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the
romance of
Repoussé

The ancient art of working with metal still captivates today,
especially in the intricate floral designs as seen in silver flatware
and other specialty pieces for the table and vanity

These serving spoons are specially designed for the task at hand. The berry, bonbon, and nut spoons—in all three sizes—include a charming pattern of fruit and flora in the bowl. The small one sits on a serving piece with a completely flat bowl used for hotcakes. The tomato spoon is also flat with a pierced bowl, and the smaller spoons are for demitasse and for baby (all spoons by S. Kirk & Son and Kirk Stieff). **OPPOSITE:** An antique footed repoussé centerpiece has an elegant gold-wash treatment inside the bowl (Tiffany & Co.).





ALL TYPES OF SILVER, from flatware to serving pieces, naturally speak to the Christmas season with all their shine and richness. Beloved collections, often handed down and pulled into service, fill our tables and our rooms. And perhaps the star of the holiday show is silver in the dramatic repoussé style with its surface almost completely covered with intricate flowers and other detailing. *Repoussé* from the French, meaning “pushed back,” refers to any type of ornamentation in which the design is raised in relief on the reverse or interior side of the metal material at hand. While the technique has been extensively practiced throughout history, the word’s first known use was in the early 1800s when the method was thoroughly embraced by silversmiths in America. Repoussé came into popularity during the rococo revival period in

decorative arts. Silversmiths nationwide used the technique, but Baltimore was its greatest champion. The silversmiths there created a regional style featuring masses of repoussé flowers with chased details. (Chasing is opposite to repoussé, as it refines the front of the piece, and the two techniques are often used together). Today, this type of decoration is known as “Baltimore repoussé” and was introduced by Samuel Kirk in 1828. It was thoroughly copied soon after, but unlike his competitors, Kirk’s iconic pattern, simply called *Repoussé*, is still made today under the name Kirk Stieff. And while America fell under the spell of neoclassicism, art nouveau, and other decorative styles, repoussé—outfitted in its rococo glory—has never fallen out of favor. When accounting for the style’s longevity, writer Jack Tanis noted the following in an article for *Silver* magazine: “What you see is what you get, and what you get is an eyeful of pretty—drippingly saturated pretty.”



The Victorians loved their silver, so manufacturers were quick to introduce pieces to meet every possible need at the table. Intimate knowledge of all the designs was a necessary social skill during that time.

TOP ROW: Berry, pickle, and oyster forks.

SECOND ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Cold meat, bacon, asparagus, large and medium lemon, and lettuce forks (all by Jenkins & Jenkins, S. Kirk & Son, and Kirk Stieff). OPPOSITE: An antique monogrammed footed serving tray brings a formal note to any occasion (Kirk Stieff).




“Everyone should have at least one piece of Kirk’s Repoussé. It’s so ornate that it goes with everything. It’s an iconic American flatware pattern that has been loved and celebrated for generations.”

—MIMI BREMER WOODRUFF, BEVERLY BREMER SILVER SHOP



A Victorian lady's vanity table might display a collection of repoussé pieces as well. All are antique: hand mirror (Jenkins & Jenkins); brush (Gorham); powder jar with the monogram "Edmonia" (Gorham); and monogrammed dresser jar in Rose pattern (S. Kirk & Son). OPPOSITE: Antique napkin clips and a napkin ring dress up linens at the table (S. Kirk & Son).

A still life photograph showcasing three pieces of silverware on a rustic, weathered wooden table. In the upper left, a pear with two green leaves sits on a small, ornate silver plate. In the foreground, a large, oval silver fish serving dish with a wide, flared rim and a pedestal base is prominently displayed. The rim of the dish is decorated with a detailed repoussé floral pattern. To the left of the fish dish, a silver blunt knife with a textured handle and a serrated blade lies on the table. The lighting is warm and directional, creating strong highlights and shadows that emphasize the textures of the silver and wood.

Repoussé elevates any surface it touches. A beautiful compote shines next to a bread and butter plate (both S. Kirk & Son) and an antique blunt knife (Jenkins & Jenkins) on a weathered table.

OPPOSITE: Flatware for serving fish shows off intricate pierced detailing on the blade and tines (Kirk Stieff).

All silver courtesy of Replacements, Ltd. and Beverly Bremer Silver Shop.

