

MEMBER RESOURCE · THE VAULT

Silver & China

Thrift Guide

Sterling, silverplate, and fine china — read the marks, know the comps, buy the right pieces.

\$76/oz SILVER SPOT, MID-2026	3 TIERS STERLING / PLATE / CHINA	\$5–\$5,000+ PIECE VALUE RANGE	2–5x STERLING SELLS OVER MELT
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SECTION 01

The Game

Three categories, one skill: read the mark before you buy.

Silver and china flood every thrift store and estate sale, and 90% of it is worth a few dollars. The money is in knowing the 10% that is not — a sterling tray priced like decor, a maker-marked silverplate bowl, a china pattern collectors still chase. Every valuable piece carries a stamp on the bottom. This guide teaches you to read those stamps, separate sterling from plate from base metal, and price each against real eBay sold comps before you ever reach the register.

One number frames everything below: silver spot hit roughly \$76/oz in mid-2026, up from about \$30 at the start of 2025. That move turned a lot of "melt-only" sterling into real money, and it is why telling sterling from plate matters more now than it has in years.

SECTION 02

Know Your Three Tiers

Sterling, silverplate, and base metal are three different markets. Never confuse them.

Tier	What It Is	How It Sells	Typical Value
Sterling Silver	92.5% solid silver throughout	Melt value floor + maker/pattern premium	\$50–\$5,000+
Silverplate	Thin silver layer over base metal	Decor / vintage / replacement value only	\$5–\$200
Base / Hotel Metal	Pewter, EPNS, nickel, "German silver"	Decor value only; no melt	\$2–\$40

Sterling is the only tier with melt value. Everything else sells purely on looks, maker, and pattern demand.

SECTION 03

Reading the Marks — Sterling vs Plate

This single skill separates a \$12 find from a \$250 one.

Flip the piece over. The stamp on the bottom tells you almost everything.

Sterling indicators (real silver):

- **"STERLING"** spelled out — U.S. legal guarantee of 92.5% silver.
- **"925"** — the same standard, numeric form (also .925).
- **"800" / ".800"** — Continental European silver, 80% pure. Still real silver.
- British **hallmarks** — a lion passant (walking lion) = English sterling, plus date/city letters.

■ Maker name *plus* one of the above. Gorham sterling shows lion + anchor + Gothic "G".

Silverplate indicators (NOT solid silver):

- "EP", "EPNS" (Electroplated Nickel Silver), "EPC", "EPBM".
- "A1", "AA", "Triple Plate", "Quadruple Plate" — all plating grades.
- Maker name with **no** fineness mark — e.g. "Rogers", "Oneida", "Wm. Rogers", "Sheffield".
- "Silver" alone, or "German Silver" / "Nickel Silver" — contains zero or near-zero real silver.

Quick tests in the aisle:

- A magnet does NOT help — both silver and most base metals are non-magnetic.
- Look for wear-through: plate shows coppery/grey base metal at edges and high spots. Sterling wears evenly.
- "Weighted" or "cement filled" sterling (common on candlesticks and some bowls) is real silver but hollow with filler — the stamped weight is not all silver.

SECTION 04

Sterling — What It Sells For

Sterling sells at melt value as a floor, then 2–5x melt for desirable makers and patterns.

At ~\$76/oz spot, a solid sterling piece has a real metal floor: weight in troy ounces × 0.925 × spot. A 6 oz solid sterling bowl carries ~\$420 in silver alone before any collector premium. Watch for "weighted" pieces — the filler is not silver, so they sell well below their total stamped weight.

Sterling Item	Maker Examples	eBay Sold Range	Notes
Small bowl / dish (solid)	Gorham, Tiffany, R&B	\$60–\$250	Sold strictly on weight + maker if plain
Weighted bowl / compote	Various	\$50–\$120	Filler inside — priced below full weight
Serving tray (solid)	Gorham, Wallace	\$300–\$1,500+	Heavy; biggest melt + collector value
Flatware, per piece	Gorham, Towle, R&B	\$15–\$150	Rare patterns at top of range
Tea / coffee service (5–7 pc)	Gorham, Tiffany	\$2,500–\$10,000+	Tray alone carries much of the weight
Trinket / pin dish	Tiffany & Co.	\$80–\$250	Tiffany name commands premium
Candlesticks (weighted, pair)	Various	\$80–\$300	Weighted base — modest silver content

Comps reflect 2025–2026 eBay sold listings at elevated spot. Plain pieces track melt; ornate named patterns sell 2–5x melt.

SECTION 05

Silverplate — Maker-Marked Pieces

No melt value, but the right maker and form still sells. Decorative and replacement demand drives it.

Plate is where most thrift "silver" lands. Generic plate is near-worthless, but recognizable makers, Paul Revere-style bowls, full tea sets, and large trays move steadily as decor and wedding/tablescape pieces. Makers to know: Reed & Barton, Gorham (plate line), Wallace, Oneida, International Silver, Wm. Rogers, Towle.

Silverplate Item	eBay Sold Range	What Drives It
Generic small bowl / dish	\$8–\$25	Maker + condition; most are low
Paul Revere-style bowl (marked)	\$15–\$60	Classic form; R&B; / Gorham / Wallace sell best
Footed compote / candy dish	\$15–\$45	Decorative appeal, no dents
Large serving tray / platter	\$25–\$90	Size + ornate rim + maker
Tea / coffee set (4–5 pc)	\$50–\$200	Complete sets only; matched pieces

Silverplate Item	eBay Sold Range	What Drives It
Creamer + sugar pair	\$15–\$40	Sells as a set, not singly
Wine coaster / bottle holder	\$20–\$60	Trendy barware decor
Candelabra (multi-arm)	\$30–\$120	Statement decor; pairs do better
Revere bowl, engraved/trophy	\$10–\$25	Engraving usually hurts value

Monograms and engraving typically cut plate value 20–30%. Dents, pitting, and plate wear-through kill it.

SECTION 06

Fine China — Makers & Patterns That Sell

Brand and pattern are everything. Most 1980s–2000s department-store china is near-worthless.

China value lives in specific maker + pattern combinations that collectors are actively completing. A common pattern sells for a few dollars a plate; a sought pattern sells for \$40–\$190 per place setting. Always identify the backstamp AND the pattern name before pricing.

Maker	Tier	Per 5-pc Setting	Standout / Notes
Royal Copenhagen	Top	\$100–\$1,000+	Flora Danica dinner plates \$1,000+ each to dealers
Noritake (rare patterns)	High	\$120–\$190	Older pre-war & ornate gold patterns; #20056 etc.
Wedgwood	Mid-High	\$40–\$60	Better patterns; English bone china demand
Lenox	Mid	\$25–\$35	Holiday & Autumn patterns are the hot sellers
Royal Doulton	Mid	\$30–\$70	Carlyle, Old Country Roses move well
Haviland (Limoges)	Mid	\$30–\$80	French; older Limoges marks preferred
Royal Albert	Mid	\$25–\$60	Old Country Roses is the staple seller
Mikasa	Low	\$15–\$25	Mostly common; few standouts
Noritake (common)	Low	\$20–\$30	Bread plates / cups only a few dollars each
Generic dept-store china	Very low	\$5–\$15	Usually not worth listing individually

Complete sets with serving pieces sell for far more than incomplete ones. Single rare serving pieces (covered veg, gravy) can beat whole common sets.

SECTION 07

How to Comp This Niche on eBay

Silver and china pricing is all in the sold listings. Here is the exact workflow.

Step-by-step:

- Search the **exact words on the stamp** + the form. Example: "Reed Barton sterling bowl" or "Noritake Azalea dinner plate."
- On the results page, open **Filters** → scroll to **Sold Items** → toggle it on. (On mobile: Filter → Sold items.) This is the only price that matters — active listings are just asking prices.
- Sort by **Most Recent** to see current market, not stale 2-year-old sales.
- Read the green **"Sold"** price and the date. Average several comparable sales — ignore the one outlier high and low.
- Match condition honestly: dents, monograms, chips, and missing lids all pull your piece toward the low end.

Search terms that work in this niche:

- Sterling: *[maker] sterling [form]* — e.g. "Gorham sterling tray", "Tiffany sterling dish".
- Silverplate: *[maker] silverplate [form]* — e.g. "Wallace silverplate Revere bowl".

- China: *[maker] [pattern name] [piece]* — e.g. "Lenox Holiday dinner plate". The pattern name is essential.
- No pattern name? Search *[maker] + a color/motif* ("Noritake blue gold band") to ID it, or check Replacements.com to name the pattern first.
- Reality checks:
- Replacements.com lists **retail asking** prices — useful as a ceiling to confirm a pattern has value, but you will sell well below it.
- For sterling, cross-check the **melt floor**: troy oz × 0.925 × spot (~\$76 mid-2026). Never sell solid sterling below melt.
- Auction "sold for" prices are hammer prices — real buyers paid 20–30% more after premium. Use hammer as your baseline.

SECTION 08

Realistic Comp Examples

What these actually sell for, pulled from recent market data.

Item (as you would find it)	Tier	Realistic Sold Comp
Towle EP silverplate 6" bowl, marked, no dents	Plate	\$15–\$20
Reed & Barton silverplate Paul Revere bowl	Plate	\$20–\$45
Wallace silverplate 4-pc tea set, complete	Plate	\$80–\$150
Solid sterling weighted bowl, ~8" (filler base)	Sterling	\$60–\$90
Gorham solid sterling small dish, plain	Sterling	\$80–\$200
Tiffany & Co. sterling trinket dish	Sterling	\$80–\$250
Gorham sterling serving tray, heavy	Sterling	\$400–\$1,200+
Sterling flatware, single Gorham Chantilly piece	Sterling	\$25–\$60
Lenox Holiday dinner plate, single	China	\$15–\$30
Noritake common pattern, 4 dinner plates	China	\$20–\$40
Noritake rare gold pattern, 5-pc setting	China	\$120–\$190
Wedgwood 5-pc place setting	China	\$40–\$60
Royal Albert Old Country Roses cup & saucer	China	\$15–\$35
Royal Copenhagen Flora Danica dinner plate	China	\$500–\$1,000+

Ranges reflect condition and completeness. A chip, dent, monogram, or missing lid pushes any item to the bottom of its range.

SECTION 09

30-Second Field Guide

Flip it over, read the bottom, make the call.

If the stamp says...	Call	Why
"STERLING" or "925"	BUY — check weight	Real silver; melt floor + premium
"800" or lion hallmark	BUY	Real silver (Euro / British)
Tiffany / Gorham / Towle + sterling	BUY — priority	Maker premium 2–5x melt
"EPNS" / "EP" / "Triple Plate"	MAYBE — maker + form	Plate; only decor/maker value
R&B / Wallace plate, nice form	BUY if cheap	Sells as decor \$20–\$90

If the stamp says...	Call	Why
Lenox Holiday / Autumn	BUY	Hot china patterns
Royal Copenhagen / rare Noritake	BUY — priority	Top-tier china value
Wedgwood / Royal Doulton / Albert	CHECK pattern	Mid-tier; pattern decides
Generic plate, no maker	SKIP	Near-zero resale
Common dept-store china	SKIP	Not worth listing
Dented / chipped / heavy monogram	SKIP or lowball	Condition kills value

SECTION 10

Buying, Listing & Watch-Outs

What to pay at the thrift

- Sterling priced as decor is the jackpot — buy any solid sterling under melt value, every time.
- Marked silverplate bowls/trays at \$2–\$5: easy flip to \$20–\$60 if maker + form are good.
- Hot-pattern china (Lenox Holiday, Old Country Roses) at \$1–\$3 a plate: always grab.
- Skip generic plate and common china unless it is near-free and you can bundle a lot.

Listing for max return

- Title formula: *Maker + Sterling/Silverplate + Form + Pattern + Condition*. Spell out the exact stamp.
- Photograph the maker's mark on the bottom clearly — buyers zoom in to verify sterling.
- For sterling, weigh it and state troy ounces in the listing; metal buyers search by weight.
- Sell tea sets, creamer/sugar pairs, and place settings as **complete sets** — singles drag.
- List china by full pattern name; that is exactly what collectors search.

Watch-outs

- "Weighted" / "cement filled" sterling is real silver but mostly filler — do not price at full weight.
- Monograms and engraving cut value 20–30% on both sterling and plate.
- Do NOT over-polish — aggressive buffing removes patina and detail and can lower collector value.
- "German silver" / "Nickel silver" / "Alpaca" contain no real silver despite the name.
- Chips and hairline cracks on china (hold to light) make most pieces unsellable.

Read the mark, run the comp, buy the 10%. Drop your finds in the server. — The Vault

Members only · Do not redistribute · Comps reflect 2025–2026 market and ~\$76/oz silver spot