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At Home  
COLLECTIONS

# *Brilliant* BLUE

An entertaining expert with charm to spare  
counts flow blue china as one of her most  
prized and treasured possessions

By Paulette Pearson

PHOTOGRAPHY: NANCY NOLAN/STYLING: MANDY KEENER





EN ROUTE TO GEORGIA NEARLY 40 YEARS ago, renowned North Carolina interior designer and author Kathryn Greeley wandered into a little antique shop along the highway and discovered what would become one of the great loves of her life: flow blue china.

That happenstance paved the way for a large collection, and flow blue is now a calling card for Greeley's gracious style of entertaining and decorating, which she shared with Arkansans on a recent trip to promote her book, "The Collected Tabletop," and guide an antiques tour to Morris Antiques in Keo and beyond. "No room in my home, Chestnut Cottage, is without flow blue china," laughs Greeley, "including the bathrooms."

What first attracted Greeley to flow blue was the contrasting white ceramic and cobalt dye. Flow blue is a type of transferware with a telltale cloudy pattern that results when lime or ammonia added during the manufacturing process causes the dye to bleed into the white areas. It originated in the 1820s in Staffordshire, England, though some debate whether the technique arose by accident or design. Nonetheless, "it added character and uniqueness," Greeley says. And it soon became wildly popular.

The technique creates a range of blue shades that "are all compatible and live graciously together on a tabletop," adds Greeley. "That's another thing I love about it." Its versatility is especially helpful when Greeley hosts large holiday dinners that call for place settings across several tables. She simply selects from among the 50 or 60 patterns in her collection, including her favorite "Abbey" by George Jones & Sons. And, using a step stool, she plucks the pieces she needs from the walls and shelves where they're displayed. "My turkey platter always comes off the wall for Thanksgiving," she laughs.

Most of Greeley's flow blue originated in England, reputable producers being W.H. Grindley & Co., Johnson Brothers, Spode, Royal Doulton, Henry Alcock & Co. and Burslem. Her collection also boasts a variety of unique and rare pieces, such as a tall columnar fern stand, which doubles as a place to hold wine by the dinner table, as well as a rectangular shredded wheat bowl, soup tureen, cheese helmet, fish platter, punch bowl and her beloved toast rack. "I wanted a toast rack for so long," she remembers, "and after years of searching,

an antique dealer found one for me in England, and my husband gave it to me for Christmas."

Greeley counts Mary Frank Gaston's "The Collector's Encyclopedia of Flow Blue China" as her favorite book of reference, but offers suggestions for new collectors. Older pieces usually have a heavier weight and a more saturated dark blue color, while flow blue produced after 1890 will have a stamp that shows place of origin, as required by an American tax law passed that year. Gilding is also found on newer pieces.

Greeley's collection of flow blue is the result of several decades of searching, and has taken her on many journeys throughout the United Kingdom. Her most recent additions, however, came from Arkansas. Aware of Greeley's love of flow blue, an Arkansas-based friend spotted it at an antique shop and emailed Greeley images. Of course, she couldn't resist. "Every time I say I'm not going to buy more flow blue, somebody comes along and tempts me," she says. "When it comes to flow blue, I'm a very, very weak woman."

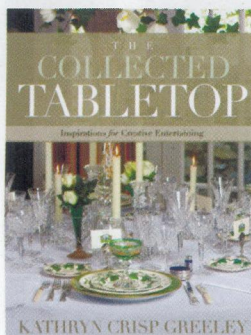






**“No room in my home,  
Chestnut Cottage, is  
without flow blue china.”**

—DESIGNER KATHRYN GREELEY

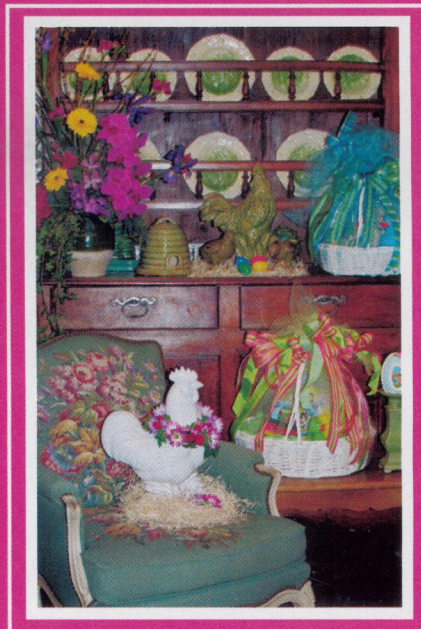


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#### Design Resources

Flow blue china Morris Antiques, Keo, (501) 842-3531,  
[morrisantiques.com](http://morrisantiques.com)  
Kathryn Greeley Designs, Waynesville, NC, (828) 452-2093,  
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