



Collecting Vintage Plastic Aquariums

By Emiliano Spada

My career as a fishkeeper started when I was just a baby. It happened thanks to a plastic “aquarium”. Actually, it was an educational toy that my father secured to one of the sides of my crib, a leakproof pouch of transparent vinyl filled with water, iridescent nuggets, and live goldfish! Every now and then, my parents still recall how I instantly became hooked on that pouch of goldfish.

That’s why vintage aquariums and fishbowls made of plastic have always held a special meaning to me, and take up a constantly growing section of my collection.



A rare example of the crib toy “Inquarium” released by Creative Playthings (New York, NY) in 1969.

Early models

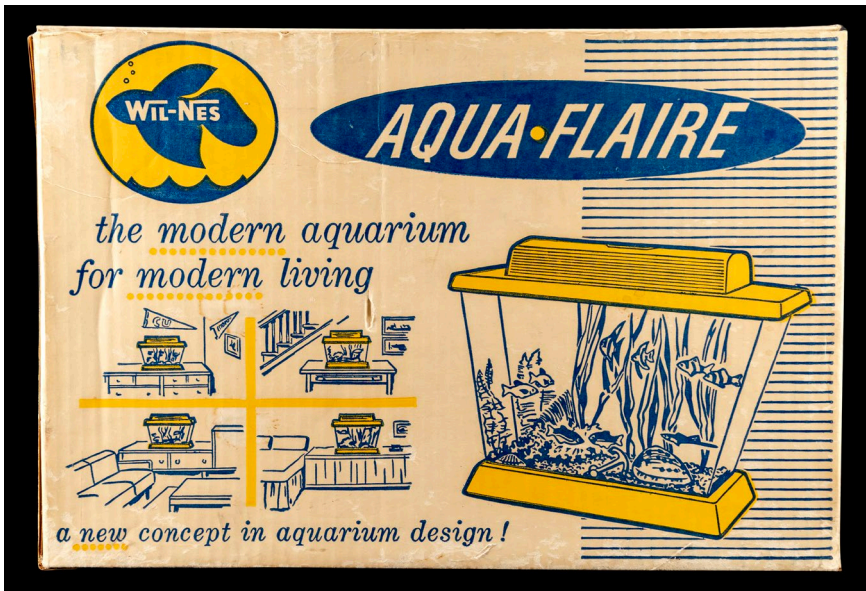
Plastic aquariums made their debut in the United States in the late 1940s, becoming in a way the joining link between the toy world and the aquarium hobby. In addition to being colorful and lightweight, they had a modern design, all features that made them a perfect gift idea as well. Even though they were mostly just starter aquariums for goldfish and bettas, they undoubtedly had the merit of having introduced a plethora of children to our hobby.



Used as a promotional give-away, the “South Sea Aquarium” was one of the earliest plastic tanks. This modern design led to Will-Nes making similar plastic aquariums in the same shape. Also, Pemco, Blaise and Metaframe made an angular metal-frame tank in this shape as well. MOAPH’s archive.



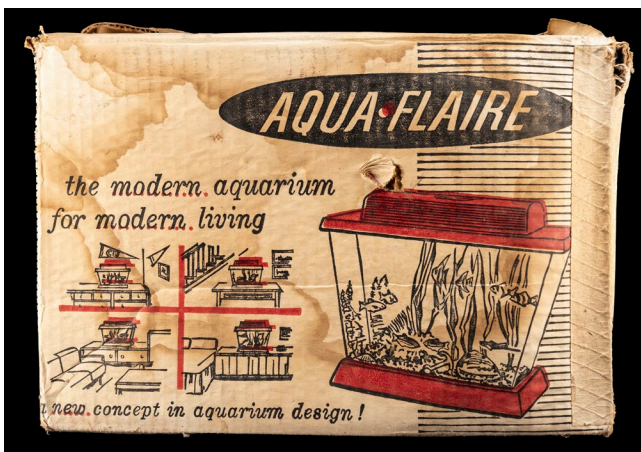
The more iconic vintage plastic aquarium is doubtless the Aqua-Flair by Wil-Nes (New York, NY). Complete with an electric full hood, this angular tank was originally available in six colors, and complemented with a line of specially designed accessories. This was a long-lasting design, since it remained largely unchanged both when Wil-Nes merged with Metaframe and Gro-Well in 1961, adopting the Metaframe company name, and when in 1969 Metaframe was sold to Mattel, which introduced the “Living World” brand. Today, the Aquaman’s Supersea Aquarium made under license by Living World in 1974 is one of the most sought-after Aqua-Flair’s versions.



The iconic box of the early Aqua-Flaire made by Wil-Nes.



Aqua-Flaire advertising on the magazine Tropical Fish Hobbyist. Courtesy of Joseph Ferdenzi.



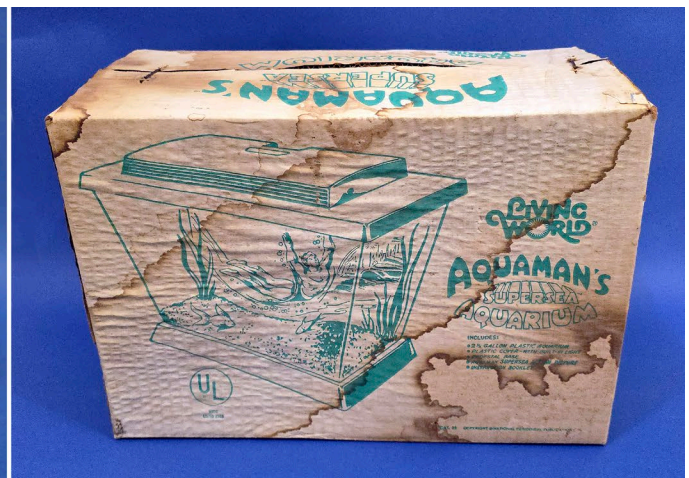
The original box of a later model of Aqua-Flaire manufactured by the Aquariums Incorporated company.



Gold frame Aqua-Flaire from the 1960s.



A factory sealed Aquaman's Supersea Aquarium.

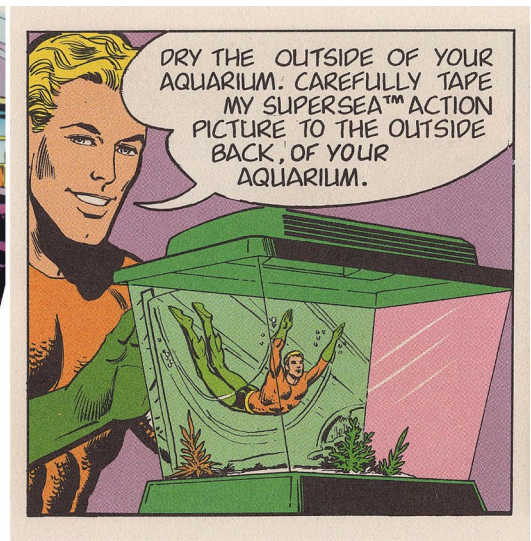


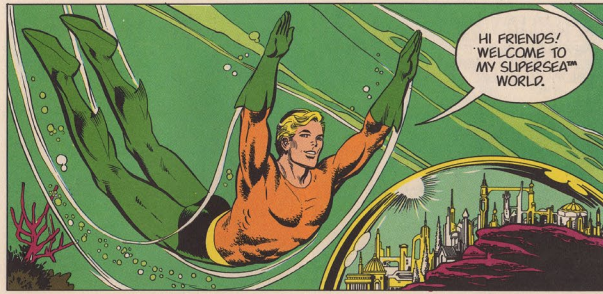


The Aquaman's Supersea Aquarium was a 2½ gallon tank. It came with a plastic hood with built-in light (light bulb not included), paper background, pedestal base and instruction booklet.



Background of the Aquaman's Supersea Aquarium.





HI FRIENDS!
WELCOME TO
MY SUPERSEA™
WORLD.



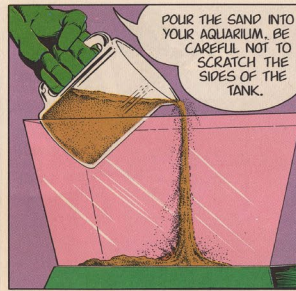
YOU CAN HAVE LOTS
OF FUN WITH YOUR
NEW AQUARIUM. IT'S
JUST LIKE MY WORLD,
ONLY SMALLER.



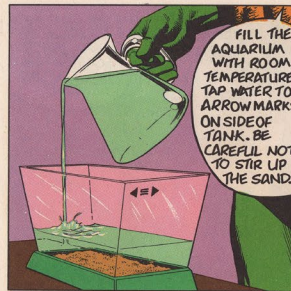
HERE'S HOW TO SET IT UP FOR THE
MOST ENJOYMENT!
PLACE IT ON A
FIRM SUPPORT.



GET SOME COARSE
SAND OR GRAVEL
AND WASH IT IN
A PAIL.



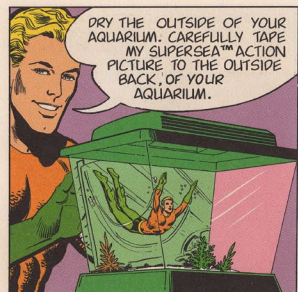
POUR THE SAND INTO
YOUR AQUARIUM. BE
CAREFUL NOT TO
SCRATCH THE
SIDES OF THE
TANK.



FILL THE
AQUARIUM
WITH ROOM
TEMPERATURE
TAP WATER TO
ARROW MARKS
ON SIDE OF
TANK. BE
CAREFUL NOT
TO STIR UP
THE SAND.



DECORATE YOUR AQUARIUM WITH
AQUASCAPERS™ PLANTS AND
ORNAMENTS.



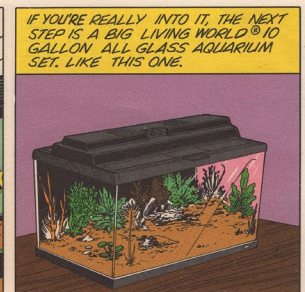
DRY THE OUTSIDE OF YOUR
AQUARIUM. CAREFULLY TAPE
MY SUPERSEA™ ACTION
PICTURE TO THE OUTSIDE
BACK OF YOUR
AQUARIUM.



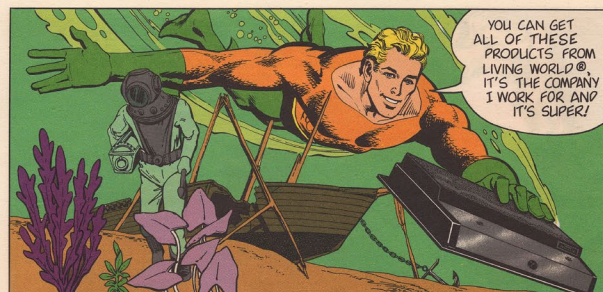
PLIT IN YOUR
GOLDFISH NO MORE
THAN TWO...REMEMBER
IT'S A SMALL
WORLD.



LATER...FOR EVEN MORE FUN
YOU CAN BUY EXOTIC TROPICAL
FISH. YOU'LL NEED A PUMP,
FILTER, AND HEATER. YOUR
PET STORE HAS THEM.



IF YOU'RE REALLY INTO IT, THE NEXT
STEP IS A BIG LIVING WORLD® 10
GALLON ALL GLASS AQUARIUM
SET, LIKE THIS ONE.



YOU CAN GET
ALL OF THESE
PRODUCTS FROM
LIVING WORLD®.
IT'S THE COMPANY
I WORK FOR AND
IT'S SUPER!



AND TO FEED YOUR FISH... USE
SAN FRANCISCO BAY BRAND FOODS.
THEY'RE REALLY GREAT! THANKS FOR
BRINGING MY SUPERSEA™ WORLD INTO
YOUR HOME.

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METAFRAME LIVING WORLD (CANNON) LTD., TORONTO, ON. CANADA A. BARTHEL, CH.

The amazing instruction booklet of the Aquaman's Supersea Aquarium.

Quirky fishbowls

Speaking of plastic fishbowls, it's almost mandatory to mention the quirky Aqua-Loop in its tabletop and wall versions. This novelty was a brainchild of the goldfish farmer Earl A. Rice, who filed three patents between 1950 and 1953 for this hollow handle fish globe design. Before being an inventor, Rice was a seasoned goldfish expert. He, in fact, got his start growing goldfish in the early 1900s, and from 1923 to 1958 he managed Mt. Parnell Fisheries, his own company in Mercersburg (Franklin County, PA).

These weird fishbowls were manufactured by the well-known company Nosco Plastics (Erie, PA), and distributed from 1949 by both the latter and Mt. Parnell Fisheries. The Aqua-Loop creatively dusted off the concept of a swim-through/cross-over fish bridge which fascinated American inventors since the 1920s, and that would later be seen in other plastic aquarium designs like the Fishville Super-quarium launched in 1975 by Vistron Corporation (Florence, MA).



Earl A. Rice and his wife Helen.

Care of GOLDFISH

- FISH LOVE FREEDOM**
"Aqua-Loop" bowls afford additional swimming area for fish, thereby increasing their activity. Do not overcrowd bowl with fish. 3 to 4 average size goldfish (2 1/2" long) are plenty for the Jupiter—2 to 3 fish for the Neptune and Venus.
- IT TAKES MORE THAN JUST FISH**
Aquatic plants such as Calomba should always be kept in the fish bowl to give off oxygen and take up poisonous gases from the water. Snails or other scavengers keep bowl free from excrement. Shells, castle and other accessories make bowl more attractive.
- KEEP BOWL CLEAN**
The frequency of changing the water depends entirely on the number and size of your fish, as well as atmospheric conditions and temperatures. See inside of folder for complete instructions.
- FISH EAT, TOO**
Feed sparingly at all times—not more than twice weekly. Excess food discolors water and gives off poisonous gases. Give only as much as fish will eat at one feeding. CAUTION: FEED ONLY FISH FOOD.
- WHY FISH DIE**
"Aqua-Loop" bowls can in no way harm fish or cause their death. Other than natural causes, fish die from water softener, too much chlorine in the water, or over-feeding. If the water in your area has an excessive amount of chlorine, allow water to stand overnight in a large vessel before filling the bowl. Never use water containing a softener.

When fish are Healthy, Happy and full of Pep They look like this.

When fish are sick They look like this.

New Type AQUA-LOOP FISH BOWLS

Guarantee
All "Aqua-Loop" bowls are guaranteed against defective workmanship. You are assured fish will swim through handle of bowl after becoming acclimated to their new home.

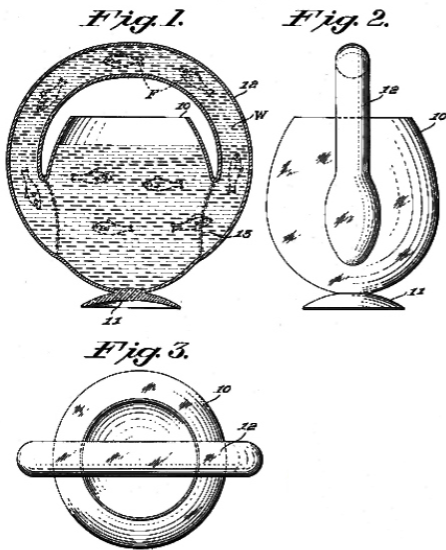
The "Aqua-Loop" is an entirely new idea and design in fish bowls. These amazing, new aquariums are the result of years of research by the Mt. Parnell Fisheries who are nationally recognized as an authority on fish, their habits, and environs. The modern, scientific "Aqua-Loop" bowls make all other standard fish bowls obsolete. Great care has been exercised in the designs, making of the molds, and selection of materials, to produce these fascinating aquariums which offer lasting pleasure.

Distributed by
MT. PARNELL FISHERIES, Mercersburg, Pa.
PRODUCERS & DISTRIBUTORS OF BETTER GOLDFISH & SUPPLIES
and
NOSCO PLASTICS, Erie, Pa., U. S. A.
CUSTOM MOLDERS OF BETTER ENGINEERED PLASTICS

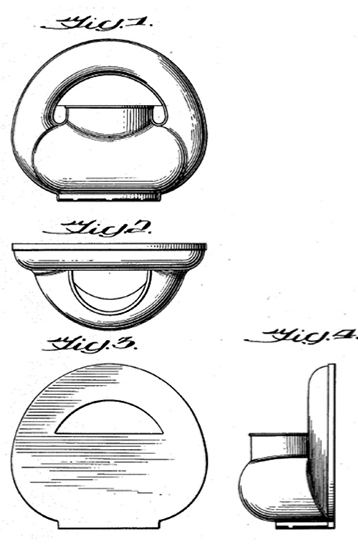
"AQUA-LOOP" BOWLS ARE AVAILABLE IN 3 DIFFERENT STYLES

- The Neptune**
Delightful, petlike aquarium which holds approximately 1 1/2 gallons of water. The perfect complement to end tables, book cases, etc. Keeps 2 to 3 fish very happy.
- The Jupiter**
Lovely, large aquarium holding approximately 1 gallon of water. Add decorative touch to office tables, console and other large pieces of furniture. Accommodates 3 to 4 fish.
- The Venus**
Glamorous half-gallon wall bracket with lovely etched design on back which adds beauty and distinction. Holds approximately 1/2 gallon of water and 2 to 3 fish.

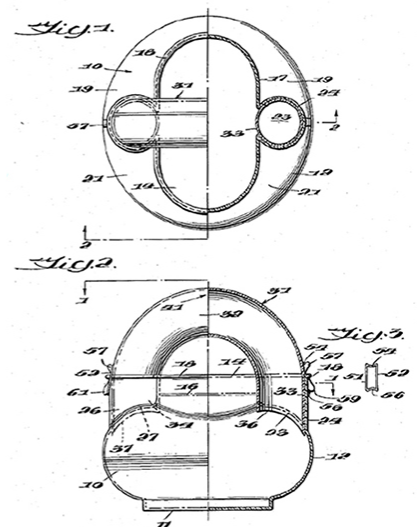
The tabletop Aqua-Loop was available in two different models: "The Neptune" (half gallon) and "The Jupiter" (1 gallon).



Earl A. Rice's first hollow handle fish globe design, 1950.



Earl A. Rice's second design, 1950.



Earl A. Rice's third design, 1953.

Technical drawings from Earl A. Rice's patents. Images from the digital book *A history of aquarium inventions* by the late Albert J. Klee.

Glamourize YOUR HOME with
NEW TYPE AQUARIUMS

CARE OF BOWLS

If fish remain near the top of the bowl gasping for air, the water apparently lacks oxygen. The water should be freshened twice weekly by placing the bowl under a faucet after feeding and allowing fresh water to gently flow into it for 2 to 5 minutes. A gentle flow of water into the bowl will not disturb water in handle, yet circulation will take place and stank water, dirt and excrement will be washed out and replaced with fresh water. Do not allow water level to drop below the water line, or water will not stay on the handle. Bowl needs to be cleaned thoroughly only when film has formed on the inner walls. Remove fish from bowl and place in another vessel filled with water until bowl is cleaned and refilled. "Aqua-Loop" bowls should be cleaned with warm water containing a few drops of household ammonia—never use an abrasive. Be sure bowl is rinsed thoroughly before refilling with fresh water.

USE BOTTLE BRUSH TO REMOVE FILM IN HANDLE

The handle may best be cleaned by simply bending a bottle brush to conform to the curve of the bowl handle and brushing warm water with ammonia acid through the handle to remove film. Rinse bowl and handle thoroughly.

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HOW TO FILL THE BOWL WITH PLASTIC TUBE

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

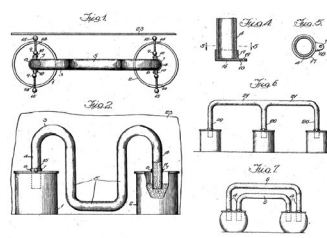
HOW TO FILL THE BOWL WITHOUT PLASTIC TUBE

FIG. 3

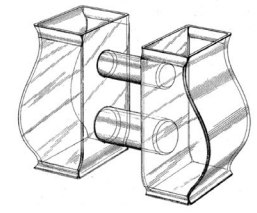
FIG. 4

BURBLE IN HANDLE EASILY REMOVED

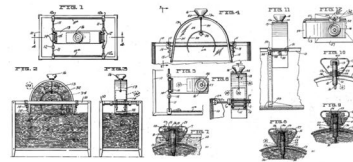
An air bubble will form in one of the handles if a fish breathes after filling the bowl. This bubble is removed by turning the bowl upside down and allowing the water to drain from the handle. The bubble will rise to the top of the handle and be removed by blowing into the handle. The bubble will rise to the top of the handle and be removed by blowing into the handle. The bubble will rise to the top of the handle and be removed by blowing into the handle.



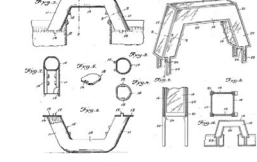
Herman A. Polzin's fish bridge, 1926.



Floyd G. Smith's novelty aquarium design, 1931.

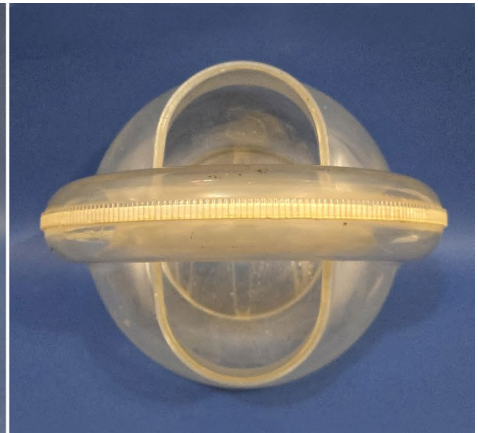
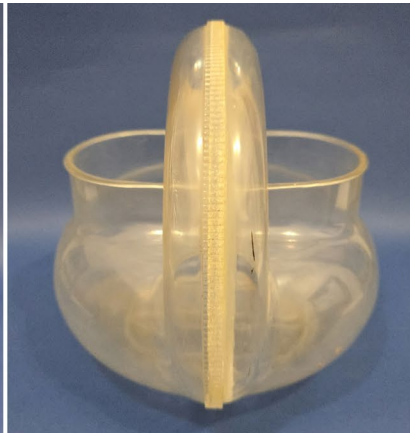
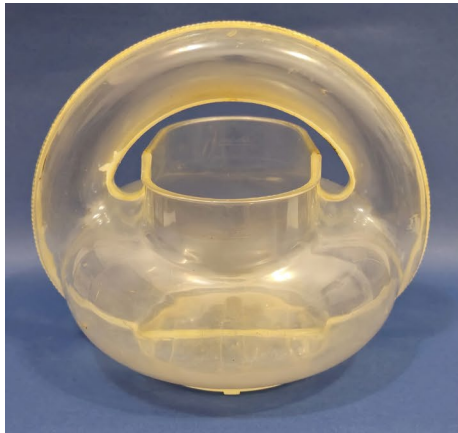


George W. Bringman's arch aquarium, 1934.



Oscar G. Beck's fish bridge, 1935.

A few ideas of glass fish bridges patented in the US from the 1920s through the 1930s. Images from the digital book *A history of aquarium inventions* by the late Albert J. Klee.



Tabletop Aqua-Loop fishbowl.



The Aqua-Loop "Venus" model was a wall half-bowl featuring a decorated background. These fishbowls are much rarer than the tabletop ones.



Vintage Antique Aquarium Wall Mount Aqua-Loop Fish Bowl 1940s 50s & Tags

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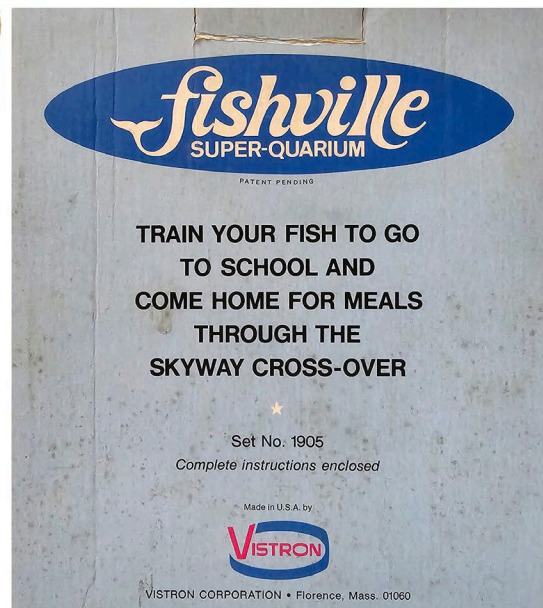
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Wall mount Aqua-Loop fishbowl recently listed for sale on eBay.



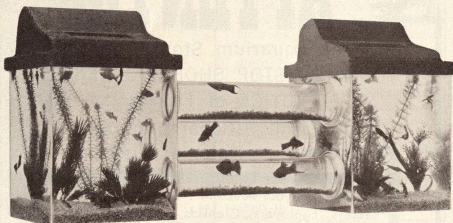


The Fishville Super-aquarium is a tank where "fish swim from room to room and from one tank to the other."

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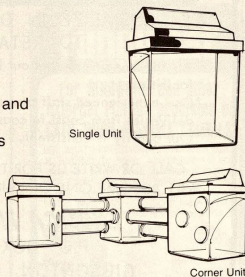
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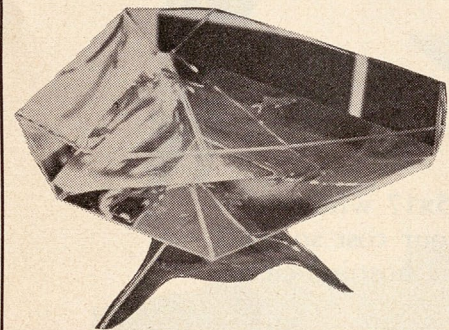
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- Fish Magnify in Aquatrails
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EVERYBODY WANTS AND GETS The World's Most Fantastic AQUARIUM

Homes, schools, institutions and business places are among your customers when you show the all-new, all-exciting Rainbow Multi-Vision Aquarium! It's designed to multiply and reflect all the colors and objects around it—makes two fish look like 32—all because it's a scientific combination of geometric shapes skillfully designed to catch and refract light at dozens of different angles. Looks like a fantastic luxury item—Aquarium, Stand and undergravel Filter sells for \$7.95! Made of strong Plexiglas molded in three pieces, the aquarium is 9" tall and 17" wide at its largest point, holds up to 2 1/4 gallons of water plus fish and accessories. A fabulous gift, a fast seller everywhere you show it. Send \$4.75 for a post-paid sample (Aquarium, Stand and Filter) complete with discount and profit details; \$37.80 for a dozen, \$212.40 for 6-dozen and \$403.20 for a gross F.O.B. Midland, Texas. Nothing on the market like this aquarium.

RAINBOW MULTI-VISION AQUARIUM
Dept. P5, P. O. Box 741, Midland, Texas 79701

An interesting acrylic aquarium concept from the 1970s. Ad from the October 1974 edition of *Pet Dealer*. MOAPH's archive.

Rainbow Multi-Vision Aquarium, 1969. Nowadays this crazy angular Ruba-Rombic like plexiglass aquarium is next to impossible to find. MOAPH's archive.

A corral for... seahorses

Thermoplastics and injection molding technologies made it possible to manufacture very small aquariums as well, like the “aqua-rama tank” which was inside the box of Instant Fish, a novelty launched by the toy manufacturer Wham-O (San Gabriel, CA) in 1962. The two competing products of Instant Fish, Kwiikee Fish and Fish in a Flash, also included a small plastic tank.



The small “aqua-rama tank” included in the box of Instant Fish.

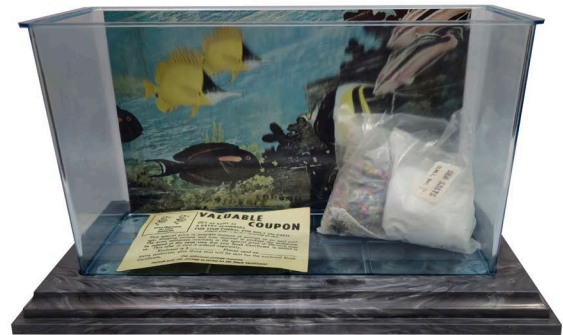


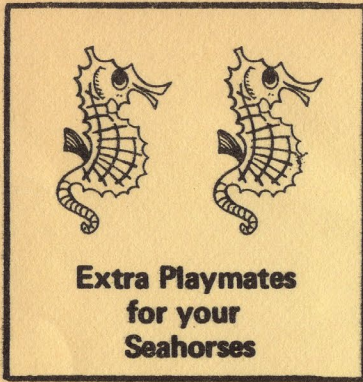
In the 1960s, the manufacturing process called “injection molding” led to an exponential increase in the use of plastic across several industries. Children in those days could even make their own plastic toys by themselves thanks to novelty devices such as “Vac-U-Form” by Mattel.

Towards the end of the 1960s, another “educational” toy involving live fish hit the American market, but this time the bar was raised as the product had to do with... seahorses. Like the aforementioned Fish in a Flash, however, the Sea Horse Corral by Uncle Milton (Hollywood, CA) had limited success primarily because it did not include ready-to-hatch eggs of aquatic animals. In order to get live, “frisky sea horses” at home, one had to mail in a “stock certificate” and patiently wait. In addition to that, the mortality rate of seahorses during transport or after being introduced into the aquarium – which was completely lacking in accessories – was too high.



Sea Horse Corral by Uncle Milton, 1969.





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6 EXTRA SEAHORSES
FOR YOUR CORRAL FOR ONLY 50¢ EACH.
(Regular price --- \$1.75 + .30 postage per pair)

This special price is possible because of savings on air mail postage, shipping cartons and time required to package the seahorses. The extra seahorses available at the special price of 50¢ each must be ordered at the same time that your Stock Certificate is mailed to us. This offer is void if ordered separately.

Enclosed is \$ _____. Please send me _____ extra seahorses, plus those that will be sent for the enclosed Stock Certificate.

(No additional postage required.)

Include only the postage as stated on the Stock Certificate)

Crazy 1990s!

Some of the most successful plastic aquariums usually came from licensing agreements among aquarium manufacturers and the industries of movies, cartoons, and comics. I already mentioned Aquaman, but if we move from the 1990s onward, several examples really start to add up: Garfield, The Little Mermaid, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, The Flintstones, Spongebob, Star Wars, and so on. Over the past few years, the value of some of these colorful themed aquariums has skyrocketed. The most striking example is certainly the R2-D2 Fish Tank launched in 2008 by Planet Pets (New York, NY), which is definitely one of my favorites although it can't be considered vintage yet.



"Acquagioco" aquarium by Encia (Udine, Italy), late 1970s.

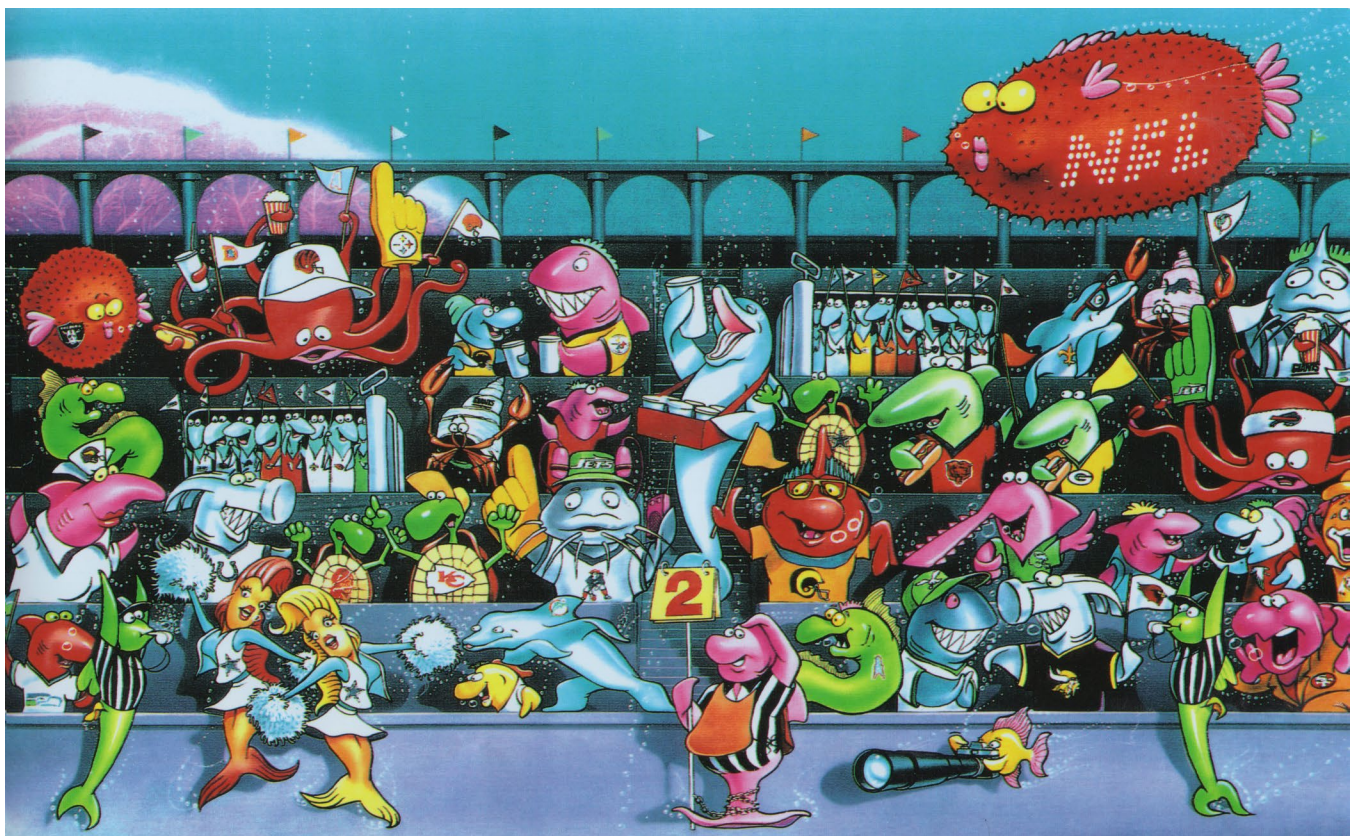


The Garfield Aquarium was released in 1992 by Hawkeye Corporation of Lenexa, KS.





The NFL Team Aqua-Stadium from 1992 was manufactured and distributed by Great Western Trading Co., Inc. (Plano, TX).



Background of the NFL Team Aqua-Stadium.



VTG 1993 Hawkeye FLINTSTONES Fish Tank Aquarium Decor Filter Box Display

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US \$199.95

No Interest if paid in full in 6 mo on \$99+ with PayPal Credit*

Condition: Used

Buy It Now

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Breathe easy. Returns accepted.

Shipping: US \$108.24 eBay International Shipping See details

Located in: United States

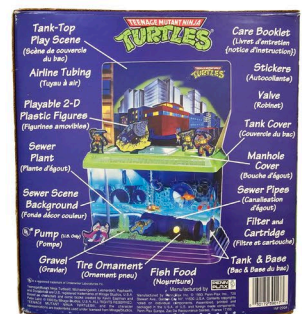
Duties: US \$10.79 - Estimate, final at checkout

Delivery: Estimated between Thu, May 23 and Tue, Jun 4 to 00125 Please note the delivery estimate is greater than 15 business days.

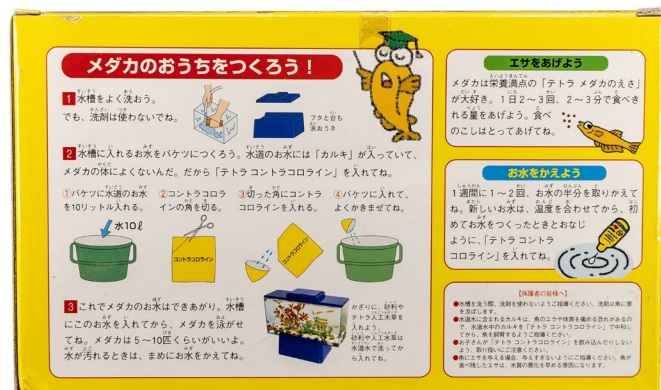
Returns: 30 days returns. Buyer pays for return shipping. See details

Have one to sell? Sell now

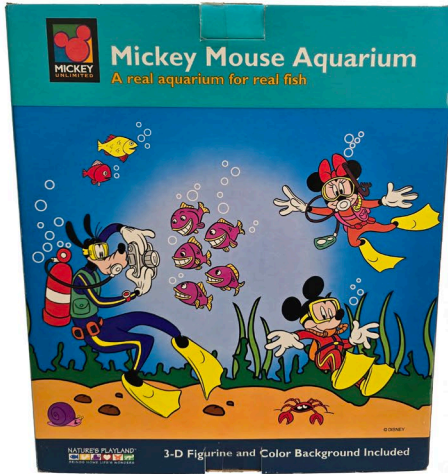
An example of 1993 Flintstones Aquarium recently listed for sale on eBay.



The TMNT Deluxe Cityscape Aquarium was made under license by Penn-Plax (Garden City, NY) in 1993.



Plastic aquarium for medakas made by Tetra in the 1990s only for the Japanese market.



Mickey Mouse Aquarium, 1994 (Nature's Playland Company, Hicksville, NY).



R2-D2 Fish Tank made under license by Planet Pets (New York, NY).



Includes:

- 1.8 Gal. (6.8 Liters) fish tank
- Double-sided background graphics
- Filter
- Adaptor



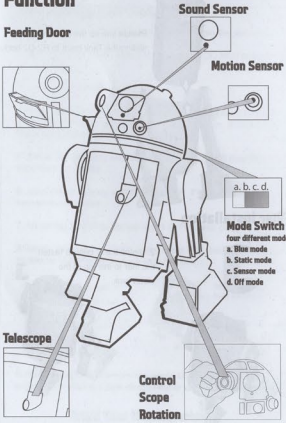
Do not keep multiple male betta fish in the same aquarium.

PLEASE DO NOT RETURN TO STORE
For more information or questions,
please call Consumer Services:
1-877-FUN-TOYS
(1-877-386-6977)

Gravel and fish sold separately.

Function

Feeding Door



Sound Sensor

Motion Sensor

Mode Switch
four different modes

- a. Blue mode
- b. Static mode
- c. Sensor mode
- d. Off mode

Telescope

Control Scope Rotation

Features

Feeding Door
Pull down the feeding door to drop in the food for your fish. Then close door.

Mode Switch
The R2-D2 fish tank has 4 mode:

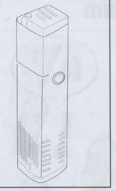
- a. Blue color mode
- b. Static mode - The R2-D2 head will not move, only the RGB (Red, Green & Blue) LED (light) will turn on (color changing).
- c. Sensor mode - The R2-D2 head will turn right or left, when it hears a sound or there is something moving across its head. The LED (light) also will turn on when it is in sensor mode.
- d. Off mode

Scope Operation
You can view the fish swimming through R2-D2 eye.


A 360° turn of the dial turns the scope 65°

Filter
The filter takes in any dirty water and cleans it up. Once it is clean, the filter releases the water back into the tank. This helps keep your tank stay clean from dirt and bacteria. See Filter Instructions for more details.

DOUBLE SIDED BACKGROUND



Select from one of the two background images provided.



Turn to the side you wish to use as the tank background and slide in behind acrylic cylinder.

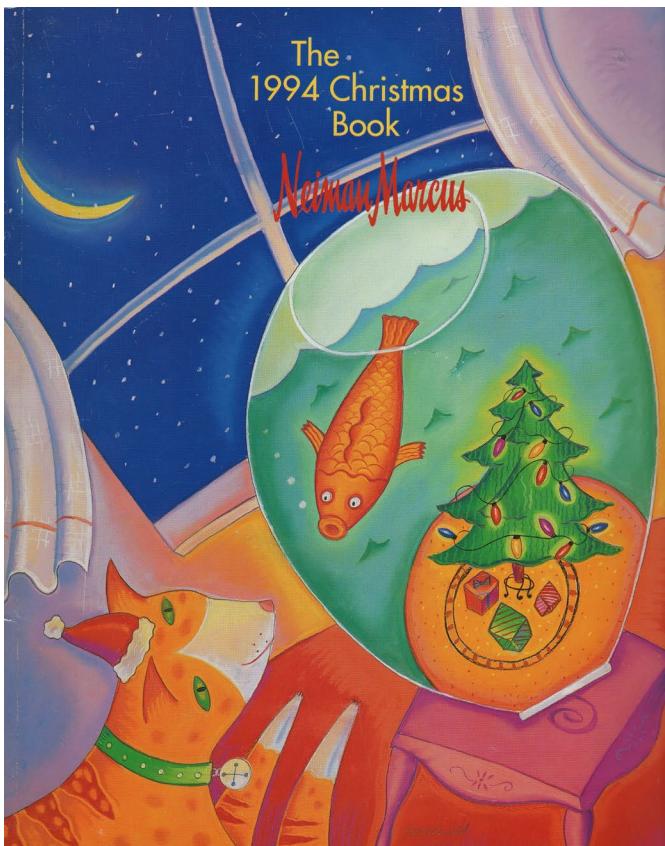


Office Aquarium, 2004.

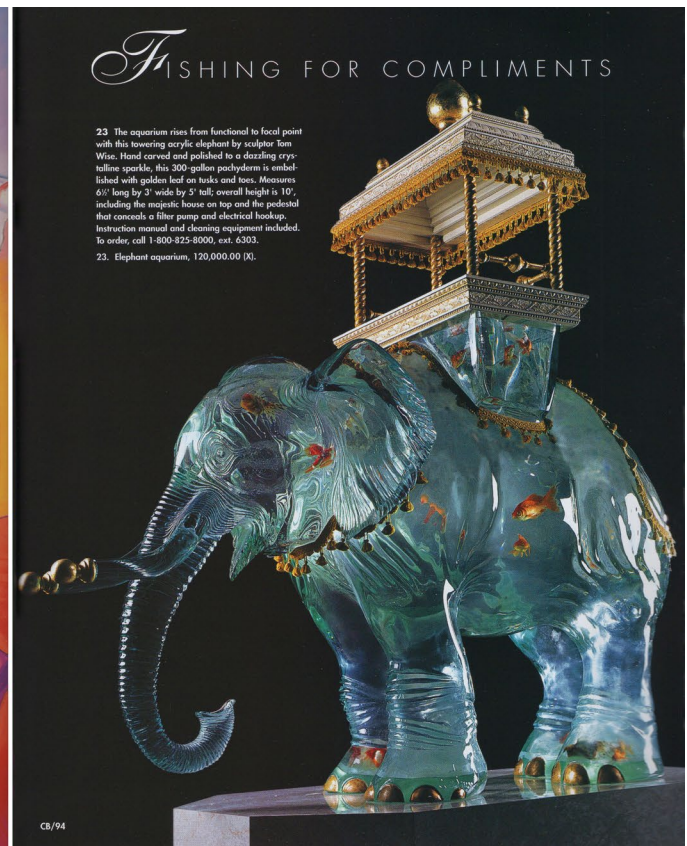


Barbie Pool Time Beta Tank by Mattel, 2014.

Does a Holy Grail exist in the world of vintage plastic aquariums? Absolutely, even though it is not a mass-produced tank like the ones we have talked about so far. It is the 300 gallon elephant-shaped aquarium made in the early 1990s by the American artist Tom Wise, who spent three years carving it out of a 6-by-7 foot block of blue glowing lucite (an acrylic-based plastic). In 1994, this bulky masterpiece was offered for sale in the Christmas catalog of the luxury chain Neiman Marcus at the crazy price of \$120,000! Wise even made molds out of it, just in case more than a single order had come in!



The acrylic "Elephant Aquarium" made by Tom Wise.



*F*ISHING FOR COMPLIMENTS

23 The aquarium rises from functional to focal point with this towering acrylic elephant by sculptor Tom Wise. Hand carved and polished to a dazzling crystalline sparkle, this 300-gallon pachyderm is embellished with golden leaf on tusks and feet. Measures 6'8" long by 2' wide by 5' tall; overall height is 10', including the majestic house on top and the pedestal that conceals a filter pump and electrical hookup. Instruction manual and cleaning equipment included. To order, call 1-800-825-8000, ext. 6303.

23. Elephant aquarium, 120,000.00 [X].

CB/94