

DÉCORATIVE

Two different couples take modern & traditional approaches.

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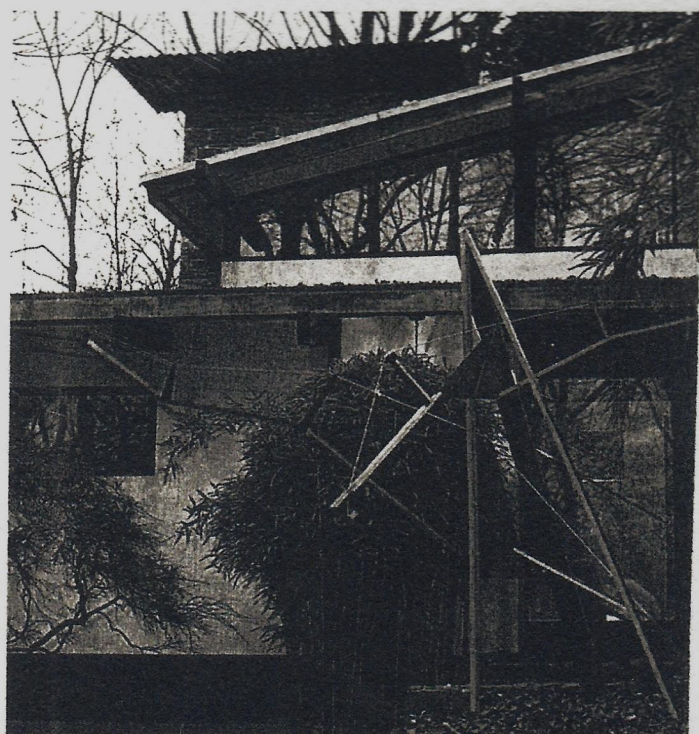


Eileen and Arnold Porges prefer the avant garde in their collection of sculpture and art.

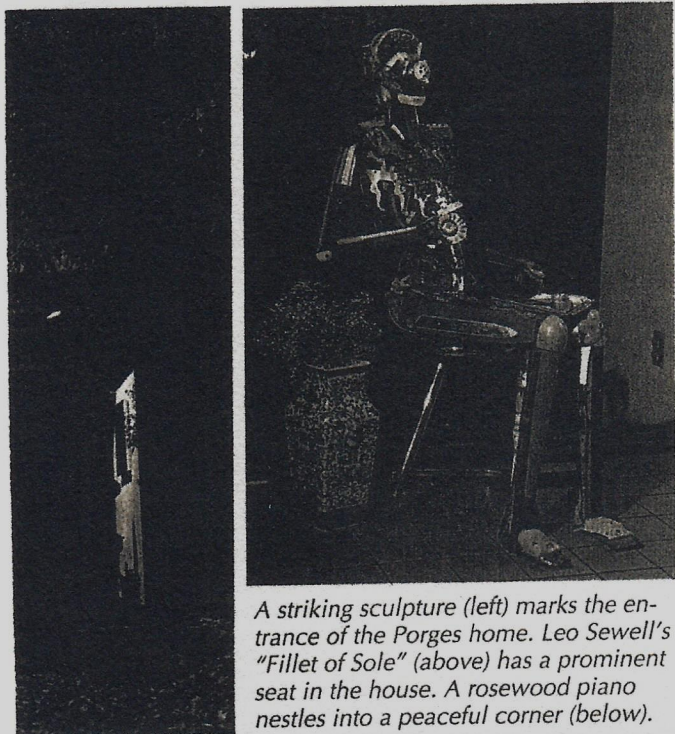
Eileen and Arnold Porges started out collecting dishes. Eileen was the original, rather unfocused collector — of odd, old artifacts and decorative, antique European china. She first accumulated unmatched sets for her kosher kitchen and odd serving pieces for her dining room, eventually accumulating matching sets. "I can't count exactly how many," Eileen admits. "Some are at our shore home and some are here."

"Here" is the stark contemporary house in Montgomery County that the Porgeses moved into 25 years ago. Their new home (one which Arnold had admired since he was a dental student) was built on five levels because, as Eileen puts it, "Irwin Stein, the architect, didn't believe you excavate a hole and just plunk a house into it." Instead, he built the house into the contours of a hillside and connected the five levels by galleries rather than hallways.

With the house grew the seeds of the couple's interest in buying modern art to focus attention on interesting angles and corners. But, rather than rushing off into an unknown field, they decided to learn how to go about it. Eileen, who is a teacher in Lower Merion, began studying at Penn's Institute of Contemporary Art. She became a docent and learned everything she could about the contemporary art scene, so she would know what to look for when she and her hus-



COLLECTIONS



A striking sculpture (left) marks the entrance of the Porges home. Leo Sewell's "Fillet of Sole" (above) has a prominent seat in the house. A rosewood piano nestles into a peaceful corner (below).



band began to buy the "right" pieces for their home.

In addition, the Porgeses consulted Atlantic City dealer Reese Paley, who was, in the mid-'60s, a guru in the burgeoning field of contemporary art. Paley also helped them locate and buy a contemporary Hindsberg-Dansk, a Danish-made rosewood piano.

"We bought several pieces of art glass from him, too, and a few other things," says Eileen. "And I wish I'd listened to him more carefully. At the time, he was interested in Milton Avery, and Avery's paintings have since become really hot."

Then the Porgeses discovered New Hope virtuoso craftsman George Nakashima and his glorious woodwork. So, of course, they needed a representative piece of his artistry and bought a shelf that undulates across a back wall of the living room. Next, they acquired an Andy Warhol portrait of Grace Kelly. And so it went — a piece at a time, carefully selected.

One of the more unusual artworks in the Porgeses' collection is a Leo Sewell construction of broken toys fashioned into the figure of a man with the sole of a shoe on his dinner plate, whence comes its title, "Fillet of Sole." "Sewell actually used to pick through people's trash to get those toys," explains Eileen. "But now he's progressed to using practically new toys in his sculpture."

Arnold Porges (something of an artist himself) designed their dining-room table, which has an oval marble top and a base made by New Hope metal sculptor Paul Evans. The table, which can be transformed into a long buffet, gives the Porgeses the flexibility they require for entertaining, which they love to do. Since there was no place to put the Plexiglas dining-room chairs when not in use, Eileen decided to hang them on the wall. Now they look more like hanging sculptures than seating objects.

The Porgeses also used Plexiglas to copy an antique cherrywood highboy they had often admired in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It was recreated to scale and now showcases Eileen's prize pieces of antique china.

Like all good collectors, the Porgeses have a story about many of their favorite acquisitions — like the one about the unusual outdoor sculpture.

A magnificent 100-year-old cherry tree used to grace the approach to the couple's home. After a long illness, the tree died, and along with it, the focal point of the exterior. So, with their wedding anniversary approaching, the couple decided to replace the tree with a mobile by Kensington-based sculptor Peter Grimord. Eileen's parents decided to purchase it for them as a gift — sight unseen. "When they saw it, they almost fainted," recalls Eileen. "To them, sculpture meant a graceful marble figure by Michelangelo — not this huge mobile fashioned out of colored metal."



Fanchon and Jerome Apfel have a passion for 19th-century Staffordshire flow-blue china.

Collectors come in various flavors. Some put together collections for the sheer joy of owning items they find interesting, while others hunt for only a few things that will decorate their homes. At least that's the way it starts out — but sometimes even they get "bitten" by the collector's bug and then buy and buy and buy, caught up in the sheer joy of finding an item they don't own (whether or not they need it or have any place to put it). Still others (rare specimens themselves) keep their urges in check and restrict their purchases to those pieces they can actually use or display on tables, in cupboards or on the walls.

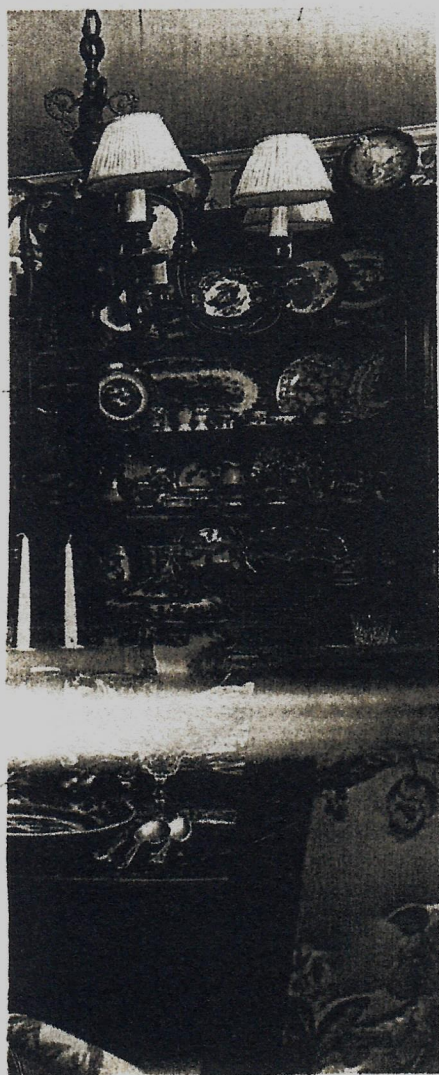
The way in which people begin collecting a particular item — and how the collection develops — is often as interesting as what they actually possess.

Jerome and Fanchon Apfel are good examples. "My mother started the whole thing," says Fanchon, whose Main Line home could be mistaken for a museum of flow-blue china. "About 30 years ago, she bought me six flow-blue iron-ware plates for 50 cents each."

Today, Fanchon estimates that she and her husband, a prominent Center City attorney, have amassed 5,000 pieces of the distinctive china — all because Fanchon's mother knew she liked blue and white.

Flow-blue china acquired its name because when it was made, about 150 years ago in Staffordshire, England, its cobalt color — applied as decoration — "bled" or "leached out" or "flowed," providing a distinctive blurred effect





Clockwise, from top: pitchers of all sizes adorn the music room; a decorative display case holds prize pieces; cherished articles in the powder room; and a dramatic flow-blue dining room.

after the pieces were fired. Every article is unique in shading or shape.

The Apfels have orchestrated their living room to show off their flow-blue collection to its greatest advantage. A large, beige rug with woven pastel flowers provides a perfect, neutral background. Several pieces are arranged on the tables, on the mantel, in front of the fireplace.

The Apfels' collection encompasses the classic octagonal shapes most identified with the Staffordshire pieces that were made from between 1830 and the turn of the century, as well as the rounded, graceful objects, like the large German lamp that gently illuminates the space at one end of the plump, yellow-and-blue sofa.

The collection flows through the center hall, where it is displayed in a pair of glass cabinets, and into the dining room, where every available surface holds examples of the kind of dishes the Apfels use — not just for entertaining, but for themselves.

"After all," says Fanchon, "these dishes weren't made for the aristocracy. They were meant for everyday use by ordinary people. They were copies of the Chinese exportware used in more affluent homes." The Apfels own butter-pat dishes and dishes for holding chop bones and dishes for every imaginable occasion. And they use them on a regular basis, both in their suburban Philadelphia home and at their Jersey shore retreat, where they keep several sets — not all matched.

The Apfels have gathered their collection from near and far: Canada, England, Scotland and around the United States. "Wherever middle-class English people moved, they took their dishes with them," explains Fanchon. "Then they discarded them when they got something better, like French-made Limoges."

Among the Apfels' collection are objects that are obsolete, like the flow-blue footbath. "People used to pour hot water into them and soak their feet, not just in comfort, but in flow-blue beauty," says Fanchon. One of her favorite footbaths sits in front of the living-room fireplace screen along with the matching vessel that

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