

ARGENT PROVOCATEUR

Collectors passionate about contemporary design are snapping up innovative British silverware, says Nicole Swingley. Photographs by Neil Mershi. Styling by Annette Masterman.

Contemporary British silverware is glitzy, tactile and capable of adding sparkle and lustre to high-style interiors – no wonder it has become increasingly sought after. Some find the reflective play of light and the feel-good factor of owning a design which ages beautifully and the value of which could well increase.

Top-quality workmanship has been the hallmark of British silversmiths ever since the 18th century. Today's silversmiths, though, are combining new technology with traditional craftsmanship, resulting in vibrant, eye-catching designs for everyday use and enjoyment. "We're now seeing more innovative and more interesting designs, especially from the younger makers," says Eric Turner, curator of the V&A's Silver and Pewter gallery. "The pieces range from late medieval to contemporary, and there's a lot of interest in silverware when we hosted the Collect show earlier this year."

It's not just collectors passionate about contemporary design who are snapping

up the latest pieces. "People with antique silver collections are buying contemporary English silver for the historical continuity as much as for its sheer luxury," says Clare Beck, director of the Contemporary department at the Adrian Sassoon gallery.

Being a growing appetite for silverware is being met by a new breed of silversmiths specialising in contemporary designs. "There are more British designers working with silver in the UK than ever before – at least 1,500 – which is probably more than in any other country," says Gordon Tatum, managing director and

founder of the British Silversmiths' Guild. It is also the stage for leading British Silversmiths, a nationwide celebration of contemporary silversmithing which first took place in June and is to be repeated next year (June 8-15). "The design aspect is now considered as important as technique," he says. "British designer-silversmiths are exploring texture and form, using long traditional skills to create new pieces using modern CAD/CAM which enables them to produce very precise work and intricate forms. They've realised that people want pieces they can use every day, so they're producing

From left to right: Drifting Vessel by Grant McCaughey at The Lesley Crace Gallery, £1,999; Water pitcher, £2,400, and Parametric Representation Bowl No. 2, £2,200, both by Frances Lewis. £2,200; Silver and gold plated butter dish by Frances Lewis, £2,500; Hand-forged ladle by Frances Lewis, £1,800.

Pigeon wing made to order by Rhysana Tughan from Linn & Linn, 100, The Quadrant, London, con. 07-935-770-603.