up with Town and Country, a service most often described as organic or even biomorphic. Marked by very soft curves, distinctive details and colourful glazes, these pieces are real eye-catchers. While elegance was the salient characteristic of the Museum set, Zeisel now emphasized the playfulness of the modelling, and the principles of Scandinavian design. The salt shaker and the pepper pot are usually considered the highlights of the Town and Country set as fluid, animal-like shapes, which went on to inspire the popular comic book and cartoon character of Shmoo, by Al Capp (1909–1979). Zeisel herself never forgot to mention that these objects depict a mother and her child, to illustrate the personal nature of the forms, which is communicated by the soft curves and expressive lines.

The British Museum's collection holds a near-complete set of the Town and Country service (see [here](#)).

For more on Eva Zeisel's objects, see [Part 9 of the Object Fetish series](#).

Literature

- szerző: Zeisel Eva: *On Design. The magic language of things*. The Overlook Press, Woodstock & New York, 2004. - Nr. 137. (124. p.) (analógia)
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