

WELL TRAVELED

Prime Source

THE SILVER FUND, SAN FRANCISCO



San Francisco had its gold rush, but it took a 21st-century Briton, Michael James, to deposit the treasures of the Silver Fund, the American branch of his London silver gallery (now closed), at 472 Jackson Street, just a block from Gold Alley, where forty-niners' gold dust was assayed. In the big back area, the Silver Fund displays hundreds of works by the pioneering Danish silversmith Georg Jensen; French silversmith Jean E. Puiforcat; William

Spratling, who revived silversmithing in Taxco, Mexico; and modernist Mexican jewelry designer Antonio Pineda. (The shop's front area houses another highly regarded silver purveyor, Argentum—the Leopard's Head.)

"It is the largest collection of 20th-century silver on the West Coast," asserts James. "Many of the top Californian collectors of silver are in the Bay Area, and they like to buy here." At the heart of the collection are rare vintage pieces by Danish master Jensen, whose work is displayed in more than 100 museums around the globe. The Silver Fund is the world's biggest source for Jensen estate silver.

"Georg Jensen is unrivaled as 'the Father of Scandinavian Silver,' and he's one of the greats of the 20th century," says James. In the early 1900s, when the public was intoxicated by the elaborate, swirling patterns of Art Nouveau, Jensen's plates, bowls, and tea sets showcased his streamlined vision. "He was a bit of a contrarian. Jensen's silver is more spare, with a distinctive

matte finish, than the other artists of his day." Inspired by nature, Jensen highlighted his elegant work with subtle designs incorporating acorns, berries, leaves, and clusters of grapes, which became his signature motif. "He took no shortcuts. Everything was handmade."

Jensen also taught many of the masters who succeeded him. One of the most notable Jensen studio pieces, found at the Silver Fund, is a two-foot-long covered serving platter (\$265,000) created in 1927 by his colleague and brother-in-law, Harald Nielsen. The hand-hammered silver took a thousand man-hours to make. "There's a warmth to the finish, a moonlight-glow patina," says James. The cover is topped with a leaping dolphin and curling wave.

The Silver Fund also has exquisite Mexican-influenced bowls by Spratling, bold jewelry by Pineda, and trays by Puiforcat, who challenged the conventional aesthetics of his day with his sleek Art Deco designs. The shop also indulges in the occasional serendipitous oddity: for example, a beautifully sculpted, foot-high sterling silver bull produced circa 1910 by Christofle (\$18,500). Perfect for the cattleman in the family, it's the near-proverbial bull in a silver shop. —BARNABY CONRAD III

The Silver Fund exhibits at 15 antique shows a year, including Palm Beach, New York, and San Francisco; check the website for updates.
www.thesilverfund.com

The Silver Fund's digs (above). Clockwise from below: A 1914 Georg Jensen moonstone brooch; a 1918 compote with a classic Jensen nature motif; a 1927 Puiforcat Art Deco pot; a typically clean-lined 1925 Jensen silver jug.

