

Black Glass Buttons 101: Mechanical Make-up

By Claudia Chalmers

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Welcome back to our entry level class on black glass buttons! This segment's topic is "mechanical make-up." The National Button Society Classification (2011-2012) defines mechanical make-up as "techniques used to join two or more button components or add embellishment while [material is] in a cool state. Includes gluing, pinning, riveting, screwing, inserting, etc." Glass buttons whose components are formed or fused together, in a molten state, by heat are categorized as "Construction" (see Minnesota State Button Bulletin, December 2009). Mechanical make-up is an interesting class of black glass buttons and reveals a great deal of variety. The ingenuity of button makers apparently knows no bounds!

In the February and October 2009 *National Button Bulletins*, Barbara Barrans, classification chairperson, discusses some of the finer points of mechanical make-up. Those Questions/Answer articles also include photos of some of the types of buttons pictured here.

Many of these buttons, perhaps most of them, would neatly fit into more than one class of black glass button. We have tried to include only clear examples that best represent the classes so as not to confuse beginning black glass collectors with too much minutiae. The important thing is to understand the basic criteria of each class.

Remember that in this series of articles on black glass buttons the terms antique, vintage, and modern are used to identify buttons made, respectively, before 1918, from 1919-1980, and 1980 to present. The term "transitional" identifies buttons that cross those time lines. Most of the buttons in this article are antique unless otherwise noted.

Frames:

Frames are an interesting class of mechanical make-up. In a black glass frame button, the body of black glass is molded to form a frame around a center of a material other than black glass.

			
This frame has a fabric center. It is unusual because the frame is off center.	This frame has a thread center.	This faceted frame contains a wood center.	Colored glass in black glass frame. They are faceted to improve reflectivity.
			
These buttons have a thin clear glass crystal (often referred to as a watch crystal) set in the black glass frame. The thin glass inset is usually back painted and often covers a backing of iridescent pearl.			This button has a piece of shell loosely inset in a molded black glass base and held in place with a steel cut topped pin shank.

Glass with glass:

This class includes black glass and/or clear and colored glass attached to a black glass base. Keep in mind that in this class the components must be joined without heat.

This category contains a collector's favorite, the tingue. Tinges are made up of three components, a black glass base, topped with a transparent layer and then a thin overlay of colored glass (typically red). All layers are cemented together and usually faceted.

			
A faceted black glass ball forms a cup to hold a caramel glass center.	This extremely rare silver luster black glass contains triangular segments of translucent pink glass.	Black glass veil button with translucent yellow end points. The end pieces are glued in place.	Incredible gold lustered cup, self-shanked, contains balls of ruby and camphor glass.
			
This button is very similar in construction to the Tinges, but tradition has excluded them from that group. Differences include a wider sheet overlay and a wheel cut design exposing the foil below.	This button has an embossed caramel glass inset. The center piece protrudes above the surface of the black glass.	Unlike watch crystals, which this button resembles, the base of this one is black glass with the clear, colorless, back painted glass sheet cemented to the top. Bits of decorative shell are visible between top and base.	This button is made of the center piece, balls of black glass riveted to a metal base, attached to the pierced bottom piece by means of the shank. The center top piece spins freely on the base.
			
These are tingues . Tinges consist of a base (in this case, of black glass) topped by a "layer of clear colorless glass with a very thin colored glass . . . sheet overlay on top" (NBS Classification 20011-2012). There is foil between the black glass and clear and colored glass, and faceting to improve reflection. The tingue on the left is the most common shape. The realistic acorn shape is very rare. The two tinges on the right have unusual colored sheet overlays, and are also quite rare.			



Metal backs:

Buttons that are considered metal backed have large shank plates that cover most or all of the back of the buttons. The backs may be riveted, glued or soldered on to the back of the buttons. Also included here are wafers.




			
<p>Riveted black glass buttons. The individual small pieces of glass, containing a stem of metal, are riveted to a glass base. Buttons like this come in many different designs/patterns and are not difficult to find.</p>	<p>A scarcity, colored glass and black glass riveted to the same button. Be sure to count the number of pieces of glass. To be black glass, it must have more black glass pieces.</p>		
			
<p>Front, back, and side view of a medium wafer. Wafers are so thin, that they need to be reinforced with a piece of metal covering all or most of the back. This one pictures a stork in silver luster.</p>	<p>Two very unusual metal backs. The embossed cat is unusual both because of its square shape and its embossed design. The realistic riveted insect is a very scarce button.</p>		
			
<p>Three more wafers. The first two, depicting a snail and a lion respectively, are incised designs with gold luster fill. The fabulous animal is slightly concave and acid etched.</p>	<p>At left is the front and back of metal backed black glass. This one has white overlay and a "Birmingham" backmark. It's always good to look for backmarks and label them on your competition cards. At right is a sew-through metal back, Paris backmark, also with white overlay.</p>		
			
<p>Bimini buttons are a specific type of metal back glass. These were made in England during the 1950's. They all have a metal shank, and many of them have a Made In England backmark with the logo of the "Bimini tree."</p>			

Precision Inlay/Inset:

The types of inlay appropriate in this section of black glass are also known, collectively, as “Insertion” inlay. When the two materials are joined, they must both be in a solid state, the base material molded to receive the inlay material.

				
				
<p>These are examples of precision inlay. The seams between the inserted piece and the base material are nearly seamless, and the top is polished so that the surface is flush. The star, bottom center, is modern; all the rest pictured here are antique examples.</p>				
				
<p>Here is shell inlaid in black glass. Many patterns are available in this type of material combination.</p>		<p>These are steel cuts inset in the preformed black glass base.</p>		

Thread/Metal Bound:

		
<p>Thread bound buttons are charming. The thread is wrapped around a black glass base which is molded to hold the threads in place. They are then anchored beneath the shank plate on the back of the button.</p>	<p>This is a metal bound button. Thin copper strips replace the threads in a design similar to the previous button.</p>	<p>This is a rare cameo embossed thread bound in a medium size. The shank on this button is the crossed threads wrapped around from the front of the button.</p>

Consultant: Rebecca Lyon

Thanks to Rebecca Lyon and Cathy Mayer for loaning their buttons for photos.

References:

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