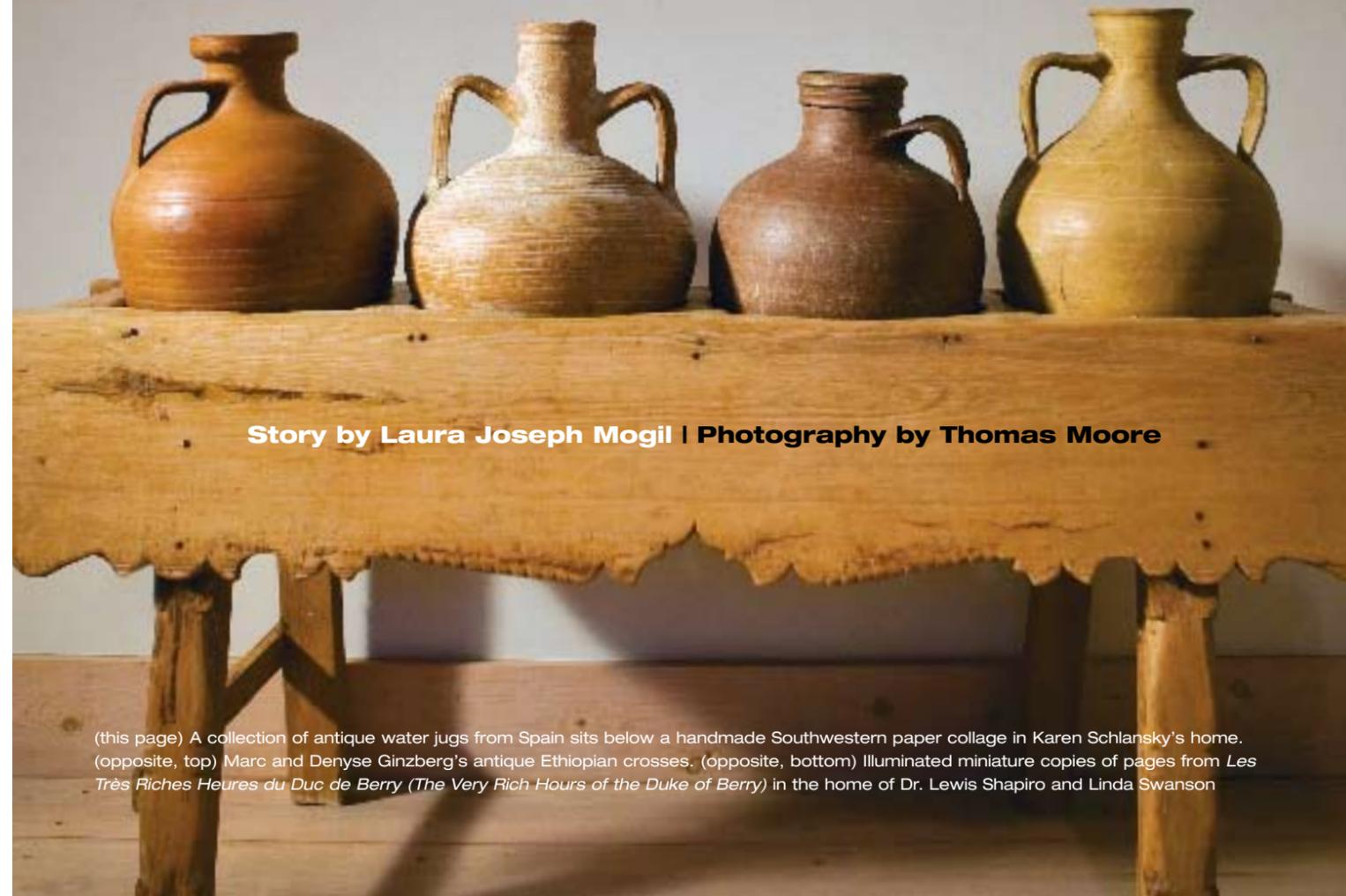




Is it possible to amass museum-worthy art and artifacts without feeling as if you live at the Met? Just ask these three Westchester homeowners, who have mastered the art of chic collecting, mixing formidable treasures and flawless taste to create truly livable homes.

GREAT collections



Story by Laura Joseph Mogil | Photography by Thomas Moore

(this page) A collection of antique water jugs from Spain sits below a handmade Southwestern paper collage in Karen Schlansky's home. (opposite, top) Marc and Denyse Ginzberg's antique Ethiopian crosses. (opposite, bottom) Illuminated miniature copies of pages from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (*The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry*) in the home of Dr. Lewis Shapiro and Linda Swanson

ASIA MINER

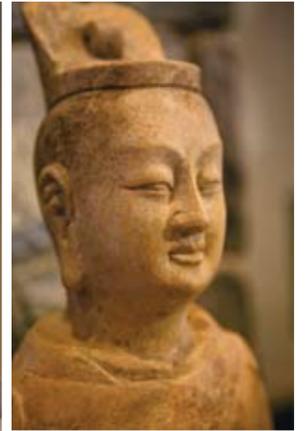
Karen Schlansky's Chappaqua home serves as both abode and art gallery, displaying her Asian antiques for guests and prospective clients alike.

Karen Schlansky leans over the Steinway baby grand piano in her living room and picks up a 12-inch-tall pottery sculpture of a full-figured Tang Dynasty court lady dating back to China's 8th century. "The emperor during this period had a favorite concubine who was very plump; this started a trend for Chinese court ladies to gain weight," says Schlansky, whose stunning Chappaqua residence is also a showcase for the Asian art that she collects and sells through her business, Rose Court Asian Antiques.

Schlansky's light-filled home, which she describes as "country barn" in design (complete with wide-planked pine floors and an exposed-beam ceiling), was built in 1987 and features an eclectic style resulting from her diverse collections and sophisticated furnishings. In the living room, a majestic third-century pottery



(above) In her living room, Karen Schlansky sits beside a sancai-glazed Tang Dynasty horse with a female rider. (below) Schlansky deftly mixes her array of Asian antiques with a variety of art and artifacts, such as those from Africa and the Southwest. (opposite, clockwise from top left) Three sancai-glazed musicians from the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644 AD) sit before the fireplace; a 200-year-old lacquered leather document box, formerly used to hold important papers, has a secret compartment for valuables; Buddhist in design, the Official, made of terracotta, is from the Sui Dynasty (581-618 AD); bronze ritual vessels once used for ancestral offerings date back to 200 BCE; a Guardian (Chinese lockapala) made of terracotta and painted white protects against evil.



lokapala (Chinese guardian figure to ward off evil) fits perfectly with a contemporary taupe Ultrasuede couch and a wooden African rain mask decorated in bold tribal colors. In the dining room, a trio of Tang pottery figures—a female polo player, a prancing horse, and a two-humped camel with his Persian rider—rest on top of a rustic Californian oak credenza, sharing the space with a set of antique Spanish water jugs. On the wall hangs a romantic silk-screen portrait of a young woman by American artist Edna Hibel. "It just goes to show that you can mix Asian antiques with any décor," Schlansky points out.

Rose Court Asian Antiques was born out of Schlansky's love of traveling to China and exploring the history and culture of the East. Because her family owned an international leather business, she spent a good deal of time in Hong Kong and mainland China and developed excellent contacts over the years. After moving to her Chappaqua home in 1991, Schlansky started collecting Chinese antiques and, soon, friends and family began asking her to select pieces for them during her travels.

A former buyer in the retail clothing industry, Schlansky decided to become a professional antiques dealer in 1997, when the market for

Chinese art was just starting to explode. Her gallery was originally located in the lower level of her home, but a couple of years ago she decided to move the majority of her pieces to the first floor. "Often a couple would look at each other and say 'How would this look in our dining room?' or 'Would this work in our living room?' So I would bring the piece up to my credenza or place it on top of my coffee table or on a shelf," she recalls. "It was a natural progression to move upstairs and sell in the living space."

While the three Sancai-glazed musicians from the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644 AD) might look as if they'll always have a place on Schlansky's fireplace mantel, most of the Asian antiques on display gradually will find new homes. If there's one piece that she won't sell it's the Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1911 AD) lacquered leather box that sits upon a ledge near her entranceway. This cherished piece is beautifully embossed, glazed, and engraved with an ornate, geometric patterning, and was once used to hold important documents.

"In my early stages of collecting, I sold quite a few of these boxes, but I'm not willing to part with this one," Schlansky explains. "I grew up in the leather business, and this represents my past, present, and future."



COLLECTION AFFECTION

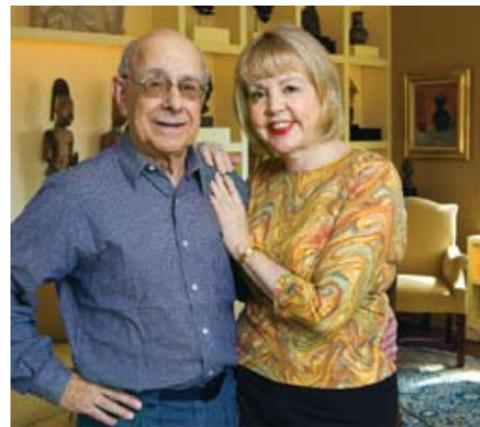
Dr. Lewis Shapiro and Linda Swanson swap a rustic single-family house for a White Plains condo that truly showcases their treasures.

Back in 1985, Linda Swanson went to Sotheby's in pursuit of carpets for her former home in Great Neck, Long Island. While she wasn't successful on that count, she did leave the renowned auction house with a rather different score: about 30 striking pieces of African art, many of which were deaccessioned from The Art Institute of Chicago.

Inspired by her acquisition, Swanson, a geriatric social worker who maintains a private practice, and her husband, Dr. Lewis Shapiro, a retired dermatopathologist, soon began amassing a diverse art collection representing cultures from around the world, ranging from 20th-century wooden masks and reliquary figures from Western Africa to thousand-year-old Casas Grandes pottery from Mexico and antique Chinese snuff bottles. What had started as a hunt for accessories transformed into a passion for collecting the remarkable and the unique.

When the couple traded their rustic Briarcliff Manor home for a two-bedroom condominium in Trump Tower at City Center overlooking downtown White Plains two years ago, they knew they needed professional help. Downsizing was tricky enough, but designing and displaying such a large and diverse collection provided an additional challenge. Enter Scarsdale interior designer Linda Blair, ASID, of Blair Interiors Group, Ltd.

"One of the reasons I chose Linda over other designers was that she has a real feel for the art. She's a collector herself and so were her parents and grandparents," says Swanson, who wanted to make the art part of the living space, not simply a display disassociated from the design of the home. "We wanted something we could live and breathe with."



(above, top) Scarsdale-based interior designer Linda Blair created this wall of cabinetry to showcase her clients' extensive collection of art and artifacts. (above) Dr. Lewis Shapiro and Linda Swanson. (opposite top) Cabinetry provides ample space for Mexican Casas Grandes pottery from 1100 AD, pre-Columbian figures dating between 500 and 900 AD, and 2000-year-old vessels from Palestine. (opposite bottom) A concrete pillar between the living room and foyer was replaced with lit display shelves that house a pair of three-foot tall, intricately carved Yoruba twins. A bronze 17th-century Shiva from India sits aside a French church column. An illuminated niche highlights the couple's collection of ancient Roman artifacts.

The designer had Swanson and Shapiro's apartment painted in a neutral palette of cream, beige, and caramel to create a serene feeling and keep the focus on the art, choosing "traditional yet comfortable furniture to complement the collection," Blair says. Among her special touches is the custom cabinetry surrounding the living room that expertly highlights a broad range of the couple's prize pieces, including a painted gold Ashanti staff finial from Ghana, a Kuba cub in the shape of a woman's head from Zaire, and a Dan chimpanzee mask with an articulated jaw. Blair also converted a round concrete pillar in the living room into two-sided display storage, featuring a pair of three-foot tall, intricately carved Yoruba twins.

In the entry foyer, a small illuminated niche draws attention to the couple's collection of ancient Roman artifacts, allowing viewers to "see them like the stars they really are," Blair says. Made of bone, clay, and wood, the rare objects are flanked by a pair of 16th-century French church columns that Blair found in an antique store in Lenox, Massachusetts. A magnificent bronze 17th-century Shiva from India, which Swanson bought at auction, sits underneath.

Also in the condo's entrance is a framed display of 24 illuminated miniatures, all high-quality copies of pages from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (*The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry*), one of the most important illuminated manuscripts of the 15th century. The French religious manuscript holds artistic as well as sentimental value for Swanson, who wrote a thesis on it for her master's degree at Manhattanville College in Purchase.

"This couple had an amazing but discordant collection they had built up over the years that we were able to unify and organize through cabinetry design and lighting," Blair explains. "The trick was to work with a deft hand to make it look and feel like a livable space and not a museum."



TRUE TO FORM

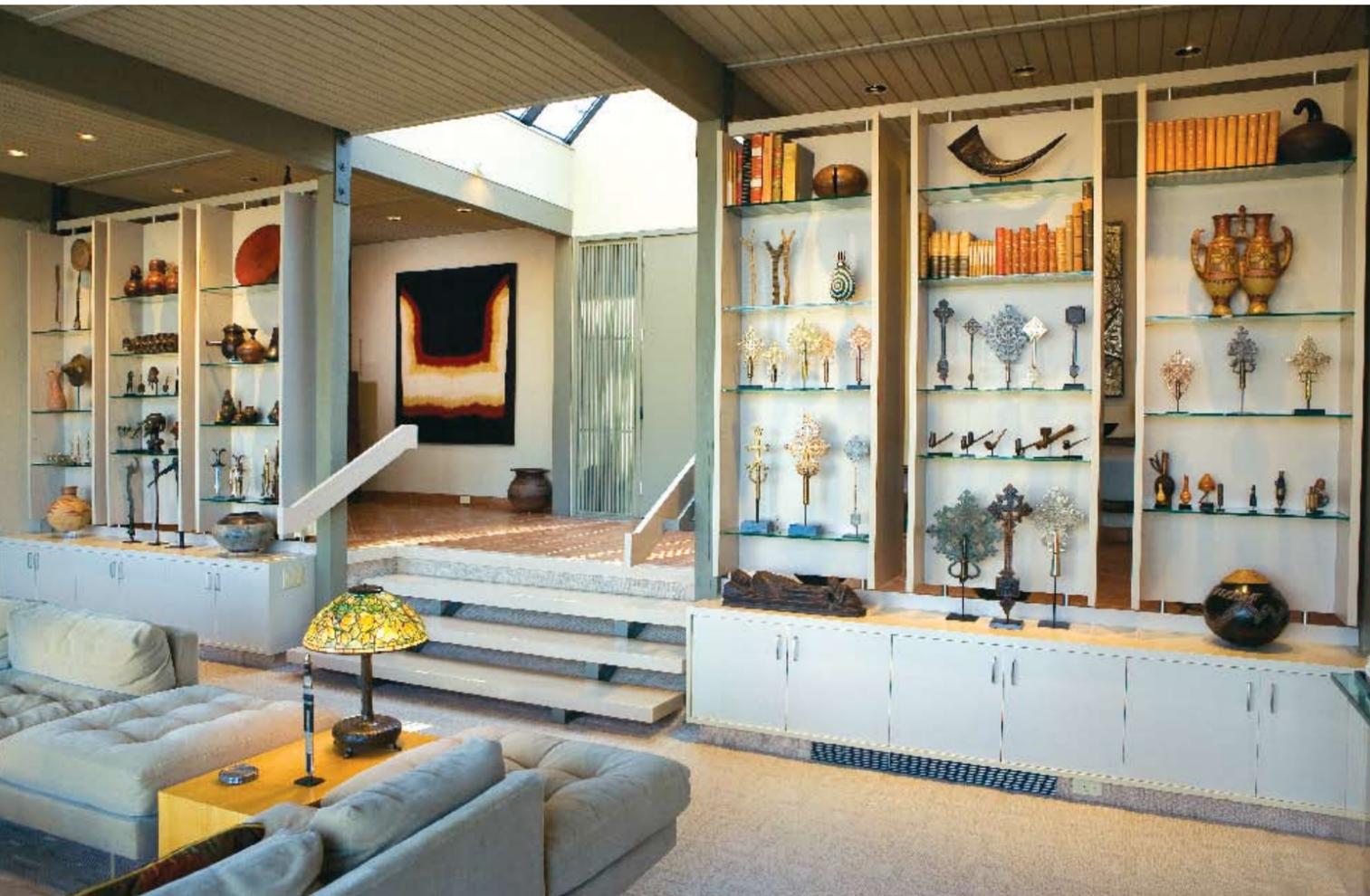
After auctioning off non-figurative African works at Sotheby's Paris last fall, Rye homeowners Marc and Denyse Ginzberg now turn their attention to a new passion: Ethiopian crosses.

There are two things one notices upon walking through the front door of Marc and Denyse Ginzberg's sleekly designed Rye home. One is the spectacular water view—a scenic inlet off the Long Island Sound—straight ahead through a wall of glass windows in the living room. The second is the entry foyer display cases filled with dozens of pieces from the couple's extensive collection of world-class African art, ranging from ceremonial combs, hairpins, and hats to sword handles, spoons, clubs, and whistles.

Designed by prominent modern architect Charles Forberg in 1993, the Ginzbergs' home, swathed in soothing shades of sand and chocolate, is lined with custom-made shelves—as well as antique armoires and distinctive chests—that showcase the couple's unique art collection. Whether it's a grouping of Zulu pipes from South Africa crafted of wood and inlaid with pewter or a set of knives with leather sheaths from the Congo and Eritrea, the objects stand out as remarkable examples of artistry and beauty.



(above) Marc and Denyse Ginzberg. (below) In the living room, display cases showcase Ethiopian cross from the 12th to 19th centuries and non-figurative African works. (opposite clockwise from top left) Ceremonial objects, including hats, ancient bronze jewelry from Mali; ivory combs, a bracelet, and a Yoruba figure; and knives and sheaths from Congo and South Africa.



"Collectors can be casual or more serious," says Marc, a retired international trader in physical commodities and one of the founders of the Museum for African Art in New York City. "We were serious in the sense that it became an important part of our lives."

That seems to be an understatement for a couple who's spent more than 35 years in pursuit of their passion. After purchasing their first piece of African art in a Greenwich Village shop—a copy of a Baule mask that they've saved for sentimental reasons—the Ginzbergs soon began amassing an impressive collection of authentic African masks and sculptures that were frequently loaned to major museums across the country for special exhibitions.

In 1992, the couple decided that the prices had become prohibitively high to continue purchasing new figurative works so they began to divest. Following the sale of those pieces, they started building a new collection focusing on non-figural, abstract objects of use that are called "forms." Buying from dealers in Paris, Brussels, and New York City, as well as from international auctions and private collectors, they soon owned what was widely considered to be among the finest private

collections of utilitarian African art in the world, with many of the pieces featured in the highly praised book that Marc authored called *African Forms* (published in 2000 by Skira).

After the collection soared to more than 800 items, the Ginzbergs decided to auction off a large part of their artwork last fall. Held at Sotheby's Paris, this noteworthy sale was the first major African art auction solely comprised of non-figurative works. "We sold 250 pieces and some of the prices broke records," Marc says. "What was most gratifying was that the sale received a lot of attention from both new and established buyers of this kind of material."

One might assume that after an auction of that magnitude the Ginzbergs would slow down on collecting. But that's definitely not the case. Their latest area of interest involves intricately designed Ethiopian crosses, which date from the 12th to 19th centuries and are composed of bronze, iron, wood, and silver. "The forms are beautiful and they're all quite different," Marc explains. It seems the Ginzbergs are one step ahead of the game, once again. "There are very few collectors so far," he adds, "but museums are starting to show an interest." 



Laura Joseph Mogil is a freelance writer residing in Briarcliff Manor. She frequently writes about art and design for Westchester Home, Westchester Magazine, and The New York Times. Visit her website and blog at www.lauramogil.com.