

Cambridge Swans – Just the Basics

By Bill Alexander

If your travels bring you to the Midwest this year, you may want to consider a spin down historic National Road to the rolling hills of Appalachian Ohio and Guernsey County. Nestled in the city of Cambridge, lies our own National Museum of Cambridge Glass. This gem grew out of the great flood of '98 with an inspiring story of what hard work and dedication can bring.

Each winter, the displays in the three feature rooms are rotated to hone in on a unique area of interest and to provide a fresh perspective to our multi-faceted hobby. This year is no exception. For 2008, the Sample Room has been transformed by Cindy Arent and her team into a major nesting area for Cambridge Swans. The flock arrived from the great white north in early February, looking for a warmer climate in which to roost for the remainder of the year. If Swan collecting is your cup of tea or if you'd just like to learn more by experiencing a "sampling" of the many sizes, colors and types, then perhaps this exhibit is for you.

During the 30 year period from 1928 to 1958, Cambridge produced swans in seven sizes: 3", 4 ½", 6 ½", 8 ½", 10", 13" and 16". Over the years, 15 confirmed production colors plus crystal were utilized at different times to support changing market requirements. With the passage of time, molds were either reworked or replaced resulting in variations identified by collectors as Type 1, Type 2 or Type 3.

As club members, we are very fortunate to have access to the back issues of the Crystal Ball where a wealth of knowledge exists. In 1999 – 2000, Les Hansen crafted an excellent series of articles providing tremendous insight into Cambridge swan history. This "must read" series of five articles served as my knowledge foundation and I would highly recommend it to anyone who is serious about learning more.

Today, I am going to present more of an overview, dealing primarily with the basic swan colors and types, while hopefully providing a perspective that hasn't yet been brought to print. We'll save the discussion on treatments, aftermarket decorates and experimental colors for another day.

The article's entitled "... Just the Basics," so let's jump in with some "basic" facts. We'll begin with "Size" which is pretty straight forward: measured from the breast to the tip of the tail.

"Type" (also referred to as "Style") basically defines the amount of feather detail found on the swan, along with other identifiable characteristics. When we add in the actual production dates, it can get a little tricky.

Type 1: These swans contain very detailed feather features with graining to the neck and carry the Triangle C trademark. Wing tips on all sizes are parallel to the body with the tail integrated into the bowl. Length of production (years) varies by size.

3"	1928 - 1933
4 ½", 6 ½", 10", 13"	1928 - 1939
8 ½"	1928 - 1936

Type 2: Feather detail varies, depending on size but is significantly diminished. Swans carry the Triangle C trademark except for the 16" punchbowl. The neck is non-twisted and generally aligned parallel to the body. The bowl is not flared and has more of an oval appearance.

3" (New Mold) 1933 – 1939	New raised wing tip design with dimple on wing center. Rippled body with a bumpy tail section. Top of tail notched and separated from wings.
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8 ½" (Re-worked Mold) 1937 – 1939	Crystal and Moonlight only. Neck and Head completely devoid of any detail. Large feathers outlined only with no interior feather detail
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16" (New Mold) 1937-1939 (Introduction of Swan Punchbowl)	Unsigned, unlike other Type 2 swans. Graining appears on the neck with a center quill included in every feather on the side, tail, and backside.
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4 ½", 6 ½", 10", 13"	1939 (Crystal only) Also (Re-worked Mold) referred to as "early Type 3" by some collectors. Base and top of neck carry a dimpled design with a smooth center section. Large feathers outlined only with no interior feather detail.
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Cambridge Swans – Just the Basics (continued)



Sample Room display of all sizes



Close-up comparison of 3" Type I, II and III swans



Rare 8 1/2" Moonlight Blue Type II with lid



Family of Ebony Swans

Cambridge Swans – Just the Basics (continued)

Type 3: No interior feather detail, Swans do not carry Triangle C Trademark, neck is twisted usually to the right, plunger utilized to flare bowl giving it a more rounded appearance

3"	1940 – 1958
4 ½", 6 ½", 8 ½", 10, 16"	1940 – 1958
13"	1940 – ? (WWII Scrap Drive Casualty)

A study of "Type" reveals some interesting facts. The 8 1/2" Type 2 swan released in 1937 (Cambridge Circular Letter #31 dated January 6, 1937), was the first of all swans to be produced without any interior feather detail. The factory Mold Order dated January 23, 1939 defines the paperwork start for the re-work of all remaining swans "Change all swans to be like 8 ½" with details removed." An additional factory Mold Order dated February, 1940 "Make plugs to flare the wings on all size swans," defines the official paperwork start of the Type 3 swan. The Type 2 swan in sizes 4 ½", 6 ½", 10", and 13" were produced for only about one year and in crystal only. These pieces are signed, have non-twisted necks and non-flared bowls. Because of the very short production run and because they match the featherless look of later swans, many collectors also refer to these variants as early Type 3. A true Type 3 swan, however, carries the twisted neck, flared bowl and is unsigned.

When we look at production runs by "Type", it becomes apparent that the 3" swan did not parallel the production pattern of its larger cousins. While swans in 4 ½" and larger sizes generally cluster around similar mold modifications and production dates, the 3" swan seemed to have a mind of its own.

The 3" Type 1 was the first to be changed, migrating to a strikingly different mold design in only the 6th year of production (1933) and a full 4 -6 years in advance of any re-working of the larger sizes. What caused Cambridge to initiate this major replacement, and only on the 3" size, is today an unknown. The 3" Type 2 swan has arguably, the most body detail of any Type 2 swan with rippled body, grained neck and bumpy tail. When the Type 3 variants were introduced, the 3" swan actually increased in overall body definition despite the detail-free wings and neck.

Interestingly, the original 3" Type 1 mold was also reworked by Cambridge in 1939 along with the other swan molds to remove the feather detail. Cambridge, however, elected to not produce any swans from this reworked mold, choosing instead to market 3" Type 3 variants based off the 3" Type 2 replacement mold. The modified Type 1 mold was transferred, unused, to Imperial and then on to Boyd's Crystal Art Glass where it is in use today.

The best way to understand the differences in Types is to actually make a visual comparison. Words cannot do justice to the actual impression received when comparing the swans side by side. The 2008 Swan display at the museum provides visitors with such an opportunity. On the round table in the center of the Sample Room, the 3" swans are grouped by Type. The oldest Type 1 versions are in the forefront, followed mid-table by the replacement mold Type 2 offerings. The Type 3 variants take up the rear and are displayed on platforms at the back of the table.

As our swan saga unfolds, it is now time to bring color into the equation. Generally speaking and as previously mentioned, Cambridge manufactured swans in 15 confirmed production colors in addition to crystal. There is some debate that this number may be slightly higher, but I have not seen written documentation and our discussion today is more basic in nature. Not all colors, were produced in all sizes or Types, nor at all times, bringing an additional level of complexity to an already detailed subject. Rather than verbally trying to walk through the maze of how the various colors were utilized, I've developed the following matrix which should bring a better sense of clarity to the Color /Size / Type equation.

COLOR MATRIX IS INCLUDED ON PAGE 9.

If you spend a few minutes examining the matrix, some interesting observations can be made. Of all the applications, crystal is the hands down winner, appearing in all sizes and Types with no color competitor coming close. You can pick up on the trend towards crystal in the 1940's as interest in the depression era colors waned, only to resurface again in the late 40's / early 50's.

At the opposite side of the spectrum, Royal Blue, Moonlight, LaRosa and Smoke made only a brief, one-time appearance. Many believe that the 8 ½" Type 2 in Moonlight was only produced in 1937 to complement the popular Moonlight Caprice line. Two examples of the 6 ½" Type 3 style in LaRosa have surfaced and are held by Les Hansen. There are also only two known examples of the 3" Type 3 in Smoke, supporting the theory that they were experimental in nature and never intended for public sale. The story behind why Royal Blue was not more widely used in alternate sizes may sadly never be known.

Cambridge Swans – Just the Basics (continued)

3" Ebony Type I



3" Carmen Type II



3" Milk Type III



Amber 8 1/2" Type I and 3" Type II



Bill Alexander surrounded by his swans



Carmen 8 1/2" (Top) and 6 1/2" (Bottom) - Both Type III



8 1/2" Forest Green Type I



8 1/2" Dark Emerald Type III



10" Crown Tuscan Type I

Cambridge Swans – Just the Basics (continued)

Trying today to reconstruct the rationale used by Cambridge in determining color applications is a very tall order. Why, for example, was Carmen not utilized on the 8 1/2" and 10" Type 1 swan in the early 30's like the colors Amber, Gold Krystol, Forest Green or Crown Tuscan? The color was introduced in 1931, along with Forest Green. Was the need to re-fire the swan to bring out the red color damaging to the detail contained in the Type 1 mold? And why, for that matter, was Amber, Gold Krystol, Forest Green and Crown Tuscan not produced in the 4 1/2" and 6 1/2" Type 1 sizes? Color was re-introduced in the late 40's/ early 50's with Late Dark Emerald, Mandarin Gold, Carmen and Milk, yet out of the four, only Milk was produced in the 4 1/2" and 16" size. Why?? And finally, the Type 3 Mold was used for the production of the 10" swan in Crystal only. Colored glass was not used to produce this large sized swan yet the popularity of color in the smaller sizes had been clearly established. Again, a mystery.

Looking back at this point in time with knowledge of the many sophisticated sales tools available today to assess market demand, it is difficult to understand the process utilized by Cambridge. Were they driven by a more informal sales instinct or were there real production constraints prohibiting a more diverse offering? We'll never know for sure but its fun to speculate on the management style and decision process used to give us the surviving product we have today.

Because of the long production run and the large variety of colors, sizes and styles, Swans make an excellent collectible choice for both the novice and experienced collector alike. Even today, they often turn up at antique malls, shows and auctions as well as estate and garage sales making them exciting to hunt with a high probability of success.

It's also very easy to take swan collecting to any level. Some limit their passion to only one size, a particular color or special treatment. Then there are others who... now how should I say this, have chosen to become decidedly more ... "involved."

So if you're thinking of becoming a Cambridge collector, or just interested in becoming more "involved" in a great hobby, then perhaps a new focus on the swans produced by Cambridge is for you.

Once you get the basics down, it's off to the races. Maybe it all starts this year with a visit to the Sample Room in the National Museum of Cambridge Glass.



NOTE: The museum display houses all colors, sizes and Types; however, not every example is shown, due to space limitations and rarity. The decision was made to downplay in-house and aftermarket decorates and to focus on core products. Overall, the display leaves the viewer with an enhanced appreciation and respect for the artisans that created this colorful product.

COLOR MATRIX

Cambridge Swans		Type 1						Type 2								Type 3							
Color / Size	3"	4 1/2"	6 1/2"	8 1/2"	10"	13"	3"	4 1/2"	6 1/2"	8 1/2"	10"	13"	16"	3"	4 1/2"	6 1/2"	8 1/2"	10"	13"	16"			
Crystal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Light Emerald Green	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																
Peachblo	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																
Ebony	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																
Amber				X	X		X																
Gold Krystol				X	X		X																
Forest Green				X	X		X																
Crown Tuscan				X	X		X							X			X						
Carmen							X							X		X	X						
Royal Blue							X																
Moonlight										X													
LaRosa																X							
Mandarin Gold														X		X	X						
Late Dark Emerald														X		X	X						
Milk														X	X	X	X			X			
Smoke														X									