

MAKE-*dos*
AND
whimsies

Repaired with inventiveness and wit,
old household treasures show us how deeply people cared
about the things they lived with.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIA ROBLEDO
TEXT BY THOMAS HINE



Make-do repairs can be exquisitely subtle or touchingly clumsy. THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: An early nineteenth-century lantern vase acquired its funnel-shaped base in the 1850s; the composition of the yellow paint helps establish that date. The pewter stem added to an

eighteenth-century English etched ale glass preserves its slender silhouette. By contrast, the squat tin base grafted onto a stick-marked Georgian glass departs from its original attenuated elegance. Although the metal replacement base of this wine flute is crudely executed, the glass retains its classic proportions. OPPOSITE: A 1760s Chinese export platter was reassembled with handmade staples, inserted into the underside.



The make-do is a cherished object that bears the scars of domestic disaster. A slip of the hand leaves a platter in shards. The spout of a teapot is knocked against a sink. The stem of a wineglass snaps. An oil lamp shatters. In each case, however, the owner of the damaged object decides to pick up the pieces and reuse them. Although such repairs can never fully re-create what existed before the mishap, the result may acquire an idiosyncratic charm all its own. Sometimes the object is reconstituted for its original purpose, but other times a fanciful twist of resourcefulness transforms it into something wholly different, as when a broken goblet becomes part of a lamp. That's when a make-do is also a whimsy.

The idea of make-dos is as old as human ingenuity, and every example is one of a kind, because a distinct misfortune has inspired its unique repair or adaptation. The make-do you find in an antiques shop may incorporate materials—tin, silver, pewter, even wicker—that weren't part of the original object but handily replaced fragments that were beyond repair. Such changes may compromise either the intended use of the object or the aesthetic integrity of its design, but they document something about which an antique in perfect condition may be silent: the importance of the object to a former owner.

Before the invention of high-speed drills, it took extraordinary effort and meticulous craftsmanship to bore tiny holes through the shards of a delicate porcelain plate and then to bind them together with handmade staples. Looking back, we can see this painstaking labor as an affirmation of emotional commitment to a damaged treasure. A different message is conveyed by the attachment of a crudely finished block of wood to an elegant cut-glass candlestick or a blown-glass vase that had lost its base. The broken object clearly performed an important function and couldn't easily be replaced, so its owner simply made do.

Most of the make-dos prized by collectors today date to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when increasing numbers of Americans were able, for the first time, to acquire luxury goods such as tea services and crystal tableware. Many of these items were imported from England or China, but the early repairs made to them were usually carried out in this country. "I'm fascinated by the range of repairs," says Andrew Baseman, a New York City collector who owns several of the examples shown here. "The simplest was to replace a missing base at home, using a piece of wood. The next step up was taking the damaged item to a tinsmith, who might create a new metal handle. The ultimate solution was to bring something very valuable—a porcelain teapot, for example—to a silversmith, who would make a fine repair complete with his hallmark."

An old repair or adaptation reflects the everyday usage of household objects. Donald P. Naetzer, a Fairport, New York, antiques dealer and the author of *Waste Not, Want Not*, a book about make-dos, says: "People moved lamps around a lot, so a lot of them broke. Chinese export teapots also got frequent use, and many lost their spouts. Ceramic pitchers were often dropped and then strapped or stapled back together. I've seen pitchers with staples in ten places that still hold water!" Because of a design flaw, many whale-oil lamps produced from the 1830s to the 1850s had a weak connection between the pressed-glass base and the blown-glass oil reservoir—and many of them

split at that joint. Reusing an orphaned base to support a decorative pincushion became a popular home crafts project.

Because each make-do is unique, it is difficult to generalize about market value, except to note that the price is usually less than what the repaired object would have sold for if it were in mint condition. "Most dealers just don't get it," says Baseman. "Some are insulted when I bring up make-dos, because they think I'm accusing them of selling damaged goods." And, he adds, a few dealers, hoping to please the wider market for flawless items, make use of improved adhesives and sophisticated restoration technologies to redo old, highly visible repairs.

Collecting make-dos requires a special sensibility, one that defies the conventional wisdom that in antiques, pristine condition is all. Here, personal taste is the final determinant of value. Naetzer, who now confines his collecting to make-do wineglasses, says he often goes a couple of years before finding one that interests him. Baseman affectionately likens the staples and straps on some of his objects to the seams and scars of Frankenstein's monster. "I am struck as much by an object's underlying beauty as I am by the ingenuity of the repair," he says. "You have to remember: They didn't have Krazy Glue back then."

Itinerant tinsmiths were familiar figures in nineteenth-century America, and many families saved broken items for the smith's visits. Pitchers were among the most-used objects of the time, and they often lost their handles. OPPOSITE: A tinsmith affixed the replacement handle of an 1860s French ironstone pitcher (left) with sturdy strap-work that encases the

bone corset stays; the ironstone's transfer print imitates burl wood. An English molded-stoneware jug from the same period (right) was given a tin handle that is attached with hidden pins. The hinged pewter lids on both pitchers aren't addenda; they were there from the beginning.



LEFT: An 1830s transfer-printed creamware creamer received a new handle that transposes the tinsmith's usual solution into wicker—a surprising material. Behind it stands an English platter with conspicuous repairs. BELOW: This eighteenth-century teapot is the Six Million Dollar Man of Chinese export. The rivets used to reattach its handle are early eighteenth century, the replacement spout is

sterling silver, and the lid is a piece of English creamware that has been given a new finial and painted to match. BOTTOM LEFT: The discreet tin addition to the copper luster creamer (left) leaves its colorful decoration fully visible. The tin handle on the silver luster creamer (right) probably swoops a bit more than its ceramic predecessor but is harmonious nonetheless.

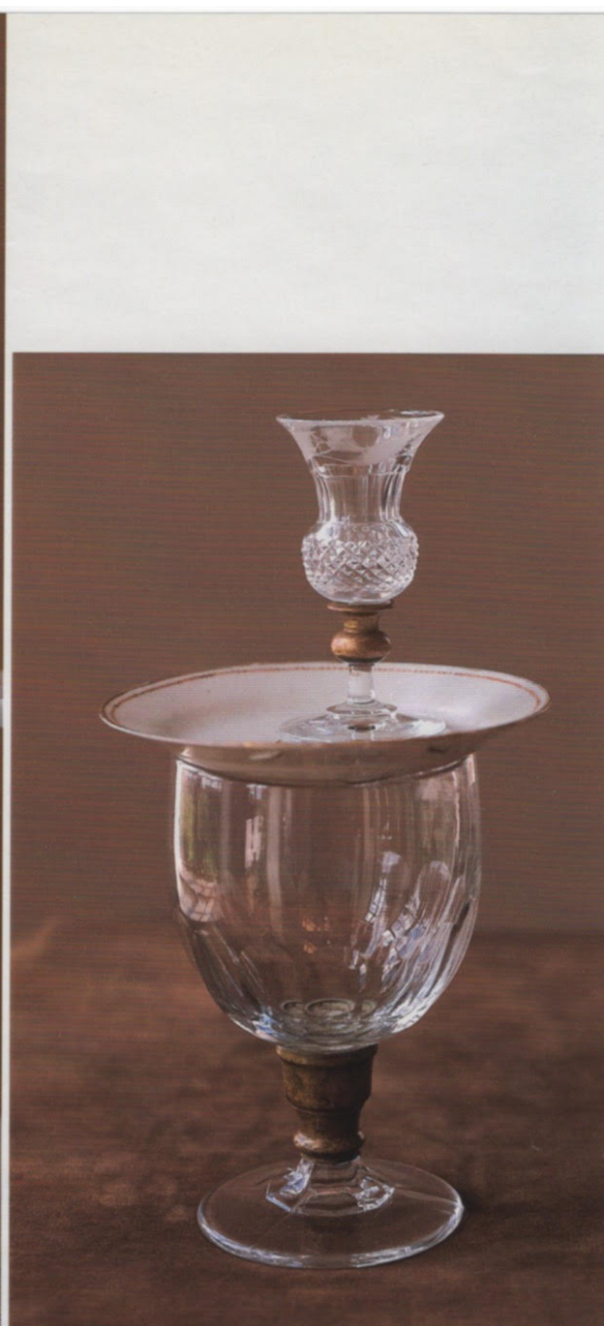




ABOVE: Converting the bases of broken oil lamps into whimsical pincushions was a genteel pastime in the nineteenth century, and the results are the most widely available make-dos. They range from children's awkward efforts to ladies' elaborate mélanges of fine fabrics, ribbons, and fringe left over from larger sewing projects. It is wise to avoid examples that look improbably pristine; they may be modern reproductions.

The bases at upper and lower left are 1830s or '40s pressed white glass, the base at lower right is marble and brass from the same period, and the one above it sits on a glass goblet base from half a century later. ABOVE RIGHT: The large goblet has three components: an 1860s pressed-glass base, a brass ferrule from an American oil lamp, and a blown-and-cut bowl from an English goblet of the 1840s or '50s. The tiny late-nineteenth-

century crystal glass on the saucer has a replacement stem of painted metal that probably replicates the lost original. RIGHT: There's no mistaking where this mid-nineteenth-century English cup and saucer have been mended. Such stapled items can often hold liquids without leaking.



The blown-glass reservoir of an early nineteenth-century American whale-oil lamp (left) outlived its pressed-glass base. To keep the lamp in service, its owner inserted the remainder of the stem into a drilled wood cylinder whose shape roughly approximates the missing piece. No such aesthetic concession was made when an early twentieth-century blown-and-cut glass candlestick (right) was affixed to a rectangular block.



The basalt stoneware teapot in the foreground is a whimsical hybrid: Its Japanese-inspired shape is swathed in Victorian ornament and topped by (Western) man's best friend, a spaniel in repose. What qualifies it as a make-do is the tin tip that fills in for the spout's broken tip. This repair may diminish the teapot's cosmopolitan grandeur, but it improves the piece's ability to pour. The larger teapot, glazed in metallic Albany slip, is either English or American from the mid-nineteenth century.

Its attractive pewter lid probably replaces a broken original that matched the body of the pot. Some ceramic teapots were designed with metal lids and a metal collar; if a lidded teapot lacks one, its top is probably not original.

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