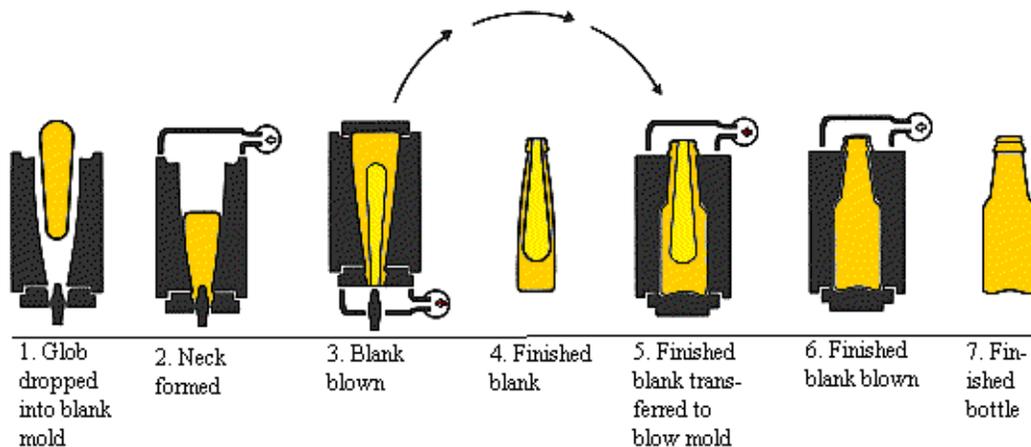


Some Questions About Construction and Aesthetics to Consider When Cataloging Any Object

Notes by John N. Pearce
drawing on "An Outline of a Method for Studying an Object"
by Charles F. Montgomery

1. What techniques were used in making the object? in making its various parts? in fastening parts together? in finishing the parts and the whole?

The best possible way to briefly explain the bottle making process used in making this and many other styles of bottle is by diagram:¹



The “glob” referred to is molten glass. “Recipes” for different types of glass are numerous; the one utilized in this Coca-Cola bottle contains the standard contents of all glass: sand, soda ash and limestone², and additionally some amounts of copper.³ Other materials used, if present, are unknown.

2. What is your judgment about the purity, beauty and fitness of the materials used? about the quality of construction? the quality of finish?

The light green glass is mostly pure; some small air bubbles are obvious when the bottle is examined with back lighting. A seam produced from the bottle making process can be seen on one side, but it does not detract from the overall beauty of the package. The bottle is very heavy, giving the comforting feelings of strength and permanence to the user when held. It is a mass-produced item and therefore can not be fairly judged in terms of “quality of construction—“ it is not unique from millions of other Coca-Cola bottles around the world. The construction quality is set and monitored by given standards, and any bottle not achieving this standard would not have been released for public consumption. The simple fact that this bottle was used at least once as a container for the soft drink

means that it met or exceed the prescribed standards. The finish is considered in the same light:

machined, polished, and stenciled to a factory or corporate norm, and here is beyond judgment.

3. What wear and tear does it show? How nearly does it maintain its original appearance? In what ways does it differ from its original appearance?

The bottle shows almost no wear and tear. This can be attributed to two separate but related factors: materials used in construction, and the original planned use of the bottle. The density and strength of the thick green glass used in its construction would certainly withstand the rigors of the bottling, shipping, and resale processes. This particular bottle was a “money back bottle,” indicating that it was intended to be returned for refilling and resale, which would necessitate a heavier and more durable construction. The number of times that this particular bottle was returned, if any at all, is unknown. Therefore the lack of evident wear and tear on the bottle may be due to its material construction, or it to its lack of use, or both.

This particular bottle is assumed to have been full of Coca-Cola and capped with a metal bottle cap. In that respect, its current appearance is very different from the original resale configuration. In considering that this bottle was *originally* empty before being filled, shipped, and sold, it has maintained 100% of its original appearance.

4. What was its original function? Did it have any later changes indicating changes in function?

The original function of this bottle was to contain and advertise the soft-drink product Coca-Cola. There is no evidence to suggest that this particular bottle has ever served any other purpose or function.

5. What aesthetic qualities does the object possess? Consider clarity of outline, silhouette, advancing and receding planes, mass and void, surface texture, color, connections, ornament, harmonies and contrasts, unity vs. polarity, inventiveness or novelty in design, expressiveness, creativity. Does the arrangement of parts or overall organization relate to theories or schemes of proportion? Is there a style name you might attach to the object? How does it conform with other objects made in the same time period? in the same area? Do you think the maker had "an aesthetic intent"? Does it fit into an evolutionary series as to overall design, ornament or structural techniques?

The Coca-Cola “hobble-skirt” bottle became nationally known and appreciated soon after its 1916 introduction.⁴ Soon thereafter, it became a world-wide icon of American culture. The bottle, originally was to emulate the curves and lines of the coca leaf (one of the main Coca-Cola ingredients) but

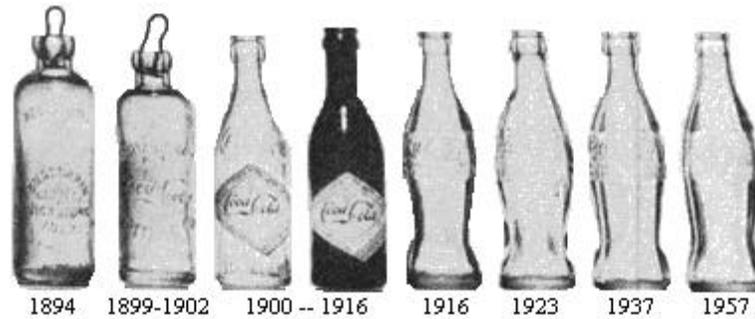
an error in communication between the designer and his assistant led the bottle to be designed after a cacao seed pod—the source of cocoa. This displays an aesthetic intent on the behalf of the designer, even though his “intent” failed to associate the vessel with its contents as planned.⁵

The design for the bottle was commissioned so that “... a person will recognize [it] as a Coca-Cola bottle even when he feels it in the dark. The bottle should be so shaped that, even if broken, a person could tell at a glance what it was.”⁶

Regardless of its serendipitous origins, the bottle is a masterful piece of form and function. It has a certain feeling of strength and permanence when held, due to a dense glass construction and full-length, raised, bulging ridges. The contoured shape allows for a comfortable grip--any adult hand would instantly become one with the vessel. In a masculine view, the reverse hourglass shape resembles the torso of a well-proportioned woman: the head and neck gracefully flowing into a plump bust which then recedes into a trim waistline that gives way to full hips. One is invited to imagine what this woman (or bottle) would look like from the hips down—but it is this mystery that only serves to make the bottle more inviting. The color, although a mere result of production, sets the bottle apart from its clear or darker colored counterparts. It is a tint, rather than an opaque hue, so that the contents can easily be viewed: Coca-Cola has nothing to hide. Clear glass would serve the same purpose, but would be almost sterile in presentation and thus lack the dignity of this slight tint.

A period label that can be applied is “Late Victorian meets Early Deco,” as the hobble-skirt resemblance is abstracted and only the most prominent features displayed in a semi-streamlined shape. Further abstraction would no doubt lead to mere lines of longitude raised on the bottle and a thinner, more triangular shape.

The exact age of this Coca-Cola bottle is unknown due largely to the consistency in design of the Coca-Cola line of bottles from 1915 until now. The diagram on the following page illustrates this point.⁷



6. In what ways does the object reflect the society and culture in which it was used? materials? source of raw materials? trade of materials or parts? trade of finished product? level of craftsmanship and/or technology? producing/manufacturing potential? scientific knowledge? use or application of philosophies or theories? emphasis on long-lasting qualities and serviceability? conservative or avant-garde attitudes of the culture? the desire for fashion, for status totems, for beauty? Is there any relationship to religious or ritual practices? Is there symbolism or iconography, or are there literary or other allusions? Could this have been owned by anyone, or did its ownership relate to status, wealth, sex, age, religion, education or occupation?

The various aspects (listed in [5]) of the bottle combine to create an image that is synonymous with Coca-Cola, and in most parts of the globe, synonymous with the United States. That image can be further classified as an American Icon that has, in certain cases, displayed western influence, and in other cases, displayed American dominance. A widely reported story from World War II tells of a German prisoner-of-war who remarked to an MP “oh, you have Coke here, too” upon arrival in an American port and seeing a familiar red and white advertising sign. This remark, made in 1943, came as a great shock to Americans—*foreigners* have Coca-Cola? In fact, Coca-Cola had been abroad for almost fifty years in small quantities, an amount that would exponentially increase from year to year.⁸

The design and production of the original Coca-Cola bottle in 1916 aided Coca-Cola, Inc., in bonding an image with a product. Once this consistency was established and advertised, the bottle *became* Coca-Cola. The design is exceptional but not extraordinary. Famed industrial designer Raymond Loewy has exhibited mixed feelings about the design over the years, at first baffled by the bottle’s success in the forties because it was neither streamlined nor stripped to essentials. He added that it was “aggressively feminine—a quality that, in merchandise, as in life, sometimes transcends functionalism.”⁹ Sometime later he proclaimed the Coca-Cola contour design “the most perfectly designed package in use.”¹⁰ The date of this “perfect package” comment is unknown, but it can be assumed that such a title was granted only after the bottle had dominated the global market and proved its design—flawed or not—

as effective.

The Coca-Cola bottle is an unequalled American symbol, rivaled only by the familiar Golden Arches of the McDonald's hamburger chain. Coincidentally, the McDonald's chain exclusively serves Coca-Cola products, creating an atmosphere where one symbol compliments the other, proving very effective in advertising campaigns.

The bottle design is not especially indicative of American culture. In fact, the bottle was designed by a Swedish immigrant living in Terre Haute, Indiana--an immigrant so new to this country that his limited English vocabulary resulted in the design of the bottle being based on a cacao seed pod rather than a coca leaf.¹¹ The concept of the bottle, and more so that of the Coca-Cola Company, was American to the core: Coca-Cola was incorporated in the late 19th century at a time when immigration to the United States was still quite high, and thus many of the company's workers, managers, and owners were immigrants or expatriates from one foreign country or another. This alludes to the "melting pot" component of American culture: multiculturalism in the workplace has always been a source of new and sometimes bizarre thoughts and ideas. Coca-Cola's success quickly spread across the globe, promoting the American ideal and the American dream: only in America could a Swedish designer with broken English make such a huge stylistic blunder and have it lead to one of the most successful packages of the 20th century.

21070	Coca-Cola bottle, "contour" bottle, ¹² "hobble-skirt" bottle ¹³	unknown	unknown, but most likely the area surrounding Fredericksburg, VA. City or local area of use in period of significance
Catalog number	Object name	Maker name	
Museum location currently in archives	Object dates: ca. early 1980s ¹⁴	Maker dates: unknown	In period of significance, used by general public
Sizes H 7 3/4" L,W,D N/A Dia 3 1/4" neck 7 1/4" middle 6 1/4" above base	Materials Glass, light green tinted; lettering, silk-screened, white on bottle	Area of origin of object unknown, but most likely from the Fredericksburg Coca-Cola Bottling Plant ¹⁵	Dates of use by user(s) cited above unknown, but most likely during the early 1980s.
Photo numbers: 97-001a 97-001b 97-002	Words, initials, symbols or other deliberate, meaningful marks: "return for refund," "Coca-Cola," "Trade-mark ®," "6 1/2 FL OZ," "money back bottle," "Coke," all in white silk-screened lettering on various parts of the bottle; "8257S," "1856," in blue- black ink on neck of bottle; "88 VR 8," is a raised glass mark near the bottle's base.		
How acquired: gift in kind from patron	Source from whom/which received: Mr. M. Lione of Fredericksburg donated this bottle to the museum after unearthing it in his backyard garden.		
Date received: 31 Aug 97			
Description: Coca-Cola or Coke soft-drink bottle, green-tinted glass. Made in a standardized machine / glass blowing process. One seam from the manufacturing process is obvious but does not disturb the functionality or the aesthetic value of the bottle. The bottle is in good to excellent condition: no wear-and-tear is evident, no scratches on the white silk screened lettering, no chips in the glass. Originally this bottle held 6 1/2 fluid ounces of Coca-Cola and was designed to be returned and refilled. The design of the bottle lends to a certain density and strength, resulting in a comfortable grip when held. The design of this bottle can easily be traced back to the original Coca-Cola "hobble-skirt" bottle design of 1916, a design which contains elements of then-popular Victorian style as well as the abstraction and streamlined aspects of the later Industrial Design / Art Deco period.			
Condition:		Conservation work to be done:	Actions taken with initials/date
Good to excellent - no conservation work should be performed. Bottle was delivered to museum in a clean condition, despite its discovery in patron's garden. An assumption has been made that the patron cleaned the bottle himself before delivery.			
History: Precise history of this particular bottle is unknown.			
List any publication in which reference is made to this specific object or in which there is an illustration of it: Due to the commonality of this object, no specific reference is made to it in any known publication, nor are images available. Numerous sources are available on the history of Coca-Cola Inc. and the history of the line of Coca-Cola bottles.			
Cataloger initials and dates of cataloging: BML 9-13 September 1997			

<p>Exhibition use planned for this object: This bottle will occupy a space in the 20th Century America wing; more specifically in the “American Kitsch, Pop Culture, and Iconography” exhibit. This exhibit will address how the merging of several nationalities of immigrants shaped the American Dream and how that dream was internationally advertised through the media, American products (such as Coca-Cola and McDonald’s), and American politics.</p>
<p>Other exhibition possibilities for it: An exhibit on “America at War” is planned and will feature static displays and images from the first, second, Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf wars. Coca-Cola has at times played a major role in the boosting of morale through the distribution of its products to servicemen and women, no matter where or when they served. The bottle could be used as a minor prop in such a static display.</p>
<p>What further research is needed to support any of these exhibition possibilities? Precise dating of the period of this bottle is necessary to accurately place it in any display. The computer generated blue-black numbers on the neck of this bottle would certainly be an avenue of approach to this problem; contacting local collectors for consult would be another means of identification, although the subjective view of a collector may not be 100% accurate.</p>
<p>What further items may need to be sought for the collections, to support any of these exhibition possibilities? None are needed to add the bottle to the “American Kitsch, Pop Culture and Iconography” exhibit: it is an ongoing and fluid work that would only benefit by the addition of this piece. For the “America at War” piece, a possibility would be to tie items together in each period display. An example would be to have a circa 1943 Coca-Cola bottle in the World War II display, and a circa 1970 bottle in the Vietnam display. This would give the viewer an object to help them follow the changes made over the years. This would especially be helpful to those viewers who have not served in the armed forces and are unacquainted with military paraphernalia – the Coca-Cola bottles would serve as a common point of reference. In addition to other period bottles, period advertisements should be sought, as well as newspaper articles and photographs concerning Coca-Cola at war.</p>
<p>Would it be worth making reproductions of this object for sale in the museum shop? Such reproductions would not be cost-effective, as few people would buy a representation of a minor piece in the museum. If the bottle were to be part of a feature exhibit in the future, such as a history of glassware, or a Coca-Cola retrospective, then perhaps the cost could be justified.</p>
<p>Should living history programs be designed around this object and the exhibit(s) using it? No living history program can be associated with the planned “American Kitsch...” exhibit. A possibility exists for the “America at War” series, where a modified living history program could be adopted. This modified program would consist of guest speakers from each war period, and the subject of their speeches / discussions would be anecdotal stories about their relationship to Coca-Cola during the war. Fredericksburg has a large retired military population, and finding volunteers to speak would not be difficult.</p>
<p>Should children’s educational programs, or other special programs, be designed around this object and the exhibits using it? No children’s programs can be associated with this object related to the two planned exhibits. The history of glassware concept exhibit may lend an opportunity to a related children’s educational series on glass blowing, glass designing, recycling, etc..</p>
<p>Does this object fit with any planned video or other special programs? The World of Coca-Cola museum in Atlanta, Georgia, sells several videos related to Coca-Cola’s global popularity, including a retrospective of Coca-Cola commercials from foreign countries. This may tie into the “Kitsch...” exhibit. For the “America at War” series, a possible visual tie-in would be to research and obtain newsreel footage showing Coca-Cola at war with the soldiers.</p>

A One Paragraph Description for the Printed Catalog

SOTHEBY'S NEW YORK

B. MICHAEL LIONE ESTATE

COLLECTIONS: AMERICANA / POP CULTURE: INDIVIDUAL ITEMS



Coca-Cola "contour" bottle, c1980-c1990, green glass and white lettering. Returnable 6 ½ ounce bottle. An example of successful product design—original styling dates to 1916.



17

Rare 1976 Volkswagen Westphalia. Golden color, 253,000 miles. An astonishing show of humility, Mr. Lione chose to drive this over his Ferrari F50.

Commentary

In choosing this Coke bottle, I bit off more than I could chew.

Several hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of these bottles have existed in history in every five-and-dime store across America and in every *mercado*, *winkel*, and *souk* in Cancun, Amsterdam, and Riyadh—not to mention *everywhere* in-between. Taking one of these bottles and properly classifying and cataloging it in respect only to itself and its own history seems nigh-impossible.

I knew I was in for a bumpy night after I turned in my proposal and *then* began to carefully read through the Catalog Worksheet. I was prepared to discuss concepts, theory, and design, but not to pinpoint a date and location of manufacture, or even a rough time when my bottle may have been used. The worksheet is deceptively simple: it asks for basic information that anyone would assume they could give about a familiar object. But therein lies the challenge: it seems that everyone “knows” where Coke bottles come from—the bottling plant. Where is this bottling plant? When was this bottle made? What is it made of and how was it manufactured? Conviction dissipates, uncertainty moves in, and the light bulb over one’s head begins to flicker and dim. *This is harder than I thought!* The worksheet allows the cataloger to search and discover the true history about the object, and allows him to do so in minute detail. The worksheet is not content with pithy snippets of information—it craves knowledge, a knowledge only detailed information (and lots of it) can provide.

I believe I have a very unhappy worksheet. I failed to provide information concerning the history of the object: date and place of manufacture, period and area of usage, and the area of origin. These are the hard facts necessary to document the object—otherwise it can not be truthfully displayed or used in an exhibit. I might have discovered these answers by researching outside the confines of a few libraries and the internet. There are many collectors, especially of Coca-Cola merchandise, that could have aided me in my quest, either with facts or with advice to guide my search to better sources of information. My research was misguided because my personality dictates that I do everything myself. Some call it perfectionism, others call it selfish, and several call it dumb. One British author remarked¹⁸ that all Americans have “..a strong flavour of intransigent non-cooperation...” due to our mixed heritage, a stereotypical remark that just so happens to apply to me. In the future, I will Network, Network, Network

and try to play well with others. I owe it to my object out of historical respect, and I owe it to myself in the spirit of perfectionism.

Ensconcing myself in the day-to-day happenings of my object a la a living history exhibit would not have aided me in discovering the difficult intricacies of my object's history. Very few Coca-Cola drinkers are cognizant of the finer aspects of the product they so enjoy. Moving deeper into the life of the object would prove difficult without applying for work as an employee in a bottle factory, a driver at a major distribution center, and a stock clerk at a supermarket. Such devotion in my eyes seems unnecessary for a simple object like a bottle—but this, of course, would depend on the importance of the information. If the goal of the cataloging process was to result in my bottle being used in a general exhibit (as suggested in my catalog worksheet), such fervor would be silly. In another hypothetical instance, where the catalog process was the start of a major Coke bottle retrospective at the World of Coca-Cola museum in Atlanta, dedication of this magnitude would not only be necessary, but expected.

My attitude towards this lonely bottle has certainly changed. Originally, I picked it as my object to catalog based on a brief experience I had with it earlier in my life and its simple beauty. Now I understand that my object, like other objects being cataloged, is merely the visible tip of the iceberg. The body of the information is unseen and potentially dangerous if ignored, as in my case, where I failed to fulfill the most basic information requirements. I now have a distinct respect for my object – for I have found that it has a longer and more interesting history than I do!

My attitude changed towards my object as my relationship with it changed. At first, I admired the bottle for its sensuous design, comfortable feel, and inherent power as an international symbol of Coca-Cola and the United States. My boyish fascination soon melted away as I began to “interview” my object. I found that each of these aspects (and several others) had stories and reasons attached to them. I quickly learned that, in order to keep my object “talking,” I would have to alter my role: move from collector to curator. Soon another persona emerged: the stoic professional. Mere stories might amuse the sheep in the general public, but I needed *facts*. Facts I could only discover through research; facts that would cause my little green bottle to lose some of its luster and beauty. The truth, as they say, hurts.

Now I debate as to whether or not I am fully prepared to move into the next realm, that of interpreter. I hear my bottle clearly now, but I do not understand all it has to tell me. There are basics that I do not yet know about it, basics I need to fully understand what it has to say. The roles of interpreter and educator require strength, a strength that will in turn discover the remaining truth; a strength that will aid in passing this truth on to others.

The path I see is one that leads me further and further away from the gentle beauty that led me to choose my object in the first place. There is a hill ahead, and I can not see very far down the path. I wonder if the path I am following is actually circular? I silently hope so. If it is, I will someday come back around to view my bottle in the same light I once saw it in and appreciate it anew.

Appendix A

Some Visual Evidence of Coca-Cola's World Domination



American GI's receiving their rationed Coca-Cola, World War II era.



Fidel Castro enjoying an American delight, c1950s.



The Beatles taking over America, c1963.



Modern day Coke comes in many languages but retains the familiar contour shape.

 Endnotes

¹ Reproduced from British Glass, <<http://www.britglass.co.uk>>. “Making Glass--Glass Forming Process.” <<http://www.britglass.co.uk/news/mglass/making5.html>>. 17 June 1997.

² British Glass, <<http://www.britglass.co.uk>>. “Making Glass--Colours.” <<http://www.britglass.co.uk/news/mglass/making3.html>>. 17 June 1997.

³ Bernard Nguang, <<http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@4BhlRQQAigxFZVCm/~bnguang/>>. “History of the Coke Bottle--Crown Top Bottles.” <http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@X4*UIAQAjw1FZVCm/~bnguang/index1.htm>. nd.

⁴ Arthur J. Pulos, *American Design Ethic--A History of Industrial Design to 1940* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1983), 259.

⁵ J.C. Louis and Harvey Z. Yazijian, *The Cola Wars* (New York: Everest House, Publishers, 1980), 31.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Reproduced from Frederick Allen, *Secret Formula--How Brilliant Marketing and Relentless Salesmanship Made Coca-Cola the Best-Known Product in the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), Photographs p. 14.

⁸ H.B. Nicholson, *Host to Thirsty Main Street* (New York: the Newcomen Society, 1953), 16.

⁹ Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited--Industrial Design in America, 1925--1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 65.

¹⁰ J.C. Louis and Harvey Z. Yazijian, *The Cola Wars* (New York: Everest House, Publishers, 1980), 31.

¹¹ Frederick Allen, *Secret Formula--How Brilliant Marketing and Relentless Salesmanship Made Coca-Cola the Best-Known Product in the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 112.

¹² Bernard Nguang, <<http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@4BhlRQQAigxFZVCm/~bnguang/>>. “History of the Coke Bottle--Crown Top Bottles.” <http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@X4*UIAQAjw1FZVCm/~bnguang/index1.htm>. nd.

¹³ Arthur J. Pulos, *American Design Ethic--A History of Industrial Design to 1940* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 1983), 259.

¹⁴ This period is arrived at through deduction: a new formula of Coca-Cola was announced in 1985, at which time all packaging advertised the new formula. After the failure of the new Coke, Coca-Cola brought back the old formula and dubbed it “Coca-Cola Classic,” while re-labeling the new formula “Coke II.” All package design therefore underwent serious changes during and after 1985. Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola--the Unauthorized History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 354-71, passim.

¹⁵ This bottle was purchased from a local “junk” vendor in Fredericksburg, VA. It was one of 10—15 for sale, along with a wooden crate nearby labeled “F’burg Bottling Plant” in marker. This does not prove the bottle’s origin—nor the true origin of the crate. The Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Fredericksburg is located at 2011 Princess Anne Street, Fredericksburg, VA.

Endnotes

- ¹⁶ Reproduced from Bernard Nguang, <<http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@4BhlRQQAigxFZVCm/~bnguang/>>. “History of the Coke Bottle–Crown Top Bottles.” <http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@X4*UIAQAjw1FZVCm/~bnguang/index1.htm>. nd.
- ¹⁷ Photo by author, 1996.
- ¹⁸ Stephanie Faul, *Xenophobe’s Guide to the Americans* (London: Ravette Books, 1994), 6.
- ¹⁹ Reproduced from Brandon, < <http://www.moonshadow.com/cocacola/enter.htm> > “CCClassic Archive: Image Room 2L.” <<http://www.moonshadow.com/cocacola/wartime.htm> >. nd.
- ²⁰ Reproduced from Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola—the Unauthorized History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), Photographs. Original photo credit unavailable.
- ²¹ Reproduced from Frederick Allen, *Secret Formula—How Brilliant Marketing and Relentless Salesmanship Made Coca-Cola the Best-Known Product in the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), Photographs, number 69. Original photograph: the Coca-Cola Company.
- ²² Reproduced from Bernard Nguang, <<http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@4BhlRQQAigxFZVCm/~bnguang/>>. “History of the Coke Bottle–Crown Top Bottles.” <http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@X4*UIAQAjw1FZVCm/~bnguang/index1.htm>. nd.

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<http://www.cyberway.com.sg/@@X4*UIAQAjw1FZVCm/~bnguang/index1.htm>. nd.

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