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DR. RENZ'S HERB BITTERS BOTTLE, CIRCA 1868-1881, BRINGS A RECORD \$24,150 IN PART 1 OF THE MEL HAMMER BOTTLE COLLECTION, HELD DECEMBER 10-19

The online auction was conducted by American Bottle Auctions, headquartered in Sacramento. Offerings included schnapps and gin bottles, bitters bottles and inkwells, most with 9.5 grades.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – A Dr. Renz's Herb Bitters bottle (San Francisco, circa 1868-1881), 9 ¾ inches tall, with a uniquely styled applied tapered top (one of maybe four known), light lime green in color, sold for \$24,150 in the online-only sale #72 of Part 1 of the Mel Hammer bottle collection, which began December 10th and ended December 19th, by American Bottle Auctions.

The Mel Hammer collection is an incredible hoard gathered over a 50-year span by a man who dedicated much of his adult life to the acquisition and study of antique glass. Part 1 featured many of Mr. Hammer's favorites, such as schnapps and gin bottles, bitters bottles and inkwells, many boasting 9.5 grades. Part 2 will be held in March. Mr. Hammer died on Thanksgiving Day.

The Dr. Renz's Herb Bitters was easily the top achiever in the 137-bottle auction and the price was a new auction record. A winner at the 1869 California State Fair, the bottle is one of just a handful known with the unique style tapered top. It was undoubtedly the first embossed bottle made for this bitters. All known examples have a green hue, with crudity consistent with the era.

"The bitters stole the show, but there were some very respectful bids in all categories," said Jeff Wichmann, the owner of American Bottle Auctions. "We were amazed at some of the prices of the squares and inkwells. For instance, out of the sixty or so early squares – including gins, schnapps and sarsaparillas – fifteen did a thousand dollars or more. One gin sold for \$10,925."

That was lot #64, a bright medium green Wister's Clubhouse gin bottle having an applied top with the earlier sticky ball type pontil. These bottles are very popular with collectors, as they come in a multitude of colors. In addition, they are typically very crude, with lots of character. This one was no exception. The condition was exceptional, except for small, minor scratches.

Lot #124 – a square, red amber whittled Turner Brothers bottle – was one that Mr. Hammer had purchased in one of Mr. Wichmann's auctions. It boasted an applied top with graphite pontil and showed both Turner Brothers locations (Buffalo, New York and San Francisco). The bottle checked every box: the color, crudity, rarity and condition were all exemplar. It brought \$3,910.

A Dr. Wonser's USA Indian Root Bitters bottle with an applied top, medium amber in color and showing lots of uneven glass and whittle, was near-perfect and sold accordingly for \$15,525. The amber and aqua Wonser's are among the most sought after and coveted Western bitters out there. For its distinctive design, unique name and overall appeal, Dr. Wonser's are simply hard to beat.

A barrel-shaped Greeley's Bourbon Whiskey Bitters bottle with applied top (G102), 9 ½ inches tall, attracted bidders because it was a true purple Greeley's. While these barrels come in shades of purple or puce, they are often very dark and hard to see through or are an off color, similar to the bourbon whiskey bitters. Such was not the case with this example. The bottle sold for \$4,600.

A Pride of Kentucky Old Bourbon bottle (Livingston & Co., Sole Agents), made sometime in the mid-to-late 1870s, was one that Mr. Hammer actually found near his home in Redding, Calif. The lightweight bottle with an applied top was as whittled as any Western fifth around, and the color, while an old amber, showed a perfect depth throughout the bottle. It finished at \$9,200.

Catawba Wine Bitters bottles are huge with collectors. Lot #119 was a choice example, medium green in color, with embossed grapes, an applied top and graphite pontil. This one was sold by American Bottle Auctions in Part 1 of the Grapentine collection. It boasted good overall whittle and crudity. It's the pontiled version, with all graphite intact. It found a new owner for \$6,900.

Turning to inkwells, there were two in the sale that performed exceptionally well. One was an M100 staved barrel type teakettle inkwell, a beautiful amethyst in color. There are only a couple of barrel inks and they're quite rare and highly sought after. This one had a pedigree: it's said to have been produced for the Henry Harrison presidential campaign of 1840. It brought \$5,060.

The other was an umbrella ink with a rolled lip and open pontil, 2 ½ inches and grape in color (the color most collectors are looking for). No umbrella ink collection would be complete without a puce or grape colored example. This inkwell has a medium to deeper hue, easy to see through on one's shelf. It is now gracing the shelf of the winning bidder who paid \$3,450 for it.

A Russ's Aromatic Schnapps (N.Y.) bottle with applied top and smooth base, olive green in color, the edges making for a stronger eight-sided bottle instead of a square one, made \$3,450.

A Vonthofen's Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps bottle with applied top and graphite pontil, a nice bluish-green in color and much larger than the usual Aromatic Schnapps, hammered for \$2,070.

A Charles Cordial Gin (London) bottle with applied top and smooth base, a beautiful bright green fifth gin bottle that really shines on the shelf, with lots of crudity, graded 9.5, hit \$1,600.

Part 2 of the Mel Hammer bottle collection will be held sometime in March 2022 (dates and times to be announced; watch the website for details). “Things will be pretty much split down the middle between Parts 1 and 2 in terms of value, variants and number of bottles,” Wichmann said.

American Bottle Auctions is always accepting quality consignments for future sales. To consign a single bottle or an entire collection, you may call them toll-free, at 1-800-806-7722; or, e-mail them at info@americanbottle.com. To learn more about American Bottle Auctions and Part 2 of the Mel Hammer collection, which goes online in March, please visit www.americanbottle.com.

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Suggested photo captions:

Dr. Renz’s:

Dr. Renz’s Herb Bitters bottle (San Francisco, circa 1868-1881) with applied tapered top, light lime green in color, 9 ¾ inches tall, one of possibly only four known (\$24,150)

Turner Brothers:

Square, red amber whittled Turner Brothers bottle with an applied top with graphite pontil and showing both Turner Brothers locations (Buffalo, New York and San Francisco). (\$3,910).

Vonthofen’s Aromatic:

Vonthofen’s Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps bottle with applied top and graphite pontil, a nice bluish-green in color and much larger than the usual Aromatic Schnapps bottles (\$2,070).

Wister’s Clubhouse:

Bright medium green Wister’s Clubhouse gin bottle having an applied top with the earlier sticky ball type pontil. The condition was exceptional, except for small, minor scratches. (\$10,925).

Charles Cordial Gin:

Charles Cordial Gin (London) bottle with applied top and smooth base, a beautiful bright green fifth gin bottle that really shines on the shelf, with lots of crudity, graded 9.5 (\$1,600).

Russ’s Aromatic:

Russ’s Aromatic Schnapps (N.Y.) bottle with applied top and smooth base, olive green in color, the edges making for a stronger eight-sided bottle instead of a square one (\$3,450).

Dr. Wonser’s:

This Dr. Wonser’s USA Indian Root Bitters bottle with an applied top, medium amber in color and showing lots of uneven glass and whittle, was in near-perfect, 9.5 condition (\$15,525).

Pride of Kentucky:

Pride of Kentucky Old Bourbon bottle (Livingston & Co., Sole Agents), made in the mid-to-late 1870s, amber in color, as whittled as any Western fifth around (\$9,200).