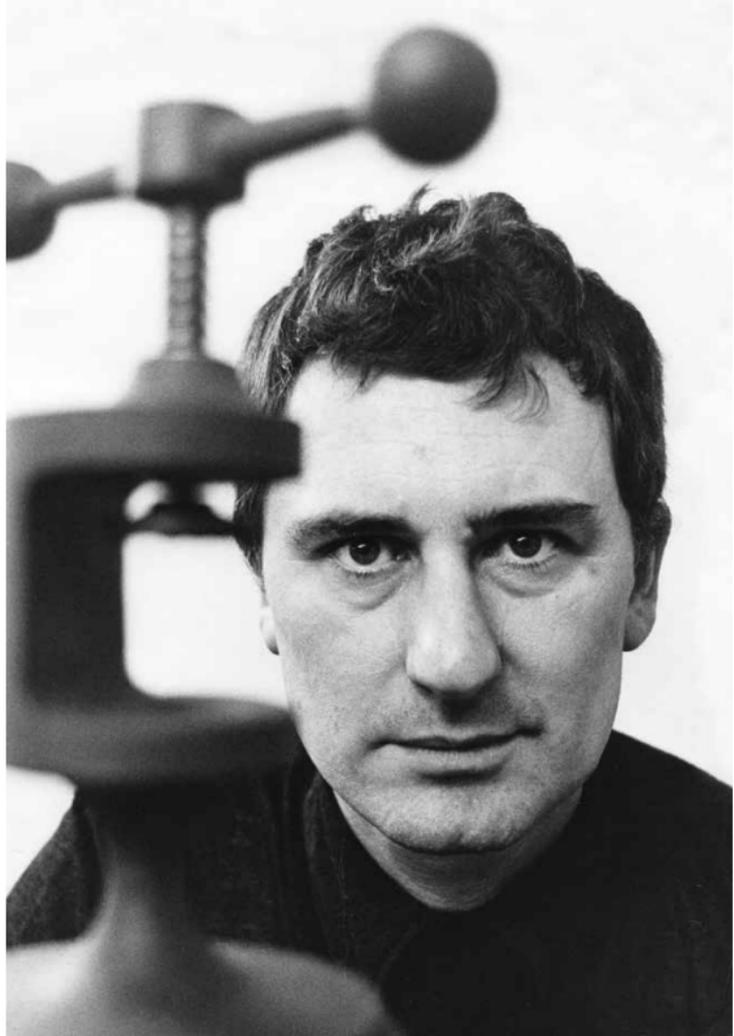


The work of designer and silversmith Robert Welch married craft-manufacture and industrial production, all from his Old Silk Mill studio in Chipping Campden, where the company is still based today. His broad range of designs brought clean, modern silhouettes into postwar homes. We asked *Charlie Whitehead*, Archivist for Robert Welch Designs to share her advice on collecting mid-century Welch.

Buyer's guide Robert Welch



Have you noticed any buying trends in relation to Robert Welch?

Welch's work has always been in demand – his silver work attracted customers such as Winston Churchill and Marlene Dietrich, while his designs for Old Hall were the wedding gift of choice in the 1960s. The craftsmanship in his work, whether in silver, stainless steel, cast iron, glass or bronze, makes it very collectable.

While rarer pieces can sell for thousands, there is a lot available at affordable prices. For example, interest in his cast ironware designs – with its enduringly popular Scandinavian aesthetic – is growing. Plus Welch worked on a huge array of projects – including clocks, lighting, cookware and crockery – so there's plenty to explore!

What are the defining characteristics of Robert Welch's work?

Welch's designs are linked by a strong, clean silhouette. They were also always functional, even when experimental. He had a practical approach to design, many of his cutlery designs evolved from studying ergonomics. The knife in his Oriana cutlery set, for example, was designed with a curved handle to fit the hand in the 'British' grip, but the contour also fits an American and Continental grip – similar to the way a pencil is held.

Can you tell us about Welch's relationship with Old Hall Tableware?

Robert Welch's work for Old Hall is especially popular – a combination of interest in both Robert

Welch and in the company itself, which produced stainless steel hollowware from the 1930s to the '80s. J. & J. Wiggins, who owned the Old Hall brand, bought a vegetable dish prototype made by Welch while he was a student at the Royal College of Art – this purchase marked the start of their three decade long relationship. In 1959, what had been Olde Hall became Old Hall to reflect the modern designs brought in by Welch.

Welch's most famous designs for Old Hall include the Campden range – including cutlery and, most famously, the coffee set and toast rack; the Alveston cutlery and tea set; his sculptural, stainless steel nutcrackers, as well as tableware and cutlery for the *SS Oriana* (once the largest passenger liner in service). After a slight redesign, the Oriana tableware also became a mass catering success. Collectors should look out for the tea sets – if there is a thick weighted ring attached to the base for extra stability, it means they were actually used at sea!

What are the three most collectable pieces at an affordable price point?

The sought after Campden coffee set, made from stainless steel and rosewood, has a strikingly modern Scandinavian look. Look out for the rounded handle – later altered to a straight tapered design for ease of manufacture – and the 'Olde Hall' backstamp to identify the earlier, rarer model. The sets sell from around £50 up to £200 for the earlier design.

Alveston cutlery, first produced in 1963, is also very popular. Welch researched British cutlery

Previous: Robert Welch, c.1966. Photograph courtesy of Robert Welch Design Archive.

Left: Model nos. CD25, CD50 and CD20 (Hobart) candlesticks from Robert Welch's Campden Designs cast-iron range, 1961.

Right: Alveston cutlery, 1961. Photographs courtesy of Robert Welch Designs Ltd.

