

Sausalito Couple Have Gone From Avid Collectors of Native American Pottery to Experts

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FOR THE PAST DECADE, Allan and Carol Hayes have shown their Native American pottery at **Marin's Art of the Americas Show**, called the "Super Bowl of Native American art collecting."

The Sausalito couple will have some 80 pieces from their extensive collection of Southwestern pottery in this year's 27th annual show, Feb. 26 and 27 at Marin Center and at the Embassy Suites in San Rafael.

With more than 200 dealers, the show attracts artists and collectors from around the world. A Feb. 25 preview benefits Homeward Bound of Marin.

For the Hayeses, their passion for pots was fired quite inadvertently during a 1989 trip to Santa Fe, N.M., to look for antiques for the small business they run from their home, Summerhouse Antiques.

They became so fascinated by the rich history of the art form that, just a few years after that first trip, they had not only become avid collectors, they were also experts and authors on the subject. Allan Hayes, a retired advertising agency art director, co-wrote "Southwestern Pottery: Anasazi to Zuni," with his friend, John Blom. It's a must-have for pottery collectors, and is affectionately known as "A to Z" by museum curators.

The couple also wrote "The Desert Southwest: Four Thousand Years of Life and Art," considered a bible for collectors, and "Collections of Southwestern Pottery: Candlesticks to Canteens, Frogs to Figurines."

Now in their 70s and still active collectors — they have about 1,000 pieces in their collection. "There's never an end to it," Carol Hayes said. "Every year we buy a couple of pots by contemporary people. We feel it's important to support the people who are still alive and working. There are new and fresh artists working in every pueblo."

The IJ chatted with Allan Hayes about their passion.

Q: Has the Art of the Americas show grown and changed in the 10 years you've been exhibiting in it?

A: This is our most important show of the year. Historically, it has been the biggest and most important Indian art show in the world, something the county is oblivious to. But the world knows about it. People come from all over North America to exhibit in the show and from all over the world to buy pieces.

Q: Why has Southwestern Indian pottery become such a passion for you?

A: We just got fascinated by the history and the continuity of Native American pottery. Specifically, pottery of the Southwest is unique among all the world's art forms.

Q: How so?

A: For three reasons: It's one of the few art forms in the world that has been made continuously by the same people using the same materials and techniques for almost 2,000 years.

The second thing that sets it apart is that it's in its golden age right now. This year's work is better than last year's work and next year's work will be better than this year's work. There's a fabulous current burst of creativity in the art form.

The third thing that makes it totally unlike anything else, with all that history and skill, it's incredibly, unbelievably accessible.

Q: Why is it so accessible?

A: It's so accessible that we decided, shortly after we made our first visit to the Southwest, to get one of each type of pottery, not realizing there are 1,500 types. Living in Marin County and having full-time lives, we and another couple gave ourselves a price range (from \$40 to \$550) and we were able to buy 1,500 pots from 1992 to the end of 1995.

Q: How old is your oldest piece?

A: Probably a 400 A.D. pot, 1,600 years old. It was a thrill to get it. However, it's not rare. The entire Southwest is covered with prehistoric sites. It's been illegal to dig for pots on government or pueblo land for some time, but there are many of them on private land and many were dug before the laws were past. There are literally thousands upon thousands of prehistoric pots out there.

Q: Is there a particular artist who's hot right now?

A: There's a young potter named Diego Romero, a Cochiti Pueblo Indian, whose work we've admired and who has become internationally famous. We've been watching him for the past five years and we've finally managed to find a small bowl we could afford (low four figures). We got it on our last trip.

Q: How much do pots cost in general?

A: People might ask as much as \$10,000 for a prehistoric pot, but most are in the three-figure range. It depends on the beauty and the size.

Q: Have you come under criticism for being outsiders collecting Native American art?

A: There are people who sincerely believe that all archeology is looting. There are people in the tribes who feel they should all be returned to the earth. But ... once these things are out of the ground, they can't intelligently be put back. What we want to do is show them to people, to tell people about the heritage, the skill and artistry of the Native Americans.