

# CORALENE

By Yessy Byl

Strictly speaking, “coralene” is a type of decoration consisting of the application of glass beads to a glass object, then firing the object to “fuse” the small glass beads onto that object.

The technique was patented by Schierholz in Plauen, Germany in 1883 although one article states that it had been used by Japanese artisans much earlier. (However, all the articles I found that dealt with Japanese coralene on porcelain were from circa 1900.) Coralene was popular during the late 1800s and early 1900s and was produced in Europe (primarily Bohemia) and in the U.S. by the Mt. Washington Glass Company as well.

While coralene describes the application of glass beads to glass, some articles use the term in relation to applying glass beads to porcelain as well. Noritake produced many lovely items like this circa 1900.

So with coralene being produced in Bohemia (the center of glass button production!) it was inevitable that someone would apply the technique to glass buttons. At the first Ottawa button show (seems like a very long time ago!), I spotted a black glass button with coralene which was probably circa 1880.....oh how I lusted after that button! I have never seen one since.....

There were some lovely glass buttons produced circa 1900-1910 with coralene decoration both in white and in black glass. They typically have 4 way box shanks (no thread grooves). My black glass example is plain but amazing!

There are some lovely examples of coralene on white glass.....this is one of the “common” ones to be found:

I have one button that I believe was intended to be “coralene” although the glass seems to have melted and its almost a very heavy salt overlay. There are some definite small glass beads...but many indefinite glass shapes. I’m unsure about the age but I believe this is likely a late 1800s button (you’ll have to let me know what you think!)



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Coralene buttons continued to be produced after WWI and there are some lovely examples that are circa 1920s and 1930s: This one has a raised self-shank. Upon close inspection, it appears that clear beads were applied and then painted:



This is a stunning coralene on green glass from about the same era..... but on this one, the colours were painted on the glass base and then the clear glass beads were applied. This gives it a real “shimmer” that my scanner just can’t capture!



The back is the same as the previous black glass:



These cute buttons look just like they are sugar-coated candy! They also have glass self-shanks. I think they are also circa 1930s.



Coralene-Like?

The Czech button makers got creative (by this time Czechoslovakia had won its independence from the Austro-Hungarian empire) and applied glass beads to wood buttons.



This round wooden ball with glass beads is quite lovely....the clear glass beads are applied over the paint which again gives it a shimmery appearance (sigh.....maybe a new scanner is needed?) A very similar button is shown in the book “The Jablonec Button” as being made in 1936:



I have a much less successful example of glass beads on wood..... Mind you, the advantage of buttons falling apart is that you can figure out how they are made! This one had a layer of plaster applied over the wood....then a thick layer of paint-like substance and then swirly lines of red paint into which glass beads were pressed (you can see they were pressed right into the black covering). The beads have fallen off and so has the plaster and black stuff....This is a view of the “good side” – not many glass beads left!:



This button is interesting....I always thought it was bakelite with a metal rim but it isn't testing out as bakelite! But...if you look closely at the background of the rose, you will see small glass beads!



This is another lovely button with glass beads OME (other material embellishment)...the problem is that I have no idea as to what the base material is! It is another lovely, shimmery button:



And then there is the ubiquitous celluloid! They even applied glass bead to that! You might be able to see where the glass beads have fallen out....



One of my favorite “ugly” buttons has applied glass beads but, again, I have no clue as to the base material. It has the distinction of being a “Paris back” and was given to me many, many years ago by a friend of my Mother’s who had brought it to Canada from Europe:



Some studio artists have used the coralene technique on porcelain buttons. This lovely porcelain button was made by Connie Robinson (backmarked “CR 99):



It's an interesting variety, isn't it? They really are remarkable buttons and it must have been very time consuming to make them.

As for classifying the buttons, they would usually be classified under the base material (what AM I going to do with that one flower like button?) and described as having "glass OME (other material embellishment) .....except for the coralene green and white glass buttons because the glass beads are the same material as the base. You can certainly list them as "construction" since heat is used to fuse the glass beads to the base.

But mostly, you can appreciate the lovely... and not so lovely but oh so interesting..... technique of applying tiny glass beads to a base to provide us with these fascinating buttons.

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