

# Exporting decorative wall plates to Europe

The European market for decorative wall plates is very lively. Decorative wall plates are placed in the mid-mid market segment and up. Both the mid-mid and mid-high segments offer you good opportunities. To appeal to these higher segments, supreme design and showcasing your craftsmanship is key. Handmade adds value to your products, as well as collectability.

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## 1. Product description

Decorative wall plates are accessories categorised under home accessories or wall decoration. This category includes such items as vases, decorative objects and picture frames. Decorative wall plates mainly present an add-on option, as they would be hard to sustain as a stand-alone specialisation. They are often added as a parallel activity to dinnerware, for example.

### Quality

#### Functionality

The primary function of wall plates is decorative. Although they resemble dinner plates, wall plates are usually not used on the table. This means they don't have to follow the functional requirements for tableware as related to standard dimensions of dinner plates, food safety, and cleansing. However, since decorative wall plates are usually produced by manufacturers of ceramic tableware, their technical and legal specifications usually don't differ from ceramic tableware.

Resellers usually recommend cleansing decorative wall plates by hand, with a wet cloth rather than in the dishwasher. To fasten wall plates to the wall, they need a hook at the back, which is usually made of metal. They can also have a ceramic extension with a perforation, through which a ribbon or rope can be attached. Separate plate racks are also available, usually in metal.

### Material

Wall plates are made from ceramics, usually high-temperature earthenware, porcelain or bone china. Other materials are possible, such as melamine, wood or natural fibres, but less common.

### Design

Decorative wall plates are accessories, displayed to be enjoyed for their beauty without any functional purpose. Design is therefore the key factor. Wall plates are usually round, with a diameter varying from 15 to 30 cm depending on the designer's vision and the subject matter. Other shapes (square, rectangular) are quite common and can add extra 'statement' value.

Decorations can have any abstract or figurative subject matter, as wall plates are essentially 'paintings on ceramics'. Hand-painted decorations add extra design value over transfer-printed decorations.

## **Labelling**

- Information on the outer packaging of decorative wall plates should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for decorative wall plates should include: producer, consignee, material, quantity, size, volume, country of origin and caution signs.
- EAN or barcodes on the product label are common in Europe.
- Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself, such as logos or 'made in...' information. This is part of the order specifications.
- Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

## **Packaging**

### **Importer specification**

You should pack decorative wall plates according to the importer's instructions. They have their own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer's order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

### **Damage prevention**

Properly packaging decorative wall plates minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should make sure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container.

### **Dimensions and weight**

Packaging must be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. Cartons are usually palletised for air or sea transport. You have to maximise pallet space.

### **Cost reduction**

Nesting or stacking the items inside the container reduces costs. While packaging has to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

### **Material**

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crating and packaging due to their unsustainability and high material and disposal costs. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packaging materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

### **Consumer packaging**

Consumer packaging for wall plates adds value to the product in the form of branded gift-wrapping. The gift box can be the original export one or a box provided by the retailer.

## **2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of decorated wall plates?**

There are no specific trade or production data available for decorative wall plates. According to industry experts, wall plates have a wide presence in homes across Europe.

In mature markets such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia, a considerable amount of disposable income is available for home decoration. These countries are markets for a purely decorative group of wall plates, mostly mid-market, among both urban and more rural consumers.

In emerging European markets for home decoration, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic States, wall plates are less widely distributed. They are mostly seen in the urban homes of aspirational consumers.

As in ceramic tableware, manufacturing of wall plates mainly takes place in China, with pockets of production in Vietnam, Thailand, as well as in Europe (France, Portugal, the United Kingdom).

### **3. What is the effect of real private consumption expenditure on European demand?**

- Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have enough disposable income.
- Between 2017 and 2019, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase. This means that consumption of decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on decorating the home. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on decoration, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

### **4. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for decorative wall plates?**

#### **Consumer as creator**

In decorative wall plates as in many other product groups in home decoration, consumers want to express their own creativity in interior design. These ‘maturing’ consumers are keen to create, compose, and curate their own home collections, including wall plates.

Examples of how they do this:

- Creating patterns on the wall with wall plates, using shape, colour and/or pattern
- ‘Mixing and matching’ wall plates, rather than choosing within one theme
- Related to this, choosing from various options in design, dimensions and shape
- Combining recent purchases with flea market finds and luxury with second-hand
- Contributing to the actual design of the wall plate

#### **Tip:**

Offer options (decoration, shape, size, colour, etc.), or even opportunities to add design features to the wall plates. This allows you to differentiate from other offers.

#### **Fun, light-heartedness and surprise**

Adding humour, light-heartedness and surprise to product concepts is a major trend in home decoration, including decorative wall plates. Humour is a strong and important way to connect to the consumer, but what is considered funny may be personal or cultural.

Examples are:

- decorating and displaying the ‘wrong side’ of your wall plates;
- wall plates that are ‘damaged’, cracked or have been repaired ‘clumsily’;
- surrealist humour;
- trompe l’oeil or optical illusions;
- funny or cute decorations or statements.

### **Tip:**

Study the market for examples of light-heartedness and find ways that agree with your own organisational identity.

## **Handmade**

An important trend in home decoration generally, handmade also adds value to decorative wall plates. As these plates can be seen as miniature paintings, consumers appreciate hand-decoration over transfer printing. For master craftsmen, wall plates can work as a canvas for applied art in ceramics, fetching high to premium prices on the market. At the top end of this trend, the consumer buys a truly personal artistic expression.

Handmade can start from the manufacturing of the actual ceramics body and include the décor. If the handmade aspect is not clearly visible in the actual end product (for example through irregular shapes or hand-drawn lines), this lessens perceived value.

### **Tips:**

Add information about the creative process. Any tags explaining the process further help the consumer enjoy and tell the handmade story after the purchase.

Differentiate by innovating with materials (such as glass and metal), shapes (such as clouds or diamonds) and/or decorations (such as textures or sculpting). Industrial techniques are also possible, such as transfer or laser printing to add design value.

## **Collecting**

The deep-seated human desire to obtain a complete set of something also applies to decorative wall plates. This is a very strong buying emotion and a way to create structural demand for your wall plates. A full set of something is tremendously rewarding for those who are particularly sensitive to this emotion.

### **Tip:**

Introduce your line as a line that will be added to periodically. Make it clear to your buyer what the binding factor is (for example a theme or designer) and what future extensions you have planned.

## **Going ‘cross-category’**

Originally, decorative wall plates were primarily functional tableware that was too good to use and ended up on display on cupboards and walls. Today, top segments in tableware are upping their decorative value to such an

extent that the laid table is also used as a canvas to display beautiful ceramics. Users are no longer afraid to actually use their luxury dinnerware for special dinner occasions.

Top-end wall plates have therefore adopted a dual purpose: as wall decoration and functional tableware. In this sense, the two separate categories of dinnerware and decorative wall decoration are merging.

### **Tips:**

If you are a manufacturer of dinnerware, you can easily expand your offering to wall plates.

If you are in lower or lower-middle segments in dinnerware, add mid and top lines to your existing positioning. As wall plates start from the mid market, they offer a good opportunity for this.

## **Buying green**

Responsible consumerism is increasing, and trends inform us that being seen as a 'green' consumer adds status in the eyes of that consumer's peer group. The connection of 'green' to the consumer's status means a connection to one of the most basic and core consumer needs, making responsible consumerism a trend that will stay and grow.

Wall plates are well suited to upcycling, as Paola Navone showed in her famous project for French retailer brand Merci. She hand-painted old industrial crockery and gave it a new lease of life. Much of it ended up on display on the wall in the home rather than on the dinner table.

The fair trade system combines social and environmental sustainability. Fair trade wall plates are available, but scarce.

### **Tips:**

Think about how you can develop or grow your social or environmental values, for instance by looking at your sourcing of materials, your production process, your transport emissions, or by making items recyclable.

For more information, see our special study about [sustainability](#).

For more information, see our study about [trends for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

## **5. What requirements should decorative wall plates comply with to be allowed on the European market?**

### **What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?**

#### **General product safety**

The European Union's [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including decorative wall plates. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

### Tips:

Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

Also use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger.

The [RAPEX database](#) lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border, or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for similar products for an idea of what issues may arise.

## Packaging legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). It for instance restricts the use of certain heavy metals. Europe also has [requirements for wood packaging materials](#) (WPM) used for transport, such as packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, (box) pallets and dunnage.

### Tip:

Read more in the [overview of EU rules on wood packaging material](#).

## Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of lead in the paints and glazing of ceramics.

### Tip:

The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVII](#) for a list of all restricted chemicals. Also check out the [information on REACH for companies established outside Europe](#) and the [Questions & Answers on REACH](#).

## Food contact materials

The [Food Contact Materials](#) regulation states that home decoration products like plates shouldn't negatively affect consumer health or food quality. It also contains rules on labelling food contact materials. This is especially relevant for cross-category plates.

### Tips:

Read more on the [legislation for Food Contact Materials](#).

Also see the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA) for more information on [Food Contact Materials](#).

## 6. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

### Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Think of sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes:

- [Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company has been audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow consumer goods.

You can use standards such as [ISO 14001](#) and [SA 8000](#) to read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance with such standards.

#### Tips:

Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.

Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you value your company's environmental and/or social performance, this may be a competitive advantage. You can do this, for instance, with a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) and the [ETI base code](#).

For more information, see our special study on [sustainability in the home sector](#).

## 7. What are the requirements for niche markets?

### Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your decorative wall plates is labour-intensive, fair trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair trade certifications are from:

- [World Fair Trade Organisation \(WFTO\)](#)
- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [Fair For Life](#)

#### Tips:

Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.

Check the [ITC Standards Map database](#) for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

## Crystalline Silica in ceramics

**Respirable Crystalline Silica** (RCS) can cause lung cancer through inhalation. The ceramics industry mostly uses crystalline silica in the form of quartz and cristobalite. Although European legislation cannot regulate working conditions in non-European countries, European buyers care about worker safety. They may demand good handling of crystalline silica during production.

### Tip:

See the [European Network on Silica](#) for more information in various languages, such as the [Agreement on Workers Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and Products containing it](#), a [Good Practice Guide](#) and the European national [Occupational Exposure Limits](#).

For more information, see our study about [buyer requirements for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

## 8. What competition do you face on the European decorative wall plates market?

The competition for decorative wall plates does not differ significantly from the sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

## 9. Through what channels can you put decorative wall plates on the European market?

The market channels and segments for decorative wall plates do not differ significantly from the sector in general.

### Market channels

Decorative wall plates are carried by a variety of retailers – predominantly in mid-mid to mid-high segments (independent boutiques and furniture and general home specialists), but also in department stores. They are mostly imported by importer-wholesalers who carry stock and supply retailers with small quantities and just in time.

### E-commerce

E-commerce in home decoration is increasing and can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items like decorative wall plates are especially suitable for this. To supply e-commerce you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as limited minimum orders.

### Tips:

See our special study about [e-commerce in Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for more information.

Target online business-to-consumer retailers if you can meet the additional requirements.



## Trade associations and fairs

These trade associations and fairs are useful sources for finding trading partners in Europe.

- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [Cerame-Unie](#), European Ceramic Industry Association
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main) and September
- [Tendence](#), Frankfurt, August

## Market segments

The market for decorative wall plates started off as a premium market for tableware that was too good to be used and ended up on permanent display instead. Today, wall plates still function as eye-catchers and find themselves in the higher regions of the market, between mid-mid and premium.

There are no lower-mid and lower segments, because decorative wall plates have sufficient added value to appeal to mature consumers with relatively high expectations. They are eye-catchers, receiving pride of place in the room to become talking points and a source of status for the consumer. These are typical higher-end values.

In the mid-mid segment, consumers look for trendiness and decorative value. They mainly purchase their decorative wall plates from general home decoration retailers and department stores. For mid-high to premium, supreme aesthetic value (handmade, applied art) is combined with boutique and high-end department or brand stores.

Depending on your level of design and need for volume, both the mid-mid and higher middle segments of the markets are available and suitable.

## 10. What are the end-market prices for decorative wall plates?

Table 2 gives an overview of the indicative prices in the low, middle and high market segments.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of decorative wall plates

	Low-end	Mid-end	High-end
Decorative wall plates	n/a	€20-€50	€50 onwards

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits), points of sale (reseller positioning), and a matching price.

Shipping, import and handling add 25% to the price of your wall plates. Wholesalers account for a further 100% mark-up. Finally, retailers may add another 100-150% to the price.


### Tips:

The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your decorative wall plates must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your price accordingly.


Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position on the market.

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