

Dear Consumer Buying Tableware? Check 'Open Stock'

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I would have liked to have started this column with something about June brides selecting their patterns of china, silver and crystal, but I know that tableware purchases are not limited to brides—June or any other month.

Singles—men and women—buy tableware. Married couples buy new sets of dishes and glassware. Regardless of marital status or age, you should get the answer to one big question before making your decision on a particular style and pattern: What is the "open stock" policy?

"Open stock" is the term for piece-by-piece sales instead of sales by the place setting category. The theory behind open stock sales is that you can buy just the pieces you need as you wish them, and you can replace items as you need.

One problem in buying open stock tableware is that there is seldom a guarantee the pattern will not be discontinued. Or, although the manufacturer is still making your pattern, the store might stop stocking it. Even if this happens, most stores, I understand, will send your order to the manufacturer as long as the manufacturer still has stock.

These special orders, as the stores call them, may take a few days or several months. Sometimes your order is held until it can be sent to the manufacturer with a group of similar orders.

Stores usually price special-order pieces at the time of delivery. This means that if the price of an item has gone up since you placed your order, you will have to pay the higher price. Also, there may be a charge for special orders.

Therefore, buying tableware on a piece-by-piece or open stock basis may be more expensive than buying extra place settings or extra

pieces at the time of your original purchase. Of course, you then run the risk of investing your money in items you do not need and may never use.

Here are a few other pointers to consider before you decide to take advantage of open stock patterns:

- Be wary of faddish styles or patterns that might change quickly as fashions change.

- Ask about a guarantee or warranty. Replacement time for a "life time" oven proof dish could be limited to a few years. Or "replacement" might mean replacement in kind and size only, not color or pattern.

- Check the name of the manufacturer. Well known manufacturers are less apt to change styles and patterns.

- Find out how long the store has been selling the manufacturer's line. The answer will be a clue—but not a guarantee—that the store might continue to stock the line, thus making your future open stock purchases easier.

Also, ask about the store's policy on open stock.

Finally, ask your friends about their experiences in buying china, crystal or flatware on the open stock basis. "Open stock" is a good idea unless it becomes closed stock for you.

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THE BLACK NEWS DIGEST shows Ronald J. James, administrator of the U.S. Labor Department's Wage and Hour Division, (above) discussing the Equal Pay Act with his administrative assistant, Agnes Robinson. James heads the federal agency responsible for administering and enforcing a number of federal laws that protect the nation's workers. (Below) Kim Johnson, 17, a partially deaf summer aid worker at the U.S. Labor Department, interprets for fellow deaf summer aids at the department during a career session held monthly in the nation's capital.



Recipients of veterans' benefits from the War of 1812 continued until 1946, the Veterans Administration reported.

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