



Buergel: the town of potters

A century-old tradition.

The Benedictine Monastery (established in 1234) was most influential in founding Buergel: "oppidum nominatum Burgelin", and remains one of the most important places of interest in Buergel. Mementos of those days are still in evidence, such as remnants of the old city wall which surrounded Buergel and the "Badertor" ("Bader Gate").

Although it is impossible to determine exactly when pottery making started in Buergel, authenticated evidence shows that in 1531 potters were working in Buergel. Rich supplies of clay and expansive surrounding forests were ideal for the

development of the potter's trade. In 1660, four of the largest potteries formed a guild.

The potters' wives traveled and sold these wares throughout Thuringia and in the neighboring state of Hessen. Kilns for firing stoneware were developed.

In the mid 19th century the potters directed their ceramics in a more artistic direction. A school for ceramic design was founded, as well as the "Keramik Museum" (museum of ceramics). In the early 1920s the BAUHAUS influence can be seen in the Buergel Arts and Crafts ceramics.

Typical modern Buergel pottery features the salt glaze, as well as the cobalt-blue glaze, and also the classic "Blau mit weissen Punkten" ("blue with white dots") pattern which originated in Buergel.





Authentic Buergel Ceramics

Traditional Pottery

Carl Fischer's portrait still hangs in the office of "Echt Buergeler" ceramics. Without doubt, Fischer was a pioneer among the pottery craftsmen in Buergel and one of the founders of "Echt Buergeler". Fischer was the son of a successful merchant; he grew up in Doebeln, Saxony. He studied pottery and ceramics in Bunzlau at the Royal Academy for those crafts. In 1919, at the end of World War I, he returned to Buergel to take over the "Hofkunst-toepferei Eberstein/Hohenstein". His parents were able to finance his endeavor so production could start immediately. Of interest are Fischer's experiments with decor, shapes, glazes and the various technologies of firing. When the business was flourishing, Fischer's business employed more than twenty employees. Being near the BAUHAUS/Dornburg provided for an active exchange of experiences with other potters, especially Otto Lindig, the leader of the BAUHAUS workshop. The basic teachings of form and function of the BAUHAUS/Weimar are still evident in Fischer ceramics.

During World War II, the German government ordered durable and stackable tableware and crockery for its army. Because of the proximity of coal and clay the pottery business not only survived, but flourished, during that era.

After the war, the folkloric blue and white ceramics, as well as the typical and time-consuming scratch designs with Engabe glazes, grew in importance and popularity. Carl Fischer followed this trend with the highest standards of production quality and quantity.

As East Germany (DDR) grew in power, the Buergel potteries owners anticipated nationalization and united to form a production association (PGH). A few years later Carl Fischer's daughter, Marie-Luise, took over her father's master-workshop. Despite strict orders by the government to "economize", Marie-Luise continued to produce high-quality fired pieces and by doing so guaranteed the tradition of exceptional quality of Buergel ceramics. Like her father, Marie-Luise was a champion for artistic craftsmanship.



Carl Fischer with his daughter Marie-Luise in the 1950s



„Bodenmarke CF“ für Carl Fischer in den 50/60er Jahren

„Bodenmarke BKW“ für Bürgeler Kunstkeramische Werkstätten in den 20/30er Jahren



Notgeld der Töpferstadt Bürgel aus dem Jahr 1921



Carl Fischer died in 1969 at the age of 78. In the 1960s, the demand for quantities of Buergel products was so great that the time-consuming artistic pieces nearly disappeared from the market. Now Buergel potteries reverted to the old pattern: white dots on a blue background. Only ceramic pieces with this pattern were then being produced and exported worldwide – mainly to West Germany and the USA. The local population could only purchase slightly defective pieces and even those were under monetary regulations. Short supply of these much-valued Buergel ceramics caused long waiting lines at the stores.

In 1999, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Gerhard Waechter, a long-time collector and dealer of Buergeler ceramics, bought the pottery out of the GmbH Association. With his keen business sense and work ethic he (with his son, Falk) brought this exceptional business back to its traditional high standards and established the trademark "Echt Buergeler" (Authentic Buergel). Marie-Luise is still a co-owner and enjoys visiting her former workplace at Hintergasse 13 in Buergel where "Echt Buergeler" is produced and also sold. There are three main stores where "Echt Buergeler" is sold: Berlin, capital of Germany, Binz auf Ruegen, and Ahlbek auf Usedom. In the past years sales via the Internet have increased significantly.

Why is Buergel Blue?

The history of the blue-white pottery from the town of Bürgel

In Bürgel, the design of blue patterns goes back several centuries. Ever since the 18th century, it was customary to glaze the hard-fired stoneware with a special technique using a mix of salt and glass (see photo above). This irregular, blue 'apron' has become a signature feature of the Bürgel stoneware. The blue tone stems from cobalt oxide, which is very temperature-resistant and which

has proven to be an ideal pigment in the production of porcelain and ceramics. In view of the popularity of old, it is not surprising that tableware with the blue pattern was in demand for daily use. Nevertheless, when this began remains unknown. It is, however, believed that the blue pattern was applied to pots fired at a lower temperature at the end of the 19th century.





Bürgel stoneware with the blue 'apron'



Henry van de Velde (design):
Bürgel tableware with blue-white pattern



Interior of the museum

Yet this does not refer to the blue glazes; the blue tones were achieved by immersing in, coating or painting with a liquidised, blue-coloured clay (see image above left).

The potters refer to this as the Engobe technique: liquid clay is adhered to unfired, dried clay – the coating or ornamental painting is thereby on the unfired pot. The white dot pattern on a blue base can be documented back to Henry van de Velde. The Belgian art nouveau artist first visited the workshops in Bürgel in 1902, where he watched the potters carry out their craft. Subsequently, he designed new shapes for coffee and tea sets with a completely blue Engobe exterior that

was adorned with white, sometimes multicoloured, dot patterns (see photo above right). Since then, the pottery factories in Bürgel have revisited and altered the blue with white dots Engobe pattern again and again, combining it with different colours or experimenting with different shades of blue. In the 1970s and 80s, the Bürgel "blue-white" attained cult status as sought-after 'bottom-shelf goods.' This led to Bürgel gaining the reputation as the city of blue-white pottery. Today, the patterns have become more diverse again, but the 'blue with the white dot pattern' retains uninterrupted popularity.

Dr. U. Häder, Bürgel Ceramics Museum

Bürgel Ceramics Museum

Presents the history of pottery

The Bürgel Ceramics Museum, which was founded in 1880, is possibly the oldest museum dedicated to ceramics.

Visitors wander through the history of local stoneware production, past displays of the styles important to Bürgel, from historicism to art nouveau with Henry van de Velde, all the way to the present.

The exhibition includes the famous Malhörnchen pattern, painted with either colourful hues or a dot pattern.





Bürgel Ceramics Museum

The only ceramic museum in the Free State of Thuringia is located in the pottery town of Bürgel, and is worth a visit due to the impressive history of pottery in Bürgel.

Museum hours:
Tuesday - Sunday: 11a.m. – 5p.m.
Situating only a few steps from the factory sales outlet at Am Markt 4.