

# Collections on Display

Unpacking treasures for  
meaningful home décor

By Alexandra Lynch, H&L



Writer Alexandra Lynch's eclectic collection includes silk fans and porcelain figures. Photos by David Snodgrass.

**W**e can't help it. We collect things. Some collecting is intentional and focused, other collecting is by default. "Oh, that's so cute!" or "That reminds me of one I had as a kid," or simply "I love that. I'm going to get it."

Some collect bottles, some collect cars. We collect antiques, we collect Boyd's Bears. Or Longaberger baskets. Or local art. Antiques. Stained glass. Christmas stuff. The list is very, very long.

So inevitably, there's the dilemma: how to display these collections? Or do we just hide them away? Some collections, like little stuffed bunnies and Santas should probably just emerge at the right season, either amassed or scattered about your home, then put away. Other collections can be permanent fixtures, enhancing your décor and being a constant source of delight.

My collections are eclectic, to say the least. For years, I've collected antique, mostly British tins that originally held candy, cookies, tobacco or tea. My mom and grandmother had

collected tins before me—and eventually their collections merged with mine. I have some sub-categories of tins—some depicting English royalty, mostly Queen Elizabeth, but also including Queen Victoria, Edward VIII and royal offspring. I have a small collection of medical tins—an old metal Tums tube, tins for solutions to digestive and rectal ailments (ew!), salves, and more. How could I just hide these away?

Then there was a collection of Asian furniture, porcelain, art and beautiful old hand-painted silk fans, mostly inherited from my parents and their parents. My mom collected netsuke, small carved ivory pieces that originally were buttons on men's kimonos.

Both my grandfathers' careers led them to South America. My mother's father was a sea captain on stately ocean liners for the Grace Line company, plying the oceans between New York and South America. My father's father was a copper-mining engineer and spent time in rather wild and wooly copper mines in Bolivia. The result: a collection of original art, rugs and blankets, and even small llamas. One carton from my



parents' home yielded an ancient, heavy pistol, some wicked-looking spurs and carved wooden stirrups.

At the other end of the spectrum, my dad collected little plastic wind-up toys, and this box of fun came to me. As a child, I collected small, mohair stuffed animals made by the German firm Steiff. I played endlessly with these, and displayed them in my childhood rooms. Little did I know that these charming animals would become "collectible" over the years, now valued at about \$125 each!

I "collected" my husband, Jack Shelton, 25 years ago. He is a graphic artist. We wanted to display some of his framed pieces, too.

## Creating collection displays

Does this sound like a collection display challenge to you? It sure did to me! So I enlisted the help of a delightful young woman, Andrea Jobe, who had just graduated from Indiana University in interior design and was working in that field at IU Residential Programs and Services. Over several weeks,





Andrea met with me once a week in my home, measured rooms, examined furniture that might be used for display, and inventoried all the items in all my collections. Each week we made some headway.

The Asian items neatly filled up our dining room. A decorated sideboard and tall cabinet on legs from Korea grounded the room. The tall cabinet provided shelves that neatly displayed the netsuke, porcelains, ceramic figures and dishes. An antique cabinet with shelves houses Japanese bowls, Chinese ginger pots, chopstick holders, and a large, decorative white porcelain bowl. A long silk tapestry hangs on one wall. Japanese prints are interspersed with works on Tibetan rice paper by my husband and his son, Joe, hung on other walls. A large framed print of the moon with grasses and crickets from the Metropolitan Museum of Art fills one wall. Our gate-leg table and Windsor chairs sit in the middle of the room.

But something wasn't quite right.

Our gray-green and cream color walls just didn't do the Asian collections justice. Andrea was able to get large paint swatches from Sherwin Williams, and we finally gravitated to a Chinese red, called Reddish. My husband went to work painting and the result was dramatic

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Jack Shelton's art prints are on display in their treasure-filled home.

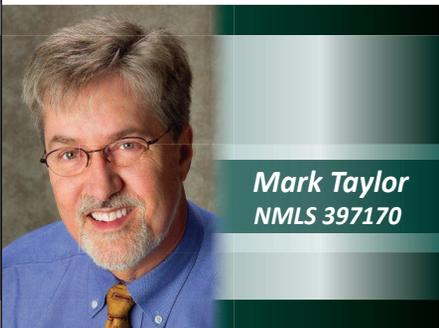
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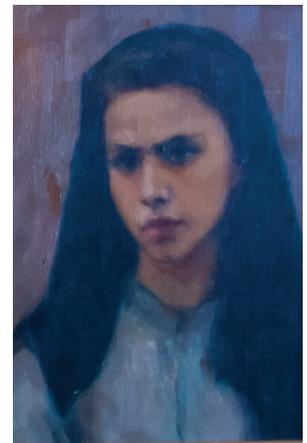
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Alexandra [top, left] worked with her husband Jack [far right] and IU graduate Andrea Jobe to attractively display her collection of various keepsakes. Photos by David Snodgrass.



and wonderful. It was a bold departure from the neutral walls throughout the house, and it totally works. It even looks fabulous from the front of the house at night.

Andrea and I agreed on a wall in what we used to call "our useless living room" for Jack's artwork. The wall was crying out for color and we selected a grayish-green called Rushing River. The artwork "popped" on this background. In one corner, a tall glass cabinet with glass shelves housed a doll collection, just as it had in my mom's place.

The South American items took a bit of work. First, we decided to hang two rusty-red woven rugs on the hallway wall at the end of the living room. They were separated by three lively charcoal and oil pastel drawings of South American life. We painted that wall a rich yellow ochre that highlighted the rugs and the art. Above and around the doorway from the living room to the hall, we arrayed a fascinating group of small paintings and some miniature paintings on tin discs. Items like the carved wood stirrups, pistol and llamas were placed on an old desk of my grandmother's and two small tables.

A small collection of Grace Line items (including a menu signed by my grandfather), were placed on a French painted dressing table. The two drawers in that table hold the wind-up toys and the Steiff animals—just waiting for my grandkids and grand nephews and nieces to discover them. On that same wall stood an antique china cupboard displaying a Royal Doulton set of hand-painted tea and dessert pieces featuring hunt scenes. With two wing chairs and a coffee table, the "useless living room" had become a collection showplace.

About two-thirds of my tins are displayed on a very old refectory table from Spain in the front entryway. I plan to rotate these to show all the tins eventually. Visitors are fascinated by the variety of these tins, with the royalty tins stealing the show.

With Andrea's kind help and guidance, we had managed to find good homes for our varied collections. In the process, we had enhanced our home and made three rooms more livable. Other than buying some paint, we had no additional expenses, and we made use of the furniture at hand. It was a marvelous creative process yielding great results.

Take a look at your collections, your furniture, and your space, and I bet you can achieve great results, too.



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