

The Iconic

ROYAL
Haeger

Panther



By John Magon

A little history:

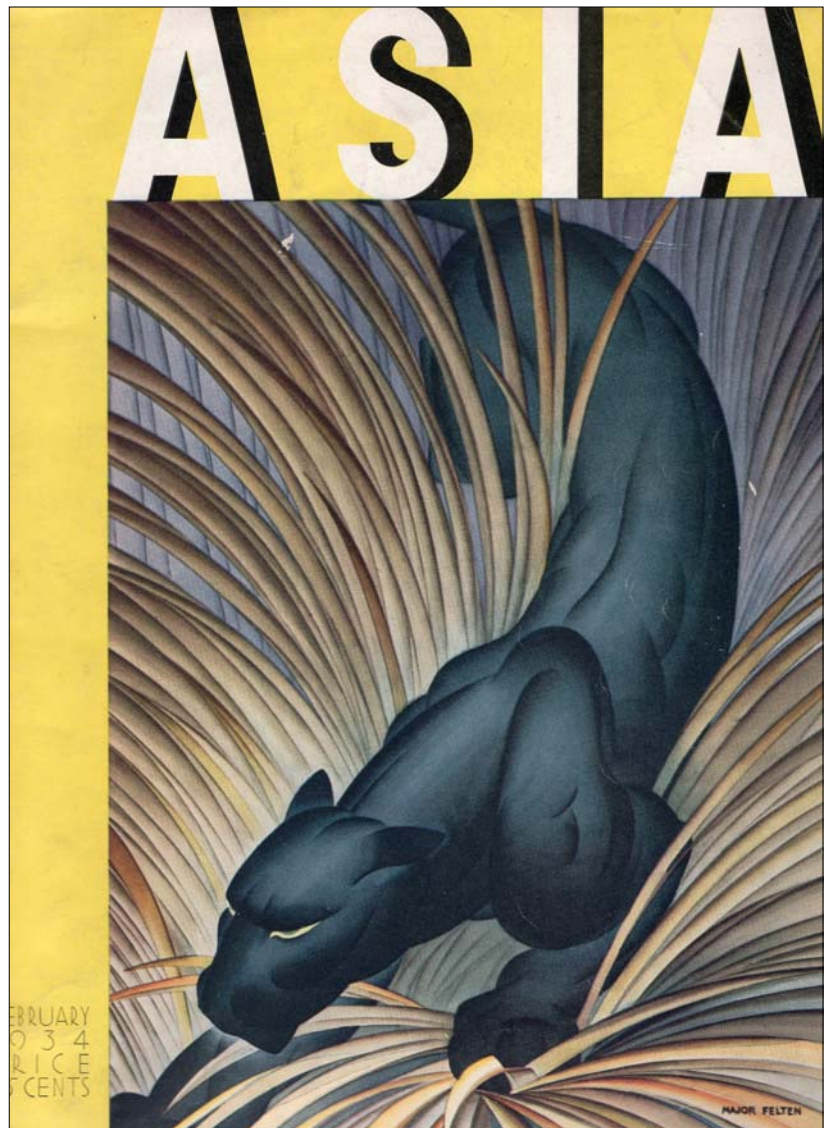
The story of the panther begins almost 50 years before it was imagined. David H. Haeger, an ambitious and hard-working immigrant from Germany settles his family outside of Algonquin, in McHenry County, Illinois in 1854. Looking for opportunity, he purchases the Dundee Brick Company in 1871, which is also the year of the Great Chicago Fire. In those flames, the new Haeger, Brick and Tile Company is forged as the fire provides a windfall that ensures the already profitable company's success. In early 1900, David's son Edmund Henry Haeger takes an active roll managing the brickyard, it's Edmund who decides to go from bricks to pottery in 1914 and later hires Royal Hickman, whose talents will shape things to come. In 1935, Joseph F. Estes joins the company and is credited with making it run like a well-oiled machine. In 1938 Joseph and Edmund will shepherd a new line of art pottery called Royal Haeger to almost instant success and the panther, subject of this story.

Culture:

First let's set the stage, the period is the late 30's, early 40's, jungle movies, adventure stories, exotic locations and jazz music are all the rage. It's from these cultural influences the mysterious, black panther emerges as a popular muse for Art Deco artists, sculptors, jewelry makers and magazine illustrators like Major Felten and his 1934 cover for 'Asia' magazine. In this atmosphere of creativity, a growing Midwest retailer reaches out to Haeger Pottery and the recently hired Royal Hickman to design a line of items that will appeal to younger buyers looking to decorate their modern homes.

Rediscovered Interview:

For the next part of the story, we have to thank Joe Paradis, who when doing research for his book "House of Haeger, 1914-1944", he rediscovered a 1985 interview Joseph Estes (President of the company), gave Lee Garmon and Doris Frizzell, pioneer authors of the first book dedicated to the pottery, "Collecting Royal Haeger" published in 1989. They used only excerpts of the interview but Joe went a step further by including Mr. Estes's full first-person recollection of the genesis of Haeger's ebony panther in his book.



Joseph Estes:

At one time there were 34 potteries making panthers-copies of us, you know. We tried to sue but there were so many involved, it was impossible. The panther was Mr. Hickman's. We brought it out for a special merchandising program for Carson, Pirie, Scott.

This was back in about 1941, and they had this program called "Homemakers," I think that was the name of it, but they were "in store" and they asked Mr. Hickman to design special pieces for it, and the panther was one of them.

Well along came World War II, and the whole program was dropped, except we had these designs and after I came back (I was away during the war), and the panther was one of the first things I put back into the line, and it took off like a shot. Then we made it in a smaller version, left and right, so you could put two on a mantle-you know. Both Dundee and Macomb made these. They just sold and sold and sold. There's got to be a lot of those around. I do not remember red being made. We might have made just a few in red, but our main thing was black. It was sensational-no doubt about it. We've always been good in our ebony."

Analyzing Mr. Estes's recollections of the C.P.S. program, he adds the caveat "Homemaker's, I think that was the name of it?" A vintage catalog ad has surfaced that questions his recollection (see next page). Instead, it might have been called "Wishmaker's House" featuring the first incarnation of the Haeger's 26" panther.

A New Haeger Mantle Group

The Gleaming Ebony Panthers with the planter in a choice of Surf Green, Gloss White or Gloss Chartreuse make a striking mantle decoration.



No. 683/3512 Haeger 3 Piece Mantle Set, Set \$3.75
Planter Height 3", Opening 10 1/2" x 3 1/2"
Colors: Panthers Ebony Only—Plant Surf Green, Gloss White, Gloss Chartreuse

IMPORTANT—Please refer to Page 54 when placing your order.
—For color description of Haeger Pottery—see page 37.
—PLEASE NOTE: You may now cover all your pottery needs from one shipping point, Macomb, Illinois—see page 1.
—Buy with confidence—we unreservedly guarantee your complete satisfaction with your purchase—see page 54.



No. 683 Haeger Panther, Each \$1.50
Length: 18" Height 4 1/2"
Color: Gloss Ebony



No. 495 Haeger Panther
Each \$5.00
Length 26", Height 5 1/2"
Color: Gloss Ebony

Page 2 • A. L. RANDALL COMPANY, 1433 South Wabash Avenue, CHICAGO 5, ILLINOIS

Page from *Randall's Catalog*, July, 1950.

1950 *Randall* catalog reprint from the Lee Garmon and Doris Frizzell pioneer book "Collecting Royal Haeger". The catalog add reads as follows:

A New Haeger Mantle Group.

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Length 18" Height 4-1/2"

color Gloss Ebony

No. 495 Haeger Panther \$each \$5.00

Length 26", Height 5-1/2"

Color Gloss Ebony.

Catalog reprint

Haeger

IN THE

Wishmaker's House

MODERN ENSEMBLE



In the Wishmaker's House Modern Ensemble, the decorative accents are supplied by Royal Haeger Pottery and Royal Haeger Lamps. Original and lovely in design, distinctive in character, these beautiful vases, bowls and lamps complement and harmonize with the entire ensemble — adding that inspired touch that makes a home out of a room. Royal Haeger Lamps and Royal Haeger Pottery can be seen at better dealers everywhere.

HAEGER POTTERIES, INC.
and
ROYAL HAEGER LAMP COMPANY
DUNDEE * ILLINOIS



Royal Haeger Pottery
* * * * * *and Lamps*

Early catalog reprint, "Wishmaker's House" feature Haeger pottery and the 26" ebony panther.

The promo reads: In the Wishmaker's Modern ensemble, the decorative accents are supplied by Royal Haeger Pottery and Royal Haeger lamps. Original and lovely in design, distinctive in character, these beautiful vases, bowls and lamps compliment and harmonize with the entire ensemble—adding that inspired touch that makes a home out of a room. Royal Haeger Lamps and Royal Haeger Pottery can be seen at better dealers everywhere.



Ebony panther with tail down, (dragging tail) from the late 40's, early 50's.

While not definitive, reading the promo in the ad it certainly sounds like a merchandising program developed for the modern homemaker. Mr. Estes also waffles on whether they produced a red panther. We know now they did in at least the 13" version, but more on that when we talk about glazes.

Relaunch:

As previously mentioned, after the war the panther was relaunched and we can see in the 1950 Randall catalog reprint from Lee Garmon and Doris Frizzell's book shown on page 3, the program expanded to include a 18" version and a 13" mantle size that will also be used on TV lamps and small planters. Not long after the launch, Haeger created a 24" version with the tail curled up meeting the back paw. This size was most certainly created as a replacement for the tail down version that was prone to having its tail snapped off during production and shipping. The 24" and 18" panthers were also mounted on wooden bases and turned into dynamic double post or single post lamps that featured exotic leopard print shades.



1950's, 13" panther with planter.



Royal Haeger 24", double post, ebony panther table lamp from the late 40's, early 50's. Note how end of tail rests on back paw. Compare with the 1990's 24" panther in the Safari glaze shown on page 9.



Single post, Royal Haeger 18" panther lamp from the 50's.

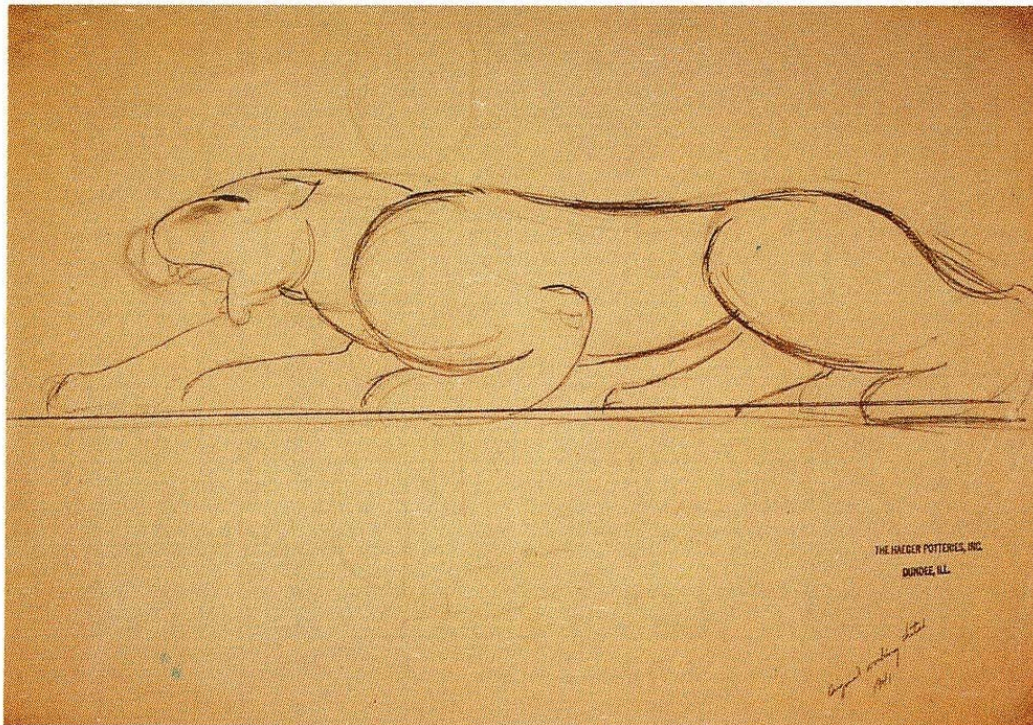
Royal Hickman and Frank Petty:

We can't talk about the panther without talking more about the man that created it: Royal Hickman. Hick as he was called by family and friends was a renaissance man and artist who was as adept in working in pottery as he was with crystal, wood and metal. He's described by family as a gypsy at heart and charismatic story teller. He started doing freelance work for Haeger in 1938, designing for the new 'Royal Line' and by 1939 was hired as Chief Designer moving to Elgin from California where he and his wife had been producing their own line of pottery called Ra-Art. With his move came 300+ Ra-Art molds that made up most of the designs for the new Royal line. It was believed that the word Royal was a nod to Hickman's first name but later recollections from Mr. Estes disputes that story. He says, "I frankly got the inspiration from the English Royals." It was simply a way to elevate the new line and its new designs." The Hickman, Haeger partnership only lasted to 1944 when Hickman left to form his own company in Tennessee but the sketches he left behind would continue to go into production long after he was gone.

Frank Petty, was a talented freelance sculptor/designer who worked for Haeger before Hickman's arrival, when the two joined forces in 1939 it's said they fit like two peas in a pod, with a deep, mutual respect for each other's talents. What a lot of collectors don't realize is Frank took many of Hickman's sketches, did the sculpt work and mold work, turning many of Hick's designs into practical finished products ready to be mass produced.

The Sketch:

It's here the name Joe Paradis has to be mentioned again. While researching Haeger's archives, he discovered gold in the form of what looks to be Hickman's original sketch of what would become the iconic panther. Studying the drawing and knowing what the finished product looks like we have to wonder, are we looking at a classic example of a Hickman design turned into reality by Petty's hands? While we might never know, it's easy to imagine he did.



Original Royal Hickman panther sketch from the Joe Paradis book "House of Haeger, 1914-1944"

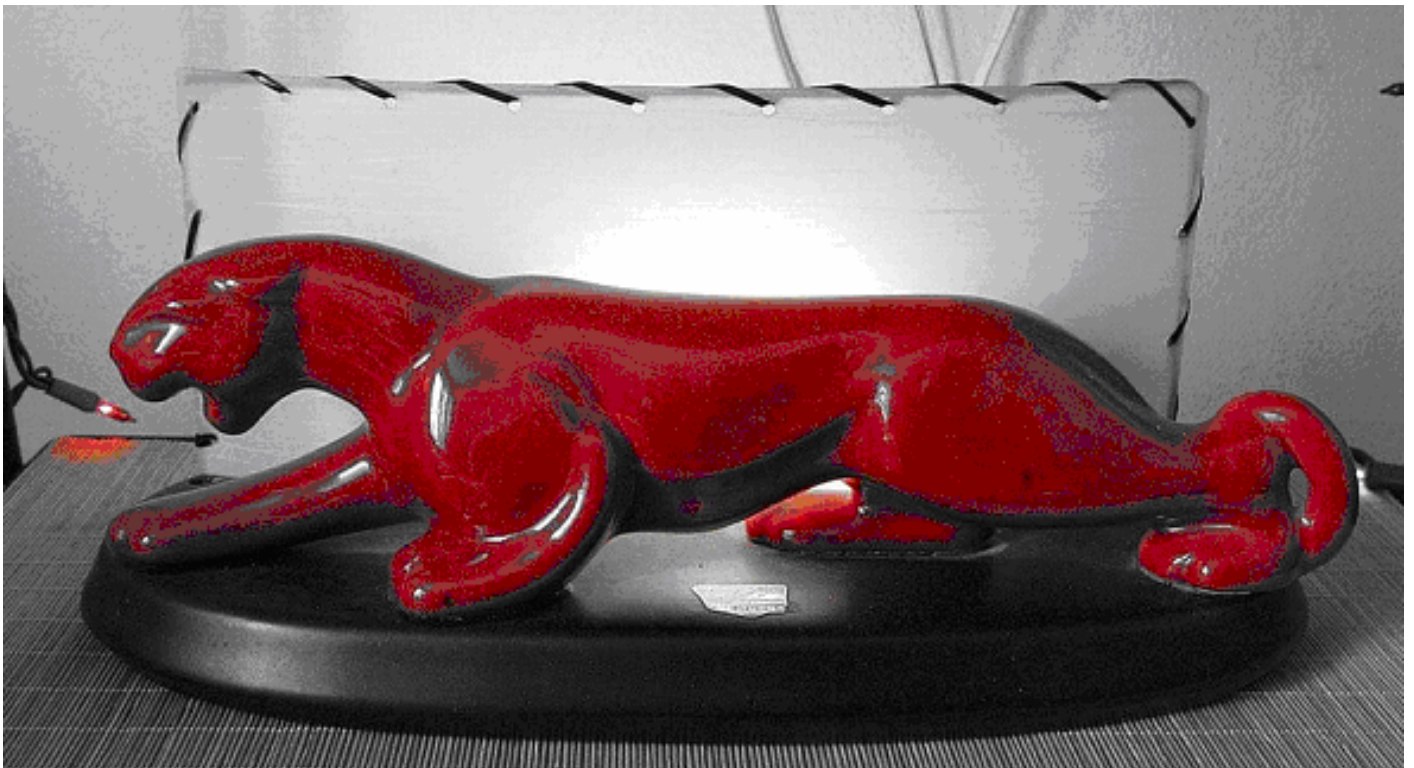
Glazes:

Initially it looks like the 26" panther was produce only in Ebony but soon examples in Amber Crystal are seen in limited amounts, making them rare and hard to find.



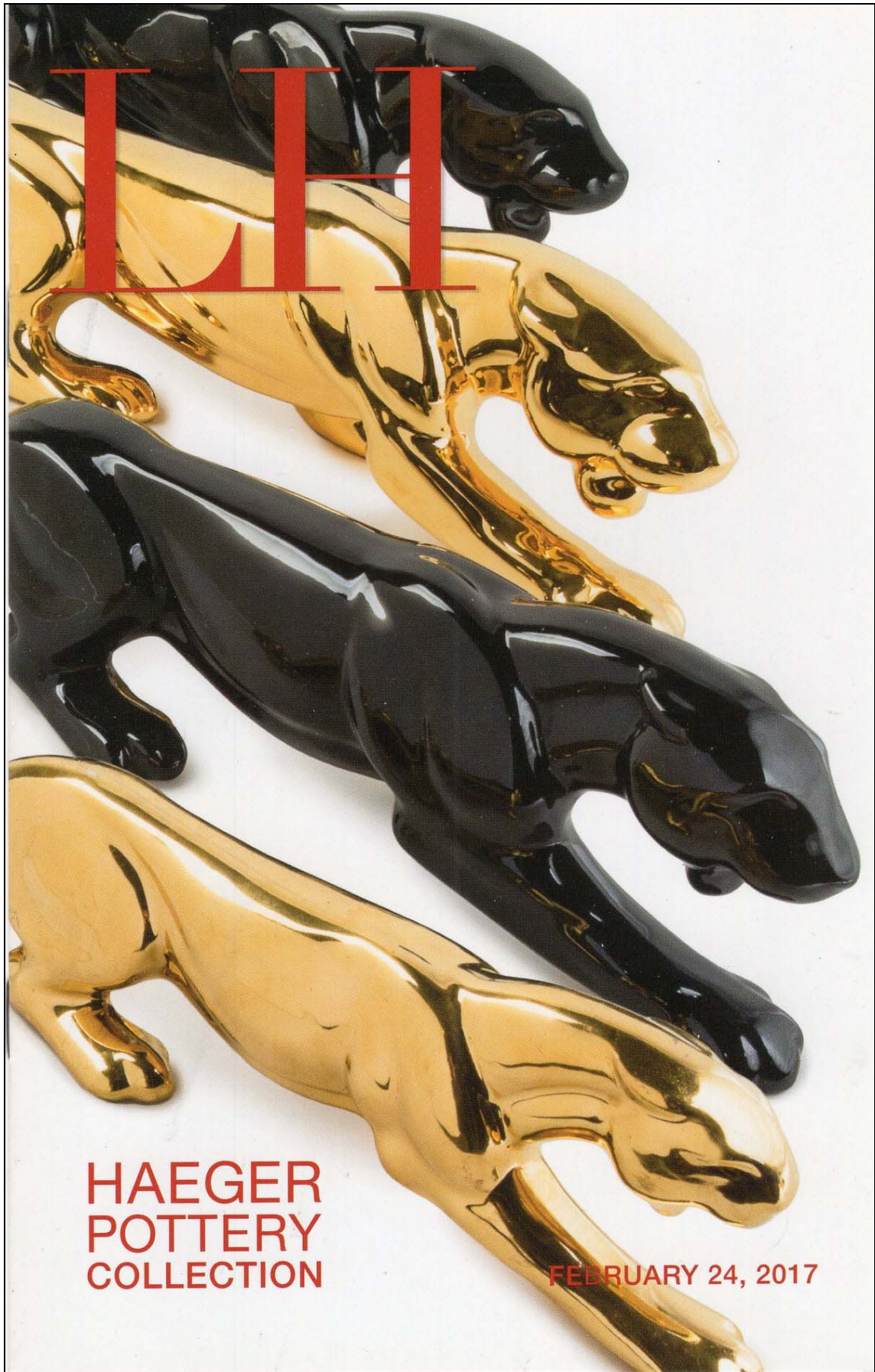
Amber Crystal, 26" panther with tail down (dragging tail), from the late 40's. Rare!

Despite Mr. Estes doubts, Haeger did produce a 13" red panther in the 50's that was used on their TV Lamps.



Red 13" panther TV lamp from the 50's.

As of today, I haven't seen any examples of their larger cats in red from this period, if one is discovered it would be a rare treasure. Rare also are the gold-plated panthers that came in various sizes, as seen on the cover of this Hindman Auction catalog (see next page).



HAEGER
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FEBRUARY 24, 2017

They were primarily given to their best sales people and for other achievements of merit. As we move into the 50's and 60's, Haeger wasn't shy about covering their cats in some of their spectacular glazes like Aztec Gold, Ebony Mystique and others. Examples like this are hard to find and demand a premium price when they surface. When we get into the 80's, 90's and beyond you'll find the 24" cat in a plethora of pastels, jewel tones and other complex finishes. I believe even a red version appears but it isn't the classic Haeger Red the 13" panther was made in. Production quantities were high in these later years making it easier to find the panthers but suppressing values on all but the ones with the rare or more exciting finishes.



1990, Safari glazed, Royal Haeger panther. Note where the tail lays on the heel of back paw. Compare with the 24" late 40's early 50's double post table lamp.

Identification:

As Mr. Estes said, "at one time at least 34 companies were making panthers" so identification can be difficult for novice collectors once the Royal Haeger foil label has been removed. I think I've seen some newer panthers with an ink stamp on the bottom of a paw but the vast majority are found without labels or stamps. Here are a couple of helpful tips when trying to determine if you have an authentic Haeger panther. One, they will never have jeweled or glass eyes, only a gentle curved brow over where the eye would be.



Detail of Royal Haeger panther's brow.

Two, they are free of adornment like chains or painted details. The body is sleek and muscular, done in the Art Deco style. Lengths have been discussed so any panther outside of that range would indicate an impostor and panthers with planters attached to their bodies or hollowed out to accommodate a light bulb should be considered suspect. Lastly, I often get the question how old is my 24" panther? Since Haeger produced them up to the day they went out of business, it can be hard to tell old from newer. One tip to share is, if where the tail meets the back paw you have a V shaped indentation at the top that would indicate an older version, if the tail rolls over the top of the back heel and you don't have that indentation you have a newer version produced after the 70's.

Barkcloth:

What falls into the category of pure speculation, I saw a bolt of barkcloth fabric at a flea-market with a repeating pattern that looked almost exactly like the silhouette of the Haeger panther. My immediate thought was, could this be part of the merchandising line created for C.P.S. in the 40's? I've seen other panther patterns used on vintage cloth before but none have looked so close to Haeger's panther. Sadly, the bolt of material was in the hands of another collector (who would not put it down) so I never got the chance to purchase it. But with the help of Ben (my partner) I've recreated the pattern from memory for you to speculate along with me.



Mystery barkcloth.

Legacy:

The panther is a tribute to the genius who imagined it and the company who produced it. Together they created an Icon whose longevity could not have been imagined in 1941. Timeless in design, produced for the masses, it's graced homes for almost 75 years. A metaphoric brick in the foundation of a proud company helping to keep it in business for 145 years. Sadly, the house of Haeger has passed into history but the panther is still here for us to admire and enjoy.

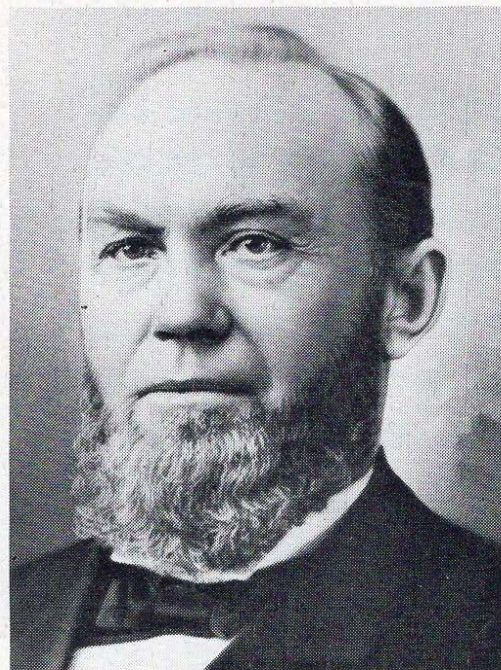
If you'd like to learn more about the people involved, I recommend finding a copy of the Joe Paradis book "House of Haeger 1914-1944". He covers the bio's of the people mentioned in greater detail in his book. I hope you found this informative.

Thank you,
John

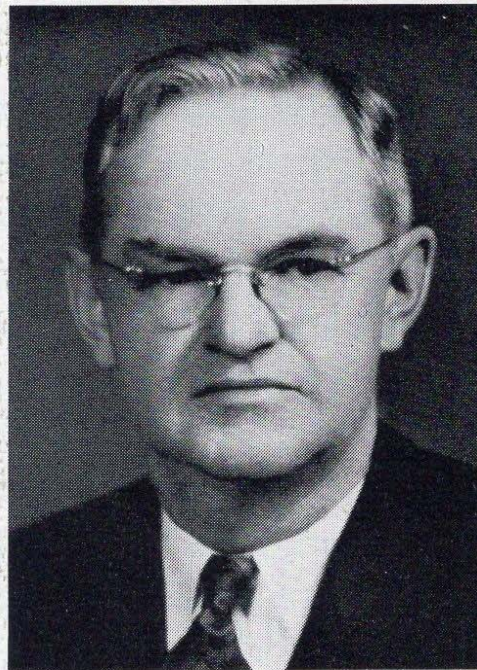
Flickr: HaegerNerd

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RoyalHaegercollectors>

“The Players” Referenced in this Article



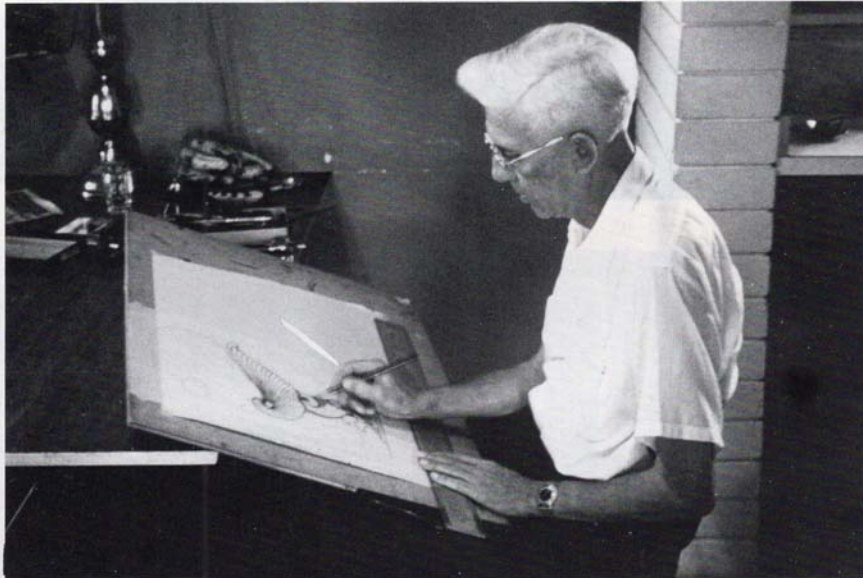
DAVID H. HAEGER
Founder — 1871



EDMUND H. HAEGER
Introduced Art Pottery — 1914



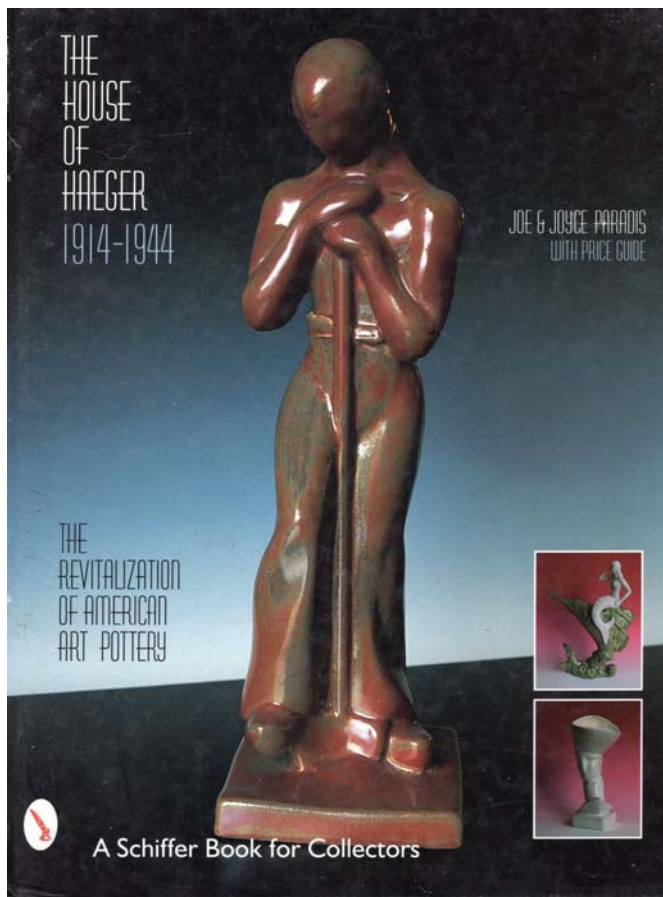
JOSEPH F. ESTES
General Manager — 1938 • President — 1954
President & Chairman of The Board, Haeger Industries, Inc. — 1979



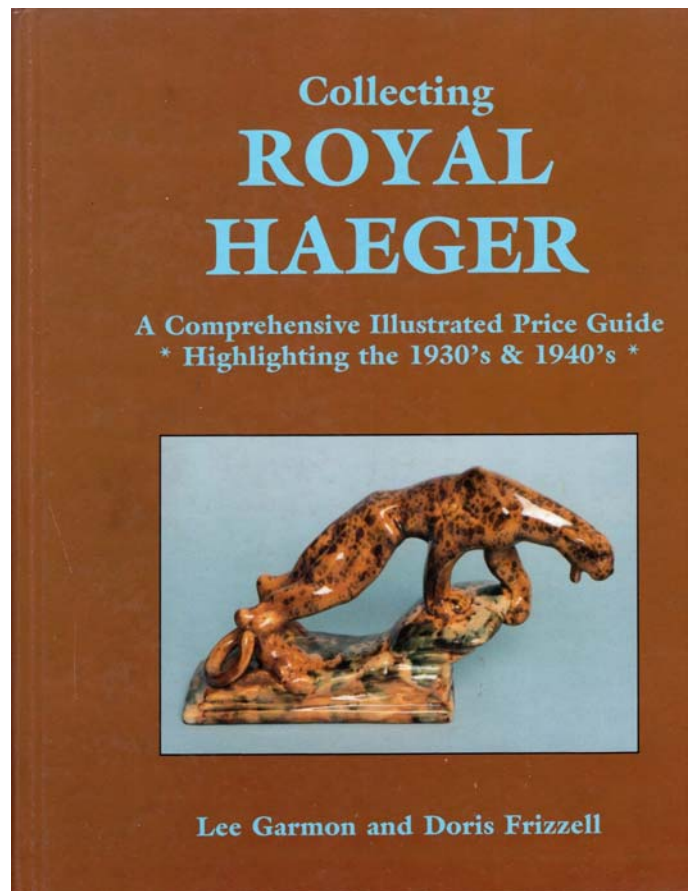
Royal Hickman designing

Royal Hickman designed pottery, glass, silver, aluminum, furniture, lamps, and other items. From 1938 to 1944 and again from the 1950s to 1969, he worked for Haeger Potteries. Mr. Hickman operated his own pottery in Tampa, Florida, during the 1940s. He moved to California and worked for Vernon Potteries.

Books Referenced in this Article



The House of Haeger 1914-1944: The Revitalization of American Art Pottery
 Authors: Joe & Joyce Paradis
 Originally published: December 1998



Collecting Royal Haeger: A Comprehensive Illustrated Price Guide Highlighting the 1930's & 1940's
 Authors: Lee Garmon & Doris Frizzell
 Originally published: January 1, 1989