

Written by Melissa Larsen

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Art to antique furniture to autos. Luxury collecting can take some time and effort, but following these tried-and-true tips from local experts can help you to put your passion for mid-century furniture or vintage baubles to good use.

Auctions. "When starting to collect items, start by frequenting auctions," says Rowlan Hill of Blue Leaf Estate Auctions, which specializes in high-end cars and furniture, artwork, special artifacts and jewelry. "Others often start by searching online for items, and then head to Ebay to make purchases. Whether it is an online auction or a live auction, you can always count on getting a good deal. Other options when looking for collectibles would be to attend garage sales, [and] visit thrift stores or vintage shops to search for items to add to your collection."

Be ready to buy. "Unfortunately, there is no 'cool car factory' out there that can produce the perfect example for you as soon as you are ready to invest, and often times, due to the overall demand of the market, there is a high degree of competition for the best examples of each vehicle," says Darin Roberge, marketing director for Russo and Steele. "Great vehicles a lot of time will disappear into collections and don't become available again for sometimes decades, so if you see the car of your dreams, the time to buy is always now!"

Care of one's [car] collection largely depends on a particular enthusiasts' level of comfort, technical knowledge and the overall goals for their collection itself," says Roberge. "For some collectors, part of the appeal is becoming immersed in aspects of the lifestyle, such as chasing parts and spending time in the garage tinkering. For others, it's all about leaving it up to the professionals. Fortunately, Arizona is home to one of the world's most sophisticated collector automobile cultures, so there are plenty of options available for the budding enthusiast that would prefer to take that route."

Don't get caught up in the moment: auctions, estate sales and competitive shopping are addictive," says Lauren Bailey, co-owner of Upward Projects and avid collector of mid-century modern furniture and art. "Prepare yourself!"

Emotional. "Manage your emotions; try not to purchase with your emotions, and be prepared to walk away if the price isn't right," says Hill. "Don't be afraid to negotiate for a better price."

Fun is the name of the game. "Have fun!" says Bailey. "We have met some of the best people in our travels and learning the stories along the way just makes your pieces that much more meaningful."

Gain...or not to gain. "I would not recommend collecting for financial gain," says Hill. "I would say, collect items for the love and sentiment of accumulating them. By collecting for financial gain, there is always the chance of the item depreciating or becoming insignificant. Some people may invest in fine artwork as an investment; however, art is subjective. When you are ready to sell, you may spend quite a bit of money finding that special someone who loves the piece as much as you did. Many times when one collects out of pleasure, the items are enjoyed for many years and that in itself is the financial benefit of collecting."

Handle your collection with care, says Hill. "Always wash your hands or wear gloves before handling items to prevent excess oils transferring to items. Adhering to a few simple rules will help to preserve your collections for generations to come."

If you have to store items for safe keeping consider the following: Weather conditions, do not store collectibles in direct sunlight and extreme cold or heat," says Hill. "If packing items away for storage, clean them before storing them away to make sure there are no damaging residues before boxing them up. Also, photograph the items being stored. This will help to remember what is stored as well as record in the event of a disaster. Lastly, label them so everyone is aware what is in the box. This will help prevent accidental breakage."

Just because you start collecting, it doesn't mean you have to buy everything you see to fill up your collection; be selective, and do your research," Hill says.

Keep it safe. "If you're going to be storing your art for any amount of time, it's typically best to keep it wrapped in soft cloth and in a cool, dry place," says Susan Morrow Potje, show director of Celebration of Fine Art. "If it will be transported or will be in a high-traffic area, protect it with bubble wrap and a heavy-duty cardboard box."

Love what you collect. "Only buy what you absolutely love," says Morrow Potje. "Don't worry about the investment potential."

Mix, not match. "Remember, art does not have to match your couch," says Morrow Potje.

Nostalgia and history. "Car collecting is really about nostalgia, history and, to an even larger degree, the passion that a truly wonderful collector car incites," says Roberge. "The bottom line is that you should always invest in your passion first."

ABC's of Luxury Collecting

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Original art. "Only buy what you absolutely love," says Morrow Potje. "Don't get too hung up on the investment potential, but always buy original art if possible, even if you have to select a smaller piece. Buying original art ensures you are getting a one-of-a-kind piece."

Peruse Pinterest. "I think starting with Pinterest or Instagram is a good launch point [when starting a furniture collection]," says Bailey. "Seeing how and what others are collecting, and even more importantly, understanding how it fits in your life will help you have a foundational understanding of your own aesthetic. It will also help you get a good grasp of the costs as well as alternative ways of collecting."

Question your goals. "The most important thing to do when diving into the collector car lifestyle for the first time is to identify your objectives and figure out how to most thoroughly accomplish the goals you desire to achieve for your collection," says Roberge. "Are you looking to restore, show, race, or just simply invest and collect? There are more options and entry points into the collector car market today, with a wider variety of options as far as collectability than ever before, so setting tangible goals and identifying what you are realistically trying to achieve is an incredibly critical initial step."

Records. "Be sure to keep records of your invoice and any information on the artists [whose work you purchased]," says Morrow Potje. "If you are buying from the artist directly, take a photo of them with you and the piece."

"Start by figuring out what you have interests in or what appeals to you and begin there," says Hill. "A collection can be as extensive as you would like it to be."

Things of the past. "Collectible furniture is art. Many of the pieces we have procured over the years, both professionally and personally, are one-of-a-kind items or are extremely limited in nature and so they tend to hold their value," says Bailey. "Kris DeMarco [fellow Uptown Projects co-owner] and I really liked mid-century furniture long before it was popular, so we are hopeful that a lot of our early pieces have been amazing investments. The other side to this is that the process and materials that these pieces are made from are in some ways a lost art form and many makers today do not take the time to construct items like they did back then. Dovetailing, solid wood drawers and handmade brass handles are things of the past."

UV protectant. "It is important to regularly condition your wood pieces and leather [furniture]," says Bailey. "Never use Pledge or those types of products because of the chemicals and fragrance. I also recommend spending the money to put UV protectant on your windows. Sunlight damages and discolors almost every surface and fabric."

"Valuations can be determined in several ways," says Roberge. "Resources such as industry publications often times do a very good job of tracking collector car values. There are also a variety of Web sites that seek to achieve the same. One of the best sources of information available is the Valuation Tool offered by Hagerty [hagerty.com/apps/valuationtools/search/auto]. They offer some of the most creditable data you can find anywhere. Professional appraisers are also great for pinpointing a more exact value for a particular automobile and auction houses can be a source for valuable information as well."

Wall art vs. sculpture. "For [taking care of] wall art, you generally want to keep it out of direct sunlight and extreme temperatures. Keep it dust free, but do not use cleaning products or water on artwork. Generally, a soft, dry cloth or feather duster is best. Sculpture, especially if it's intended for outdoors, tends to be more durable. I always recommend talking to the artist; they can help direct you on the best way to care for it. There are too many variables when it comes to art and the artist is the only one privy to the durability of it and of the materials they used to create it."

Young and emerging talent. "Look for young and emerging artists that you like and collect pieces from them as they are up-and-coming," Morrow Potje says.



A Prized Piece

Considered the pioneer of the Pop Art movement of the 1950's, Andy Warhol's art provided a unique glimpse of what life used to be like in Post-War America. Warhol is indubitably one of the most important artists of the second half of the 20th century. His most iconic pieces can be found in major art museums all over the world as well as in large private collections. In his work, Warhol focused on the crossover between celebrity, advertising and artistic expression. He contradicted the well-known traditional ways of art.

Perhaps as interesting as his solo career is Warhol's collaboration with the young and talented Jean-Michel Basquiat. Basquiat idolized the art world legend, and in 1980, he mustered up the courage to approach Warhol at a restaurant in SoHo. Most of the magic happened in Warhol's studio he called The Factory, which became a famous meeting place for creative people and celebrities. It wasn't until Zurich-based dealer,

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Bruno Bischofberger, brought Basquiat to The Factory that the two actually began working collaboratively and developed a strong friendship.

The Basquiat and Warhol collaboration characterized the whole era they lived in and American culture frozen in time through the close to 200 works they produced together. Their collaborations were fascinating to the public for bringing to the surface the symbolism of the ritual and the characteristic styles of expression. As Basquiat put it, "[Andy] would put something very concrete or recognizable, like a newspaper headline or a product logo, and then I would try and deface it."

The most famous among their collaborations is the painting "Crocodile," dated 1984. Valley resident Elena Von Kohn, an international art dealer with Art Fortune, is representing this unique piece now.

This acrylic and silk-screen painting on canvas measures an astonishing 114.2 inches by 178 inches and is among the most impressive examples of Warhol and Basquiat's joint creations.

Can you tell us more about what makes the piece so unique? "Crocodile" represents a pinnacle in the careers of both artists. The combination of Warhol's mechanically reproducible, flat images and Basquiat's hand-painted physically and purposeful primitivism served both artists well. Basquiat's powerful imagery, poetic symbolism and youthful frenzy reinvigorated Warhol, whose career had been relatively quiescent for the previous decade.

How did such a piece and collaboration come about? Jean-Michel was looking for Andy's fame, and Andy was looking for Jean-Michel's innovative style and admired his rebellious spirit. Bruno Bischofberger originally commissioned the piece, bringing together two artists who were as fascinating as they were contentious, but even he could not have imagined the degree to which this partnership would be mutually enhancing to both artists' careers, when he originally suggested they work together.

How does it feel to represent such an iconic internationally recognized piece? It's definitely a big honor to represent such a famous painting. I am very lucky. I love my line of work and love what I do. In addition to my clients, it is the best part of my business. —*Raul Guevara*

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