

The collected collection

Displaying beloved items in the best way

By Marina Brown

Ever heard a comment along the lines of ... “How many Beanie Babies does one house need?” Or ... “When are you going to empty the drawer with the 500 wine corks?” But that’s your collection, right? It’s a gathering together of memories in tangible form. (Or maybe the stuff is just cute.)

In the interest of peace, here are some ideas on putting a collection in its best light.

A collection is about repetition. A similar color, size, theme, subject — any characteristic and its variations make a collection. Play on one of them as you group objects together. For instance, group small objects — dice, thimbles, perfume bottles — in divided cases that allow for inspection of individual items. Rotate others in and out. Displaying all the objects at once can diminish the uniqueness of each one.

Make your collection useful. If you collect skeleton keys, why not use them as window-shade pulls, arrange them as a mobile sculpture, or attach them to walls as hooks? Zigzag-stack pillars of hotel soaps beside the guest sink with a tiny sign saying, “One for you and one for the road.”



“Under glass” doesn’t have to mean locked in a picture frame or display cabinet. It could mean “prominently displayed on your cocktail or bistro table.” Antique playing cards, ticket stubs, playbills and carefully chosen vacation photos become easy conversation topics under a table’s glass and over a glass of wine.

Quick tip

Got enough?

Keep control of your collecting. Once friends and family find out you collect panda bears, giraffes or old mascara wands, that may be all you get for birthdays or holidays. Likewise, collecting can be a form of obsessive-compulsion, akin to hoarding. Keep all things in proportion.

Making it truly personal

Some of the most interesting collections say something about the person who owns them. What would say something about you, and how would you express that in a grouping of objects? **Start by asking:** What is my greatest recreational interest, my hobby, my dream? **The answers could be:** baseball, sewing, winning “Dancing with the Stars.” **Your collections might include:**

- Old baseball bats circling a room like wainscoting, a circle of vintage mitts surrounding a mirror or a shadow box filled with pyramids of used baseballs tells us about your personality and a little baseball history too.
- Colored spools of thread mounted in patterns across a wall, a jar full of antique pincushions or interesting vintage buttons, 1940s pattern fronts covering a room divider put a collection front and center.
- Ballroom shoes affixed to an over-sized wall diagram of a foxtrot, a coffee-table display of dancing figurines organized as a big-band era dance.



Working smart

Think ‘tableaux’

Monica was a world traveler, and a world-class shopper. Her modest home was filled with finds she’d brought back from exotic trips. Every surface was covered with something she’d not been able to resist: little carved antelopes from Nubia, a piranha from the Amazon, spoons from Russia, a coffee service from Kazakhstan. From bedrooms to kitchen, tables and counters were a hodge-podge of disorganized stuff. Then she began to think in tableaux.



Tableaux are like little Nativity scenes. They’re motionless figures or items that tell a story.

Monica began to group all of the objects from each trip into tray-size arrangements that explained what she’d found fascinating about each locale. In a tableau from a trip to China and Tibet, she sat an ornate Thai headpiece on Chinese silk. Around it she grouped a porcelain vase with a peacock feather, two jade elephants and intricate silver necklaces. She did the same for Africa using cow-horn vases, a hand-woven placemat, a beaded Tanzanian neckpiece and a chunk of rock from an archaeological site.



Her tableaux became points of interest visitors lingered over, and Monica was able to organize her life and home so that, in fact, more visitors came.

Collecting is about remembering, sharing, even learning. A proper display of your efforts will make that collecting and sharing all the more rewarding.

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