



SANDRA JORDAN

*wine country traditions*

## SILVER CARE

It has been said of many luxury items, from classic cars to horses, that taking care of them is part of the pleasure of owning them. It is certainly true of fine silver which, contrary to popular opinion, need not be difficult or overly time-consuming to look after.

Our hand made silver was created by master silversmiths to be used and appreciated, and the best way to keep it looking its best is to use it every day. This not only provides aesthetic pleasure but, perhaps surprisingly, reduces major polishing sessions to a minimum. Daily use also gives silver a wonderful patina that is achievable in no other way.

**PATINA** The patina that develops on well-loved silver pieces results from the oxidization of silver with the air, so keep your collection on display and enjoy it. This patina or finish is actually a fine film that coats the surface of silver. It fills in all the microscopic scratches that occur with use, and imparts a lustrous, mellow sheen. It is also protective.

To keep silver items such as bowls, trays, candlesticks and wine coasters gleaming, all they need is a brief buffing, perhaps once a week, using a pair of special silver mitts or polishing cloths. Impregnated with a gentle silver cleaner, the fabric inhibits the formation of tarnish. When a major polishing session is in order, perhaps before holiday festivities, far less time and effort will be needed as the silver will be quite clean to start with. Naturally, silver items such as cake spatulas or wine funnels that will be in direct contact with wine or food must be washed before use, as even invisible tarnish can impart an off taste.

Silver cutlery, too, should be used daily. Its presence adds immeasurably to the pleasures of the table. If you have a large service, be sure to rotate the pieces so that they all develop the same patina.

**STORAGE** Store silver forks, knives, spoons and serving utensils in an airtight cutlery chest lined with anti-tarnish silver cloth, or in a drawer lined with silver cloth. Hagerty and Pacific Silvercloth manufacture this cloth, and bags made from it.

Silver bowls, trays and the like that are not on display should be wrapped in archival tissue paper and placed in silvercloth bags. Don't let rubber bands, chamois leather, felt or newspaper ink touch stored silver: they contain chemicals that can create indelible black marks. And plastic wraps can break down and produce moisture condensation that will attack silver.

**CLEANING SILVER** Dishwashers are not silver-friendly, despite the insistence some flatware manufacturers, and silver that comes into contact with stainless steel while in a dishwasher can develop black spots. Instead, wash with mild soap or dish detergent and hot water. Rinse with more hot water and dry immediately with a kitchen towel. Be sure to dry the inside of pitchers, bowls, teapots and other hollow ware thoroughly. Do not allow silver to air dry as water left on it can cause spotting or worse, corrosion.

Silver cutlery used every day will rarely require polishing, except for forks, which are prone to tarnish rapidly as silver reacts to certain sulfur-containing foods such as eggs, onions and spinach. A quick rub with a gentle silver cream such as Twinkle will remove it. Never let knives soak in water as the handles can loosen, and in any case, prolonged contact with the minerals present in tap water is not a good idea.

#### **CLEANING VERMEIL (Gold-plated silver)**

Do not polish vermeil pieces using silver cleaners; they will eventually remove the gold. Instead, wash with mild soap and hot water. Rinse with more hot water and dry immediately with a clean kitchen towel, then buff with a soft cloth.

#### **POLISHING SILVER**

Recommended silver polishes include Goddard's Long Shine Silver Polish, Wright's Silver Polish, and Twinkle Silver Polish. These products are gentle; many others, including the so-called all-purpose metal cleaners, are much too abrasive. Silver should be clean before it is polished, but if it cannot get wet because of its structure — such as semi-hollow candlesticks that could retain water inside and later drip on your tabletop — use Goddard's Long Shine Silver Polish because it can be left to dry and then buffed off.

In general, apply the polish according to the instructions on the container with a soft, clean cloth using a gentle, circular motion. Use cotton swabs or an old toothbrush to clean applied ornamentation, but don't overdo it as darkening around these areas shows up the design and is desirable. Rinse the polish off with hot water and dry thoroughly, using a hair drier if necessary for hard-to-get-at areas. Then buff the silver to a soft luster, using a soft cloth and as little elbow grease as possible. Over-enthusiastic polishing can rub off hallmarks and remove silverplate altogether, revealing the base metal underneath. Don't wear rubber gloves when cleaning and polishing silver — rubber and silver don't mix.

## BEWARE OF DIPS & ELECTROLYTIC CLEANING METHODS

The use of acids and chemical dips is not recommended for removing tarnish because they are much too harsh. Furthermore, if these products get into cracks and crevices, they can lodge there and eat away at the silver.

Electrochemical cleaning involves placing silver in a plastic bowl lined with aluminum foil and filled it with boiling water plus baking soda and salt. Silver cleaned this way looks rather like stainless steel, loses its patina, and tarnishes far more quickly afterwards. Furthermore, as silver has to be immersed for the chemical reaction to take place, any piece with hollow parts, joints or crevices could trap the harmful liquid, which would corrode the silver from the inside.

## THE HEIRLOOM FACTOR

Last but not least, a little time lavished on the care of fine silver will benefit the next generation. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren will remember its soft gleam as part of their childhood, and one day will treasure your silver all the more for its family associations.