



Antique and Vintage Catalogs: Time Portals to a Magnificent Past

By Emiliano Spada

What distinguishes a methodical, serious collector from impulse buyers and simple hoarders? I'm quite sure that this question can be answered with a single word, knowledge.

The key to success in building an organized, enviable collection, whether small or large, is always an in-depth knowledge of the items to be collected: history, rarity, current market value, main features, etc. Of course, money is important as well, but comes after.

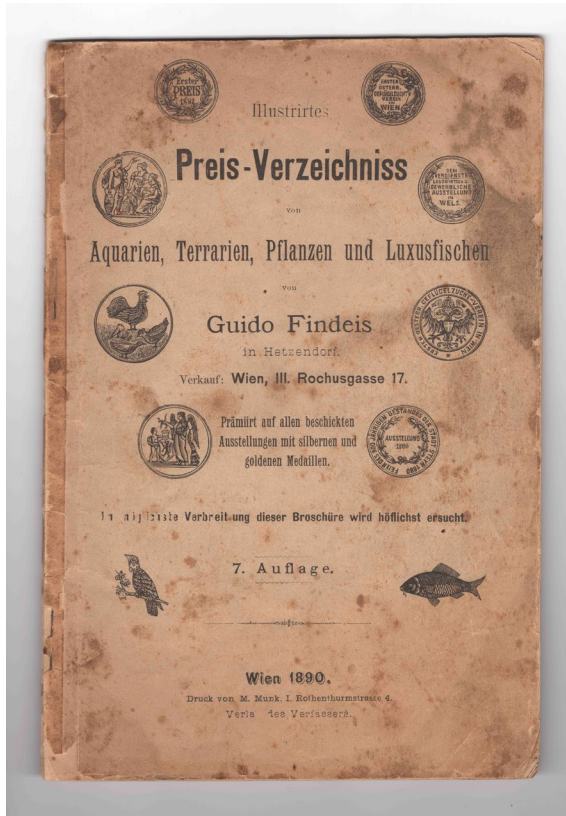
According to my experience in collecting aquarium antiques, the right sources of this kind of information are the senior collectors, all the books and articles on the aquarium history published to date, and particularly the trade literature of yesteryear.



Old catalogs offer collectors an insight into the aquarium industry of yesteryear.



A few examples of vintage trade literature.



Guido Findeis catalog, Wien, 1890. When you find rare, antique pieces like this do not care about the condition and grab it!

ORDER SHEET

BELDT'S AQUARIUM, 2141 Crescent Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.

Date..... PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Name..... Order Number.....

Street Address (P.O. Box R.F.D.)..... Remittance.....

City..... State..... Shipping Date.....

Express Office (if different from Post Office)..... Shipping Clerk.....

● WE GUARANTEE TO SATISFY YOU ●

TERMS: CASH WITH ORDER. No C. O. D. shipments unless 25 per cent remittance is made with order. Parcel post shipments can be made on all plants, snails, etc. Glass items are best sent by express or freight. Aquariums or fish can not be sent by mail.

KINDLY USE THIS ORDER BLANK—IT MAKES IT EASIER FOR YOU AND FOR US AND PREVENTS MISTAKES. If you want to write a letter, use separate sheet, than your order and your letter, will both get immediate attention.

Quantity	NAME OF LILY, FISH, PLANT OR SUPPLIES Order Collections by Number and Name Both	Amount Dollars
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p>FROM</p> <p>Name.....</p> <p>Street and No.</p> <p>Town..... State.....</p> <p style="text-align: right; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">PLACE STAMP HERE</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">Beldt's Aquarium</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2141 Crescent Avenue</p> <p style="text-align: center;">St. Louis, Mo.</p> </div>		
STATE.....	YTD.....	STATE.....
		YTD.....
		Total.....

37 Residents of Missouri Must Add Sales Tax of 1%

Beldt's Aquarium order form, 1937. Like other mail order catalogs of that era, vintage aquarium catalogs usually contained one or more purchase order sheets.

“Trade literature” is a general term including advertising, technical communications, trade journals, leaflets, price lists, and catalogs (or “catalogues” in British spelling) issued by manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing firms. In other words, a goldmine of information about the development of the business in the aquarium industry in terms of:

- history of the companies
- technology
- design
- marketing
- consumer trends
- supply evolution
- prices
- purchasing, payment, and shipping methods
- other general conditions of sale.

I search for the trade literature as often as I can, focusing my attention especially on old catalogs.

Search tools and collectibles

About these “compasses” to navigate the mare magnum of the aquarium history, we have to keep in mind that they were, like today’s printed catalogs, transitory and cheap creations not meant to be preserved, but intended on the contrary to be periodically replaced by new editions (some of the oldest usually had a longer lifespan also thanks to supplements released by firms from time to time).

Basically, they were objects more closely related to ephemera than to books, and that’s one of the reasons why many of them disappeared forever, or survived until today in a very limited number of copies.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS TO CUSTOMERS
Please read this page when ordering. It tells how to order—terms and policies.

HOW WE SHIP TROPICAL FISH
During the summer months tropical fish are shipped in light-weight metal cans corresponding in size to the number of fish ordered. In winter, we use a Thermos Jug warmly packed in a carton with a Heating Pad to assure safe arrival.

SHIPPING CANS
There is a deposit necessary on all shipping cans to assure their return. This deposit is refundable as mentioned below. If a can and Heating Pad is used, this must be returned with the can.
1 Gall. Can (Carry 10 to 20 small size fish) \$.50 ea.
NOT REFUNDABLE
1 Gall. Can (Carry 10 to 20 small size fish) .65 ea.
NOT REFUNDABLE FOR FULL REFUND
5.00 ea.
THERMOS JUG (Used for all winter shipments, Carry 10 to 20 small size fish) .50 ea.
REFUNDABLE FOR FULL REFUND .50 ea.
SPECIAL WAXED CARTONS (For male Betas) .35 ea.
NOT REFUNDABLE

RETURNING SHIPPING CANS FOR REFUND
Your deposit will promptly be refunded when you return the container to us by Railway Express, charges PREPAID. All shipping cans, pay cans, even with the heater system attached, can be returned from any part of the United States by Railway Express on only 30c. Just take the can “SHIPPY TIGHT CAN” and send it back to us, together with the contents if it is in, if any.

SHIPMENTS BY EXPRESS
All shipments are sent by Express Collect. This means that you pay the express man only for the sending charges, not for the merchandise, but the cost of the merchandise is in with your order. All fish aquariums, stands, etc., must be sent by express.

SHIPMENTS BY PARCEL POST
If you wish to ship shipments to you by parcel post, please send us advance payment to send them. Also advance payment will promptly be refunded to you on your purchase. Please send for us “BEVERLY BEVERLY” or “SPECIAL DELIVERY” ALL PLANTS BY P.P. SPECIAL DELIVERY. This will assure their safe arrival.

PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE
All prices listed in this catalog are subject to change without notice.

For fastest delivery we recommend
Air Express

TYPICAL RATES AND TIME CHART—U. S. A.

Rate	Time	Rate	Time
1.00	1 1/2 hours	2.00	3.00
2.00	3 hours	3.00	4.30
3.00	4 1/2 hours	4.00	6.00
4.00	6 hours	5.00	7.30
5.00	8 hours	6.00	9.00
6.00	10 hours	7.00	10.30
7.00	12 hours	8.00	12.00
8.00	14 hours	9.00	13.30
9.00	16 hours	10.00	15.00
10.00	18 hours	11.00	16.30
11.00	20 hours	12.00	18.00
12.00	22 hours	13.00	19.30
13.00	24 hours	14.00	21.00
14.00	26 hours	15.00	22.30
15.00	28 hours	16.00	24.00
16.00	30 hours	17.00	25.30
17.00	32 hours	18.00	27.00
18.00	34 hours	19.00	28.30
19.00	36 hours	20.00	30.00
20.00	38 hours	21.00	31.30
21.00	40 hours	22.00	33.00
22.00	42 hours	23.00	34.30
23.00	44 hours	24.00	36.00
24.00	46 hours	25.00	37.30
25.00	48 hours	26.00	39.00
26.00	50 hours	27.00	40.30
27.00	52 hours	28.00	42.00
28.00	54 hours	29.00	43.30
29.00	56 hours	30.00	45.00
30.00	58 hours	31.00	46.30
31.00	60 hours	32.00	48.00
32.00	62 hours	33.00	49.30
33.00	64 hours	34.00	51.00
34.00	66 hours	35.00	52.30
35.00	68 hours	36.00	54.00
36.00	70 hours	37.00	55.30
37.00	72 hours	38.00	57.00
38.00	74 hours	39.00	58.30
39.00	76 hours	40.00	60.00
40.00	78 hours	41.00	61.30
41.00	80 hours	42.00	63.00
42.00	82 hours	43.00	64.30
43.00	84 hours	44.00	66.00
44.00	86 hours	45.00	67.30
45.00	88 hours	46.00	69.00
46.00	90 hours	47.00	70.30
47.00	92 hours	48.00	72.00
48.00	94 hours	49.00	73.30
49.00	96 hours	50.00	75.00
50.00	98 hours	51.00	76.30
51.00	100 hours	52.00	78.00
52.00	102 hours	53.00	79.30
53.00	104 hours	54.00	81.00
54.00	106 hours	55.00	82.30
55.00	108 hours	56.00	84.00
56.00	110 hours	57.00	85.30
57.00	112 hours	58.00	87.00
58.00	114 hours	59.00	88.30
59.00	116 hours	60.00	90.00
60.00	118 hours	61.00	91.30
61.00	120 hours	62.00	93.00
62.00	122 hours	63.00	94.30
63.00	124 hours	64.00	96.00
64.00	126 hours	65.00	97.30
65.00	128 hours	66.00	99.00
66.00	130 hours	67.00	100.30
67.00	132 hours	68.00	102.00
68.00	134 hours	69.00	103.30
69.00	136 hours	70.00	105.00
70.00	138 hours	71.00	106.30
71.00	140 hours	72.00	108.00
72.00	142 hours	73.00	109.30
73.00	144 hours	74.00	111.00
74.00	146 hours	75.00	112.30
75.00	148 hours	76.00	114.00
76.00	150 hours	77.00	115.30
77.00	152 hours	78.00	117.00
78.00	154 hours	79.00	118.30
79.00	156 hours	80.00	120.00
80.00	158 hours	81.00	121.30
81.00	160 hours	82.00	123.00
82.00	162 hours	83.00	124.30
83.00	164 hours	84.00	126.00
84.00	166 hours	85.00	127.30
85.00	168 hours	86.00	129.00
86.00	170 hours	87.00	130.30
87.00	172 hours	88.00	132.00
88.00	174 hours	89.00	133.30
89.00	176 hours	90.00	135.00
90.00	178 hours	91.00	136.30
91.00	180 hours	92.00	138.00
92.00	182 hours	93.00	139.30
93.00	184 hours	94.00	141.00
94.00	186 hours	95.00	142.30
95.00	188 hours	96.00	144.00
96.00	190 hours	97.00	145.30
97.00	192 hours	98.00	147.00
98.00	194 hours	99.00	148.30
99.00	196 hours	100.00	150.00

1948 Aquarium Stock Company catalog, general instructions to customers.

OUR 40th ANNIVERSARY
Serving America's Aquarium Hobbyists
1910 1950
LARGEST SELECTION OF TROPICAL FISH AND AQUARIUM SUPPLIES IN THE COUNTRY
Aquarium Stock Company Inc.
LOS ANGELES - ESTABLISHED 1910 - NEW YORK
8070 BEVERLY BLVD.
LOS ANGELES 48, CALIF.
WEBSTER 3-8374
Jedric Paul
Tropical Accessories
AQUARIUM STOCK COMPANY
New York • Los Angeles
PRICE 15¢

Aquarium Stock Company “40th Anniversary” catalog, 1950.



Multiple subject catalogs from United States (1904-1932).



Iowa Bird Company catalog, 1904.

Nowadays old catalogs have become much sought-after items. They are search tools for collectors, as explained earlier, and collectibles at the same time. Typically, they are not that expensive. An interesting Aquarium Stock Company product catalog from the 1950s, for example, usually goes for \$30-60 on eBay. However, if your goal is to buy antique pieces issued in limited quantities when our hobby still wasn't at its peak, you probably will need more money and, even before that, will have to be lucky and skillful enough to find them!

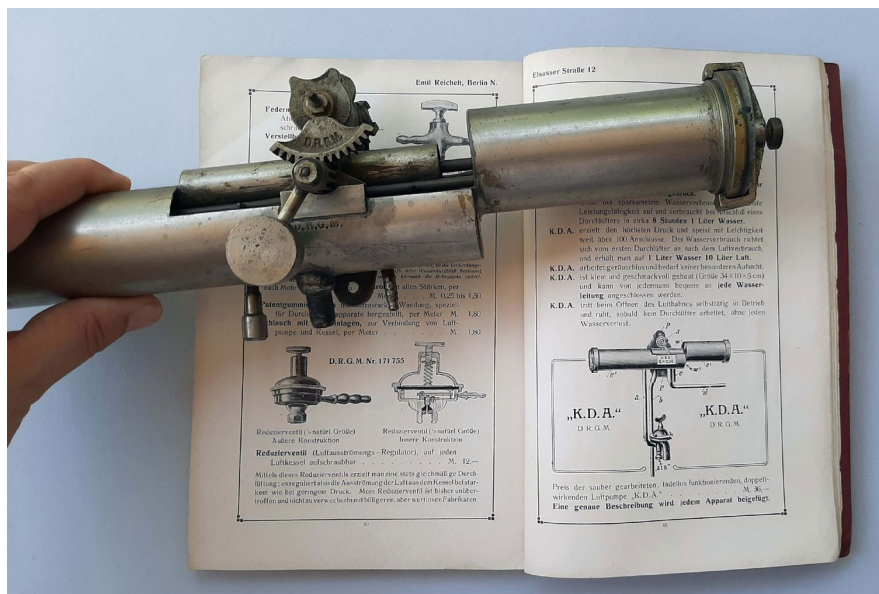
A special feeling

It's not only a matter of limited run and rarity with the older catalogs. It's also a question of wider demand. Early catalogs, in fact, usually were not monothematic and promoted a combination of products for different pets: fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, dogs, etc. The classic American combo was birds and fish. The typical German mix, instead, was fish, reptiles, and amphibians. As a result, when you are hunting for this kind of multiple subject catalog, you are probably competing with more collectors than you would expect, and this is never a favorable situation during auctions!

Reading old catalogs, I sometimes come across illustrations of objects that I have never seen in person or in a web picture. Basically, they are ghosts. Seeing them in a catalog, however, gives me the awareness that they really existed, unless they were items produced only under commission and, therefore, possibly never manufactured. This awareness charges me with adrenaline, and pushes me to hunt for them, sometimes for years, until the moment I find them and can finally do something I tremendously love, that is comparing the real object to its image in the catalog and saying, "Welcome back to reality, buddy!" What a special feeling...



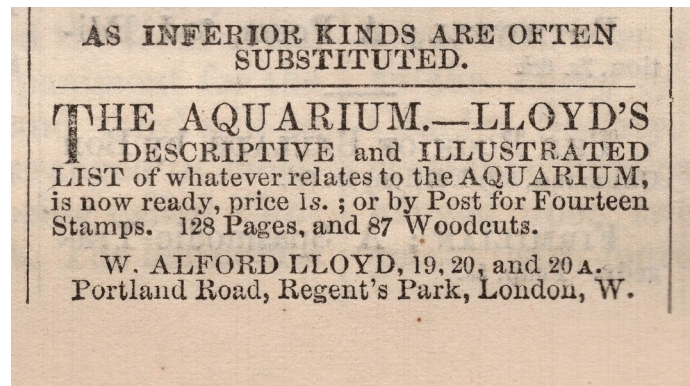
Welcome back to reality, buddy!



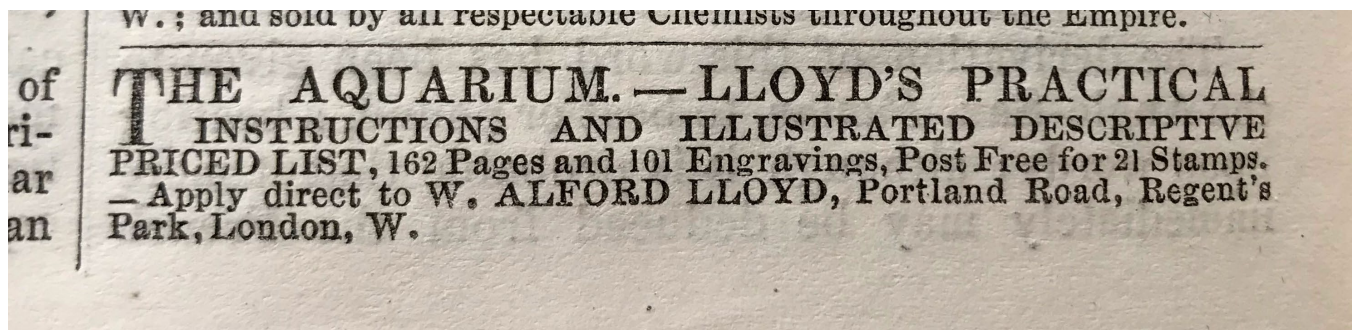
Comparing the real object to its image in the catalog is always a special moment for the author.



Lloyd's catalog, 1858. The woodcut depicts the Aquarium Warehouse, the first aquarium shop in history.



On November 13th, 1858, Lloyd advertised his List in the weekly periodical Notes and Queries (page 404).



Notes and Queries ad, October 13th, 1860 (page 300).

The "Holy Grail"

Without a doubt, the Holy Grail of old aquarium catalogs is the "List" by William Alford Lloyd, the first professional aquarist and owner of the very first aquarium shop in history. Lloyd's business started in 1855, at 164 St. John Street, London. In 1856, the shop moved to Portland Road, was named "Aquarium Warehouse" and had its own logo (a starfish).

In order to increase sales and reputation, in 1856 Lloyd assembled a basic price list for his customers, followed by a second list a year later. The true masterpiece arrived though in August 1858, "A List, with Descriptions, Illustrations, and Prices, of whatever relates to Aquaria", the father of all aquarium catalogs and price lists.

Lloyd, who loved books and previously worked as an apprentice in the business of bookbinding and in a second-hand bookshop, advertised his labor of love of 128 pages and 87 illustrations in the famous weekly magazine Notes and Queries (1858, Nov. 13th). The sale price was 1 shilling, or fourteen stamps by post.

The List had been conceived to be both a detailed description with prices of the Aquarium Warehouse stock (live animals, plants, paraphernalia, fish tanks, stands, books, magnifying glasses, microscopes, fishing nets, and containers), and a guide of quick tips and practical instructions – coming from Lloyd's direct experience – on the maintenance of the aquarium and the care of its inhabitants. Something definitely very different from the early aquarium books which were available in those years, full of romantic but useless Victorian suggestions.

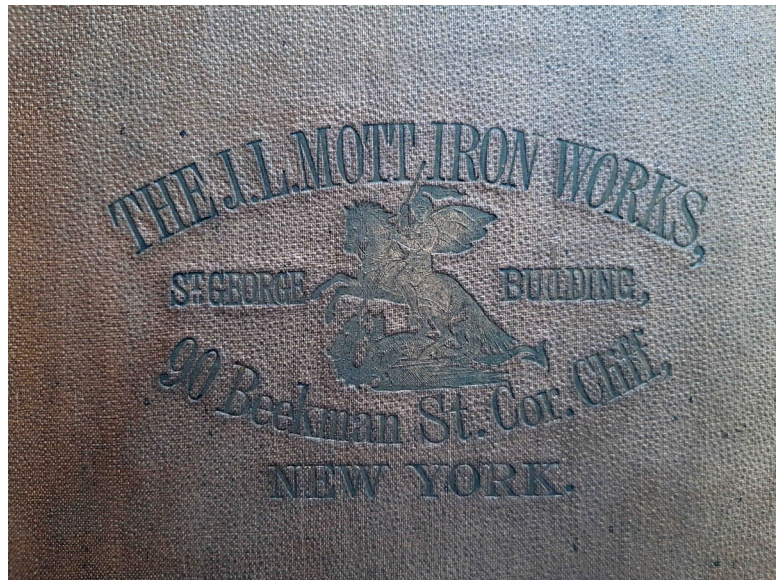


Gary Bagnall and William Alford Lloyd with the List in his pocket!

A Supplement with an extremely long title!

In 1860, he expanded his List with “A Supplement to A List with Descriptions, Illustrations, and Prices of Whatever relates to Aquaria containing Practical Instructions for their Management and a Description of a Series of Tanks in which Cheapness of Cost and Efficiency of Action are combined to an Extent hitherto unattained”. This consisted of 34 very interesting pages plus 13 illustrations at the sale price of 6 pence. Two years later, William Alford Lloyd declared bankruptcy and started to work as an errand boy, later finding employment in a few public aquariums until his death in 1880.

During his career, he believed that the parlor aquarium was not a frivolous ornament but a serious educational tool by which success could only be achieved by the understanding and application of basic scientific principles, a modern vision unfortunately not shared by his fickle Victorian public.



Cover closeup. The J.L. Mott Iron Works was Fiske's primary competitor during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was a huge company and, unlike Fiske, owned its own foundry.

The oversized catalog by the J.L. Mott Iron Works.

A crazy oversized catalog!

Among the most important catalogs from the late years of the Victorian era, we cannot fail to mention the ones issued by the two premium companies which made aquariums (actually a small part of their huge business) in the United States, the J. W. Fiske Company and the J.L. Mott Iron Works. The early editions contain stunning illustrations of fountain aquariums, parlor aquariums, rectangular fish tanks and stands making these catalogs highly desirable works of art.

The "Illustrated Catalog of Statuary, Vases, Settees, etc. for Parks, Gardens and Conservatories manufactured by the J. L. Mott Iron Works" that was issued beginning in 1875 is my favorite. Considered by experts as one of the more impressive American trade catalogs of the 19th century, it enthralls collectors with its lavish engravings and its astonishing page-size of 21"x15".

In the past, I came across a single sheet of this valuable catalog on sale for \$250, and 2 genuine copies which totally lacked illustrations of aquariums. During more than 140 years a lot of things can happen to a catalog with no page numbers, therefore collectors, before the purchase, should always ask the seller how many illustrations of aquariums there are in the catalog.

My copy of 176 pages contains 19 engravings depicting 3 rectangular fish tanks and 16 fountain aquariums, plus some of the supplemental sheets which the J.L. Mott Iron Works sent when anything new was added to their stock. I have never seen a copy with more aquarium illustrations to date.

The fountain aquariums manufactured by the J.W. Fiske Company were equally spectacular and, in those days, were also available in the catalog "Fair-Hill Terra Cotta Works" issued by the Jacob C. Cassel Company of Philadelphia in 1877.

Cassel, who was primarily a florist and garden supplier, had an aquarium department and manufactured its own aquariums, stands and ornaments as well. The rustic style, so popular at the time, was the main source for their designs. The "Mulertt Aquarium" and the "Stump Aquarium" are two crazy examples of the many artifacts you can find in this funny and exceedingly rare catalog.

GENTLEMEN:

In consequence of the great expense incurred by us in getting up this Catalogue, it is necessary for us to state that to our Customers we can only supply one Copy Free of Charge. If an Extra Copy is required we will furnish same at the nominal price of \$5. We give this information so you will be careful of and not mutilate this Catalogue.

When anything new is added to our stock, sheets of same will be sent you, which we ask you to please carefully paste into this Book.

We would suggest that you page-the Catalogue, marking on the Price List the page of the Catalogue on which each article is represented; by this means, you will save time and also save wear and tear of your Book.

The dimensions of Fountains and Vases have been carefully revised, the height of Fountains not including the Jets as formerly.

With few exceptions, all the designs represented in this Book are original, all are Patented by us, whether marked so in the Book or not, and any one using them for patterns or designs, we will immediately prosecute according to law.

Any further information relative to the Goods will be gladly furnished by us.

Respectfully yours,
THE J. L. MOTT IRON WORKS.

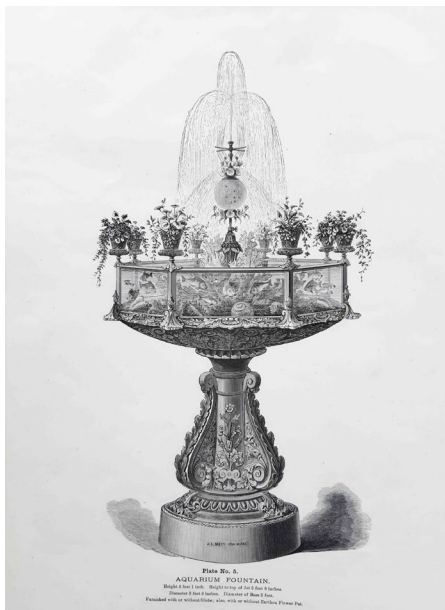
N. Y. May 1st, 1878.

N. B.—In consequence of the late change in the Postal Law, very materially increasing the rate of Postage, we can only send this Catalogue by Express.



A plus for collectors, this paper insert found by the author in his copy of the J.L. Mott catalog is historically important for its content.

Innes' book looks very small if compared to this giant catalog!



One of the largest fountain aquariums pictured in the J.L. Mott catalog.



Other spectacular J.L. Mott fountain aquariums.



Every single page of the Mott fountains catalog is lavishly illustrated.



The J.L. Mott catalog pictures many other "outdoor toys" for wealthy people.

Hunting in Germany

Starting from the late 1800s, German manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers of aquariums and aquarium related paraphernalia played a key role in the development of our hobby thanks to their technical, scientific, and pragmatic approach. Their product catalogs were usually full of technical illustrations and curiosities for catalog nerds! In my humble opinion, the maximum expression of the German aquarium industry during the pre-electricity years were the parlor aquariums manufactured by Louis Heinrici and Hubertus Raab.

Heinrici's "parlor fountains catalogs" from the early 1900s are spectacular and became tremendously rare as they are also considered collectible by hot air engine and steam engine enthusiasts. After years of unsuccessful searching, two months ago I finally had my Heinrici catalog thanks to a well-known antiquarian bookseller from Germany. Honestly, if this gentleman had asked me to pay with one of my kidneys instead of cash, I probably would have answered "OK, we have a deal" without hesitation! The same bookseller gave me the opportunity to buy other pretty rare catalogs issued by early players in the German and Austrian aquarium industry like Wenzhel Hübner, Adolf Kiel (Heiko Bleher's grandfather), and Guido Findeis.

Besides the above-mentioned classics, I consider equally important for every respectable collection some super rare catalogs like the Julius Reichelt from 1898, the Otto Preusse from 1902, and the Wilhelm Sander from 1912. Other famous German firms which issued interesting illustrated catalogs were A. Glaschker, Emil Reichelt, and Scholze & Pötzschke with its trilogy consisting of the "crocodiles catalog" (1908), the "frogs catalog" (1913), and the "25th anniversary catalog" (1930).



Louis Heinrici parlor fountains catalog, early 1900s.



Color plates make the antique catalogs by Louis Heinrici much sought-after targets for collectors.

Wenzel Hübner catalog, early 1900s.

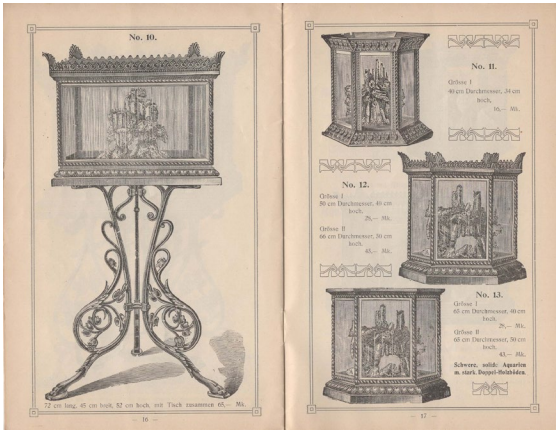
The "air pressure fountains" equipped with Heron's hydraulic device pictured in the Wenzel Hübner catalog are spectacular.



Adolf Kiel catalog. Back in 1901, Kiel founded one of the largest aquatic plant nursery in the world.



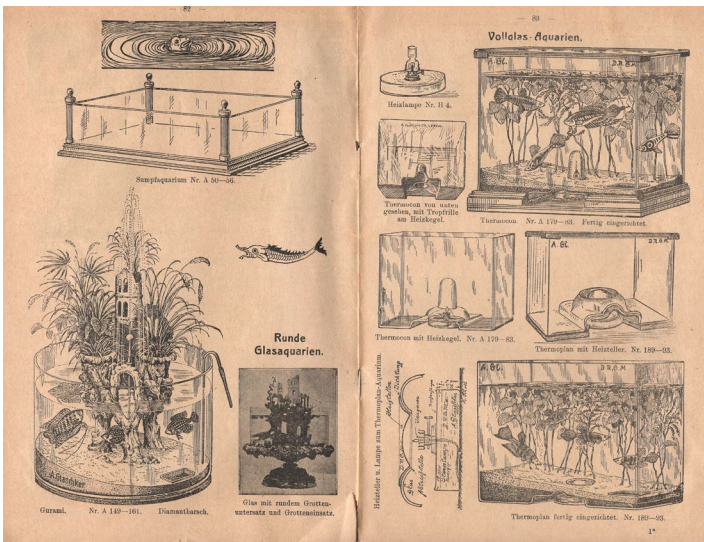
Kiel's stock included aquatic plants, fish, reptiles, amphibians, crustaceans, aquariums, and terrariums.



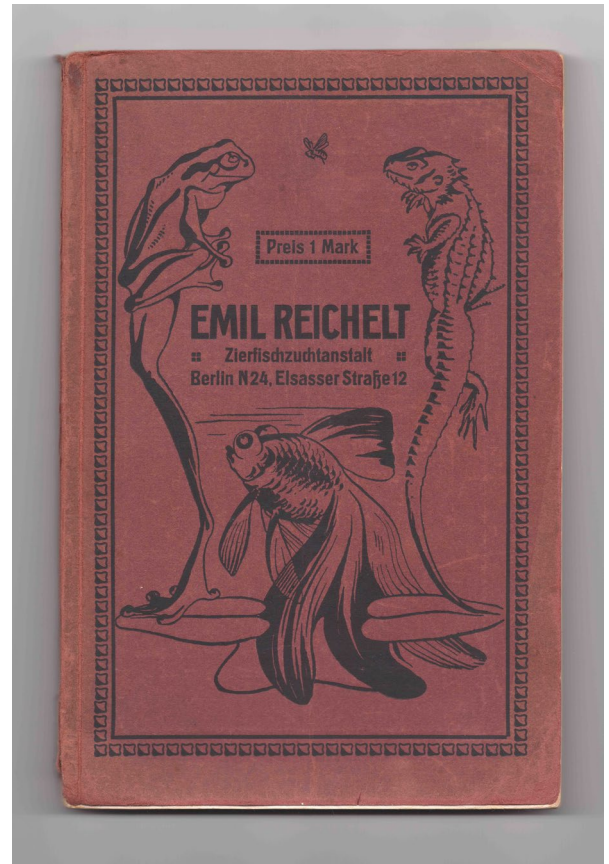
Some of the aquariums pictured in Adolf Kiel's catalog.



A. Glaschker catalogs are among the most interesting technical aquarium catalogs of the first half of 20th century.



A few fish tanks and pre-electricity heating systems promoted by A. Glaschker.



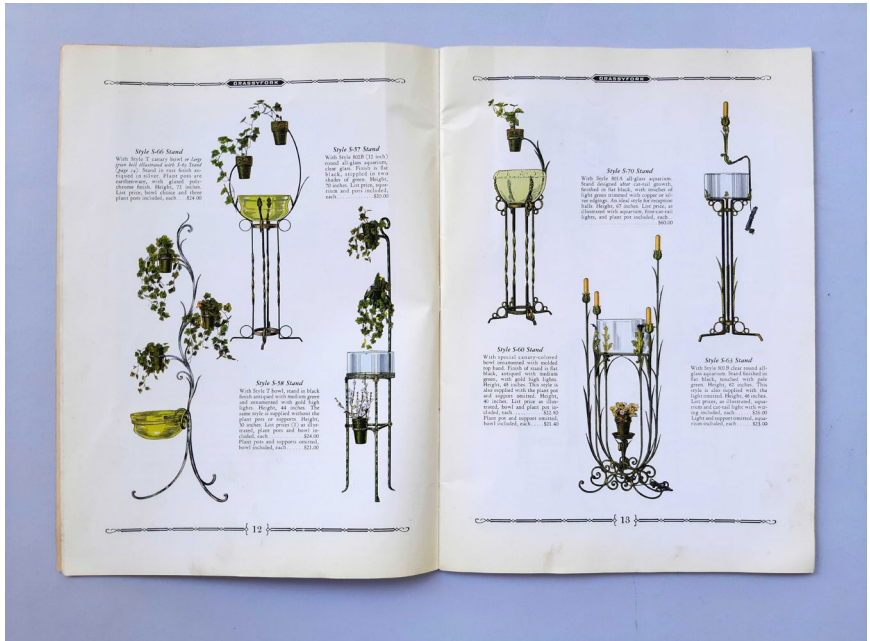
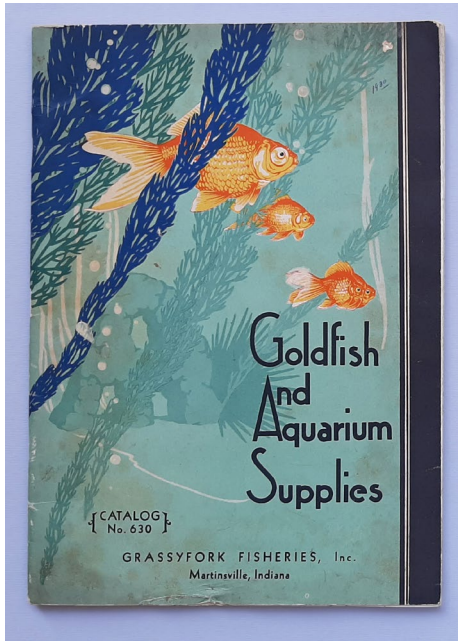
Emil Reichelt catalog, season 1909-1910.



Scholze & Pötzschke "25th Anniversary" catalog, 1930.

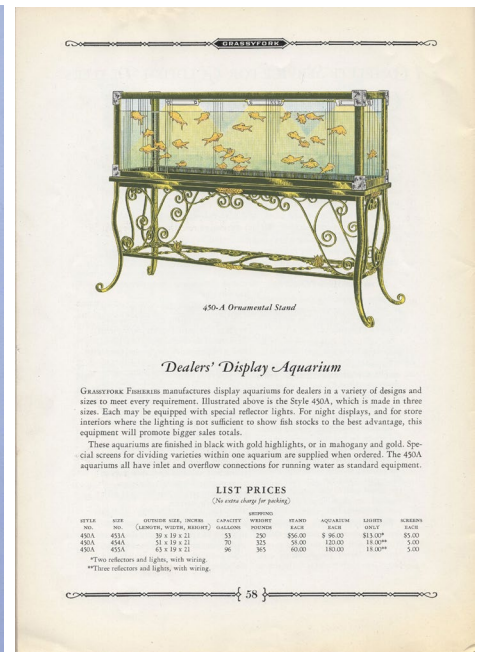
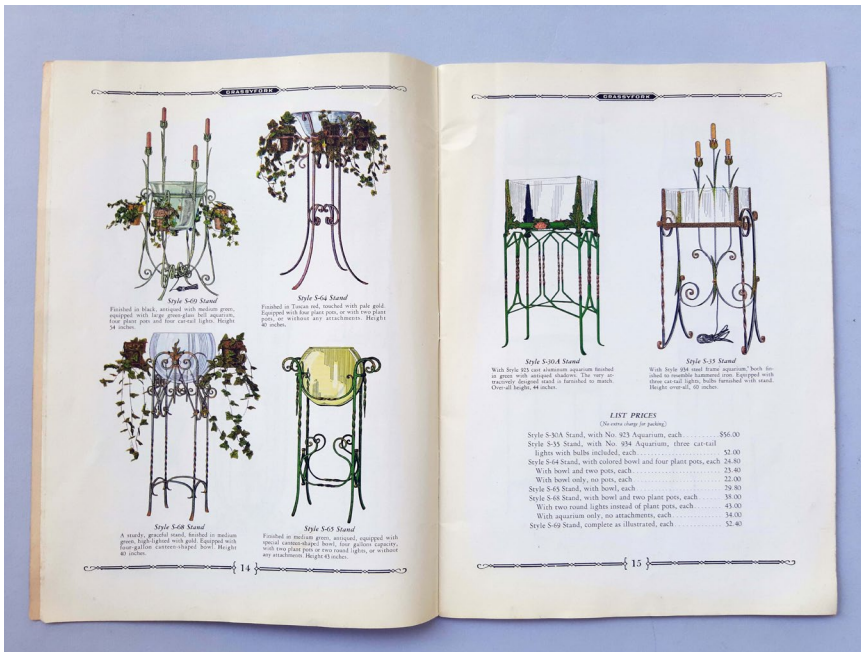
American beauties & classics

Back to United States, I can't forget to mention the Jewel Aquarium Company and Grassyfork Fisheries, as their gorgeous catalogs featured some of the finest aquariums ever produced.



During the 1920-30s, Grassyfork Fisheries issued outstanding catalogs full of color illustrations of bucolic design aquariums and fishbowls.

"Grassyfork style" fishbowls and aquariums.



Other examples of fishbowls and aquariums promoted by Grassyfork. All these treasures are exceedingly rare in today's market.

Grassyfork "Style 450", an elegant, large aquarium for dealers.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS TO CUSTOMERS

Forwarding—All shipments of live stock are forwarded via express, also all glass articles. We guarantee glass articles only if forwarded via express and in case of damage in transit will replace all articles gratis only if a bad order report is obtained from express company and mailed to us. We do not pay express charges on re-shipments or on original orders.

Cash with Orders—Please send sufficient money with order to cover the whole bill. We decline to ship "Collect on Delivery" unless 50% remittance be made to guarantee acceptance.

Shipping Cases—For smaller orders holding about two dozen fish, 50 cents each. Thermos cans must be used to long distance points. A deposit of \$3.00 is required on thermos cans, which we refund when can is returned. We reserve the right to make C. O. D. charge on shipment if deposit for thermos can is not included with order and it is necessary to use same to permit safe transportation. All west and east bound shipments going more than 1000 miles from St. Louis and northern shipments are lost sent in thermos cans.

All Live Stock shipped at our risk—The following conditions must be observed in order that if a shipment should be received in poor condition and we are requested to replace them. A bad order report must be secured from the Railway Express Agency, Inc. showing how many fish were dead in cans. And the lost fish should be packed in salt and returned to us same day received. We will not entertain any claim unless accompanied by bad order report. We only guarantee living arrival of Tropicals from May 20 to October 1. We do not reimburse shipments express charges prepaid. And if no provisions are made for thermos cans to long distant points this clause is void. Also the empty shipping cans must be returned to us prepaid or remittance made for another can.

Shipping Season—We ship Tropical Fish and Fancy Goldfish, Water Plants and all Supplies listed in this catalog all year round. During cold weather Tropical Fish are shipped in thermos cans. We guarantee live delivery of Tropical Fish from May 20 to October 1. However, safe shipments are made throughout the year. We guarantee live delivery of Coldwater and Fancy Goldfish during cold weather from October 1 to May 20. However, shipments are made all year round. During extremely cold or hot weather shipments sometimes may be postponed temporarily to permit safe transportation.

Order Early—All orders are filled and shipped in rotation at proper planting time.

Canadian Shipments—Obtain a permit to import plants from the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, Ontario. Send us permit number. You keep the original.

Non-Warrant—Various conditions, such as unfavorable weather, improper planting, etc., may cause poor results. We send out only first quality stock, but we give no warranty as to productiveness or description.

Selecting Tropical Fish—Not all varieties listed can be shipped in one can. Customers desiring only such varieties that can be kept together in one aquarium should order those marked * which are known as "Happy Family Fish."

Correspondence—We try to give prompt attention to all letters of inquiry, etc. Students and beginners wishing to know more about tropical fish should secure Mr. Innes' book, "Goldfish Varieties and Tropical Fish," it covers the field.

Catalogs—We issue only one catalog each year and this is mailed out about February 1st. We mail one catalog to each customer and any additional catalogs desired can only be furnished for 25 cents each, to cover cost price.

A FEW UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIALS

We are including these few abstracts of letters to show that distance is no boundary for good service, and that we can actually make shipments of fish and have them arrive alive, and in good condition

anywhere in this country. You will be satisfied to deal with us and we always appreciate hearing from you, even if you have a complaint coming on a shipment. Tell us; it's our business.

Gillette, Wyo.
Nov. 28, 1932
Beldt's Aquarium:
I received the two pair of Guppy and tadpole this morning, and they appear to be in excellent condition.
Edna Archibald
c/o Campbell Co. High School

Clarksville, Tenn.
April 18, 1932
Beldt's Aquarium:
I was so satisfied with your plants last year, that I want you to suggest lilies for my pool again.
Mrs. J. C. Gill
Chariton, Iowa
June 9, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:
Perhaps you might be interested to know I successfully filled the cracks in my pool with your black Asphaltum enamel. One crack was so large the water seeped out.
Sarah Jane White
Coldwater, Mich.
Jan. 8, 1932

Denver, Colo.
March 31, 1932
Beldt's Aquarium:
Shipment received O. K. Not a fish lost.
J. M. Lowell
Honolulu, Hawaii
April 9, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:
All the fish received from you, but one Barbus, received in 1930 are still alive, fully grown, and healthy.
P. W. Rushforth
San Jose, Costa Rica
Feb. 9, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:
The shipment arrived in perfect condition, and all fishes are doing very well. Fanciers here tell me it was exceedingly good luck, because nobody here has been able to receive the fishes alive.
E. F. Alvarado
Azuso, Calif.
Feb. 10, 1932

Minneapolis, Minn.
April 19, 1932
Beldt's Aquarium:
The fish reached me in excellent condition.
Jeannette Corser
Omaha, Texas
April 27, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:
I just want to tell you that I am well pleased with the collection of Calicos, Japs, and Moors you shipped to me recently. They are a healthy and vigorous bunch and have spawned in my ponds. I did not expect so many high price fish for the price.
E. Y. Anthony
St. Joseph, Mo.
April 10, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:
I have taken care of my night blooming water lilies according to your directions in your large book, and have quite a number of small plants in 3" pots.
Cliff H. Rivers
Canton, Ill. Okla.

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"General Directions to Customers" Testimonials for Beldt's Aquarium, 1934.
from Beldt's Aquarium, 1931.

What Our Customers Think About Our Aquariums and Aquarium Cement

Omaha, Nebr.
Nov. 16, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:

Several days ago I received your No. 72 aquarium, and truly believe that it is the finest aquarium in the city of Omaha.

A. R. Benson

Martinsburg, W. Va.
Nov. 9, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:

Enclosed find check for cement and gum oil. Doctor Wallace of our city recommends your cement as the only kind that is Leak-Proof.

Miss M. F. Gattrell

Fargo, N. D.
July 11, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:

I am in receipt of the aquarium with which I was very much pleased.

Mrs. E. Thull

Clay Center, Kan.
Nov. 30, 1931

Beldt's Aquarium:

Please find enclosed check for your cement and special gum oil. Your cement is the best I have ever used.

W. H. Brill

Malden, Mass.
Feb. 6, 1932

Beldt's Aquarium:

Some time ago I bought some Aquarium cement from you and found it to be very good and durable and I am extremely surprised that it can be sold for such a low price.

Vincent Nyden

McAlester, Okla.
Dec. 28, 1931

Beldt's Aquarium:

You may be interested to know that I have had great success with your cement. Repaired an aquarium one day and put the fish in the next morning without any apparent discomfort to them.

C. V. Stewart

Feedbacks from customers! Beld't Aquarium catalog, 1934.



Nothing very old from Italy

In Italy, the hobby of fishkeeping in its modern meaning (tropical fish instead of just goldfish and native fish) developed after WWII. One of the early tropical fish stores, started as a secondary business during the 1930s inside a stationery shop, was “Acquario Tropicale De Santis” in Rome, a place where dreams came true for many Italian enthusiasts.

Unfortunately, only a few traces of this business have remained, and the same goes for its owner, Giovanni “Nino” De Santis. An undated general catalog probably from the early 1950s is what we have today, together with a few other documents I collected from Italian old-timers.

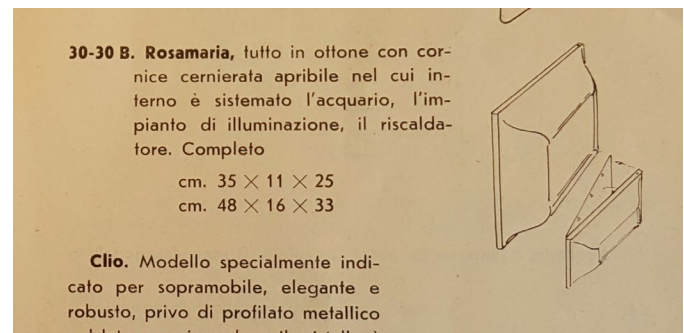
Besides standard shape fish tanks, the catalog promoted unusual lantern aquariums and picture frame aquariums including the “Rosamaria” model, a wall fish tank named after De Santis’ beloved daughter.

One of the early suppliers of this shop was the well-known Aquarium Stock Company. Since times were tough in Italy after the war, De Santis on some occasions paid the company in New York with money, but other times sending them lots of ceramic aquarium ornaments manufactured by Italian craftsmen.

De Santis was a pioneer whose great enthusiasm inspired the early generations of Italian aquarists. Among his followers, there was a young Werther Paccagnella, who regularly visited the shop in the early 1940s. Paccagnella remained so fascinated by the potential of this hobby that he decided to start his own business, “Acquario di Bologna” (the company later changed its name to “Euraquarium”), the most important firm in the history of the hobby here in Italy up to the 1980s.



Acquario Tropicale De Santis general catalog, early 1950s.



Wall aquarium model “Rosamaria” by De Santis.

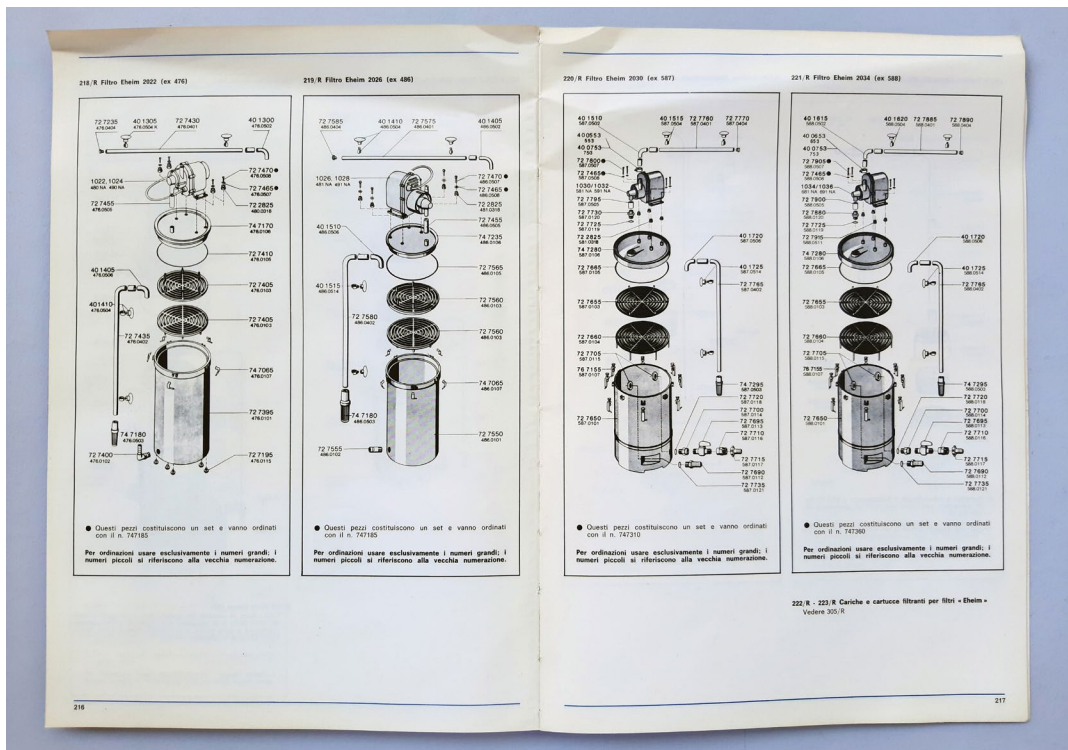


Acquario di Bologna and Euraquarium catalogs, 1950s-1980s.

All the catalogs and price lists issued by this company are the classic starting point for Italian collectors. The earliest Acquario di Bologna price list from my collection is dated 1954. One of my favorite catalogs, quite easy to find, is the “a/11”, as inside it you can find the funny “Hermes 65 SM”, an aquarium sold as... a construction kit!



Construction kit aquarium by Euraquarium.



Euraquarium catalog, spareparts section.

“Zen catalogs”

The graphically dazzling catalogs issued by the Japanese company ADA (Aqua Design Amano) are well-known to aquascapers and collectors for their innovative layouts and for the gorgeous photographs. They are among the few modern catalogs I collect.

Takashi Amano, ADA founder, opened his first Japanese shop in 1984, and started to sell his own aquarium products a year later. The first ADA catalog was distributed in 1986, and it was a leaflet printed in black and white, far from the impressive later editions. As often happens with “the very first of everything,” today this exceedingly rare catalog has become a much sought-after collectible.

Another two valuable targets for collectors are both the ADA general catalog from 1994, popular as “the catalog with a frog on the cover,” and the ADA 2001 catalog, also known as the “leaf catalog” or “the green one”! Pages 72 and 73, notably, make the leaf catalog very special as they depict Amano’s collection of antique Japanese fishbowls, and the enigmatic “Cube Garden Excellent” (this is the translation I had from a Japanese friend of mine). The story behind this small fish tank (L25x-W20xH20 cm - L9.8”xW7.9”xH7.9”), which never went into a regular production, is almost a legend. At the end of the 1990s, Amano decided to produce the perfect aquarium using the clearest glass ever manufactured for the aquarium industry, a minimalist museum piece ready to go on the Guinness World Record book. In 2001, the publication date of the leaf catalog, the price for this small treasure averaged around \$9,900 (¥ 1,200,000).

As far as I know, only one or two specimens were manufactured by hand before the project failed for technical reasons. Currently, a Cube Garden Excellent is in Italy.



Aqua Design Amano “leaf catalog”, 2001.



ADA Cube Garden Excellent.

The author always looks for Fujifilm large format slides by Amano, focusing his attention on the ones used in ADA books, leaflets, and catalogs. Here a slide showing the same aquarium with Guppies pictured in the ADA product catalog from 2000.

Auction and booksellers' catalogs as reference works

Auction catalogs are inventories of items to be sold at auctions. They can be of great interest for collectors, museums, and dealers since they usually include detailed descriptions and helpful information on the objects: provenance, estimated price, reserve price, historical significance, photographs, comparative analyses, and descriptive essays by experts. These catalogues are also key documentation for rare items coming from huge private collections.

In the past, and sometimes still today especially in the field of antiques, auction houses used to send printed catalogs to their best and regular customers before the auction date. Booksellers have always been present in the recipient lists, and they usually asked for extra copies to sell after the auction. Thanks to their historical significance, some of these catalogs end up for sale in books auctions as well.

At the end of the whole process, auction houses generally provided and still provide the hammer prices list, a bare listing of lot numbers and final sale prices. Before the purchase of an auction catalog, I always ask the seller if the hammer prices list is available as it is a precious tool to trace the worth of many items in time.



An auction catalog (left), and a classic example of modern catalog regularly issued by an antiquarian bookseller (right).



In 2017, Frank Wolter's huge collection of old fish books and related literature went on auction sale in Germany. The catalog issued for this auction is already a collectible.

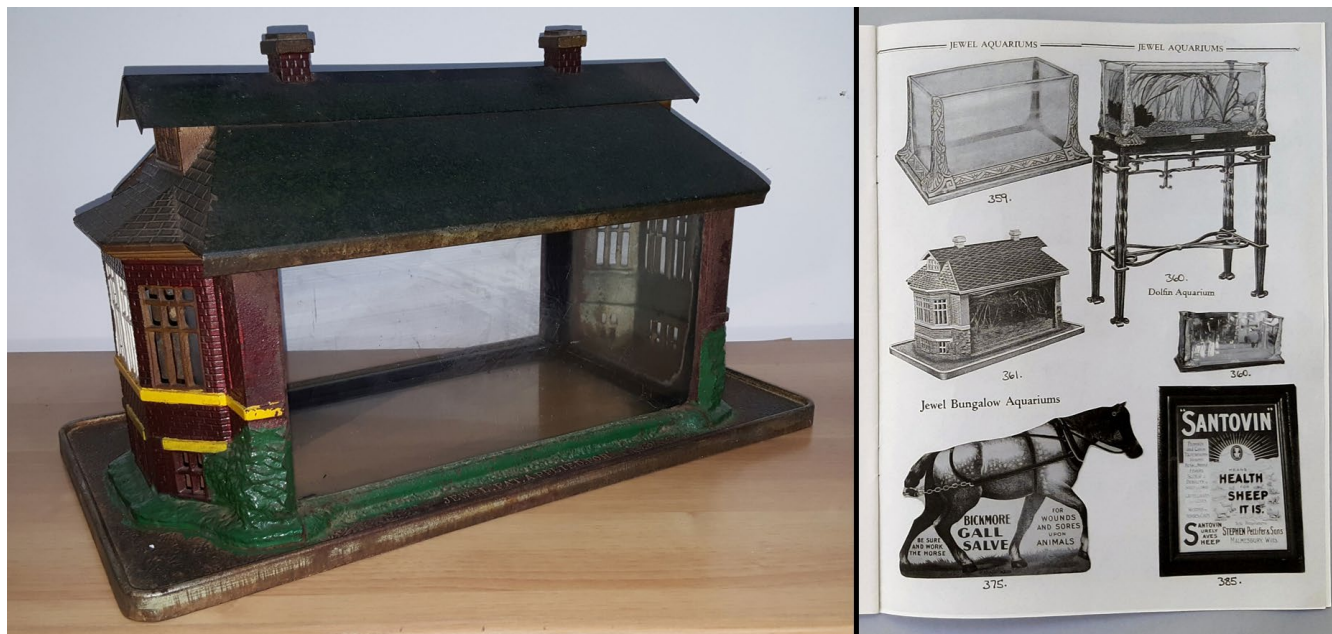


Gary Bagnall's vintage catalogs, 1980s.



Aquarium treasures from Gary's vintage catalog.

Antiquarian booksellers' catalogs are very similar to auction catalogs and equally of great interest. Surfing on eBay I came across two special, old-school catalogs issued in the 1980s by Gary Bagnall, the founder of the MOAPH. They both contain a funny, exciting mix of books, mags and catalogs, but also aquariums, fishbowls, fish food tins and other old stuff for the pre-web collectors of that time. I have never seen other catalogs with this variety of aquarium treasures. About their graphic layout, I prefer to say "no comment Gary"!



The Jewel aquariums section in Gary's vintage catalog.



A few examples of books written by collectors for collectors. These kinds of works often contain old catalogs reprints and are very helpful search tools. The last one on the right is the Sanguinetti catalog (2016), the most important guide to Liebige trade cards.