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HEIDI HAUS Bringing Switzerland to you...

Heidi Marriott

A selection of the 'Heidi Haus' collection.

Photo: Heidi Marriott

It was the coasters that started the collection. They arrived in a box of Car Boot Sale 'stock', from a well-travelled friend who often visits Switzerland, for us to sell on our stall. Somehow it seemed morally wrong to sell them on for a couple of pounds as they were nice quality, hand painted, and more importantly were Swiss - according to the obligatory 'Swiss Made' label on the base. We already knew of the huge variety of souvenirs available to tempt visitors to Switzerland to part with their holiday francs, but on returning home these items often end up not just at Car Boot Sales, but also in charity or junk shops and for auction online. Another good source of bargains we discovered in Switzerland were the Flea Markets (flohmarkt) and second-hand shops (brockenhaus) that offer a huge variety of items to choose from. Our collection (or obsession as my colleagues call it!) has grown over the last 2 years and yet the 200+ items have only cost us just over £500. This includes over 80 badges, 28 glasses, 26 plates, more then 20 spoons, 114 steins and mugs, 9 musical chalets, 7 vases, 6 musical boxes, 5 cow bells, 4 thimbles and 2 tooth pick holders. Originally everything was confined to a glass cabinet in the lounge but has now spread around the room to the 'Swiss animal corner', soft toys who live on a musical jewellery box which used to belong to my Great Auntie; and onto our hallway via a collection of 'Appenzeller Tradition' plates (£25 from Force Cancer Charity); an original watercolour of Château de Chillon (£12.99 from Barnardos), and some carved wooden bowls (from 99p-£2.99).

My favourite items are the delicate embroidered hankies and tablecloths, which can be purchased from just 99p, along with the bone china items which often feature traditional gentian, edelweiss and alpenrose designs. Husband Roy likes the musical chalets and boxes, usually found at car boot sales for £1 or so, which are often in need of a bit of renovation, and anything else that is in need of a 'good clean' to restore it to its former glory. We also enjoy finding vintage items that have had personal messages written on them by the original owners. We have a 3D picture of dried alpine flowers (bought for 49p from a house clearance stall at a car boot sale) which, below the original maker's and retailer's stickers, has "Switzerland 1959 our caravan at Interlaken site", and a small Engadine costumed doll which has the text "Sue & David. Married June 3rd 1963. Brought this back for me from her honeymoon". The books also often have notes or dedications inside, and sometimes postcards used by previous owners as bookmarks. The cheapest items we have purchased are a fridge magnet showing the canton shields around the Matterhorn and a promotional glass from Motel Leman, both of which were just 10p. The most expensive were the Langenthal 'Appenzeller Tradition' plates. The biggest bargain is a lovely pack of playing cards, £4 from a local car boot sale, plus a leather case to keep them in from the Zürich Flea market at CHF2. We have been lucky enough to have items 'donated' to the collection from friends and families including a Glacier Express tilted glass for Christmas from the lady who started it all with the coasters.

The kitchen is due to be 'Swissed-up' next. It is going to be themed around one of the famous Mondaine station clocks which we bought on Brig Station (for a lot more than 99p!!!), and an SBB 'Reserved seats' sign (£1.99 from eBay), so we are now on the lookout for modern railway-related items. We also keep an ever changing 'wish list' of items we most want to find, which this week includes a piece of Nyon porcelain or Thoune pottery and some of the tiny silver shield shaped charms originally from various touristy towns to make enough for a charm bracelet. It goes without saying that we buy Swiss products whenever we can, not just the souvenirs. In our house the toiletries are Fenjal, the luggage is Victorinox, my jewellery is Swatch, our watches are Tag Heure and most importantly the chocolate is Lindt. Our dream is to live and work in Switzerland; how many musical chalets do we need to get to swop them for a real one? I think my colleagues are right – we are definitely obsessed!