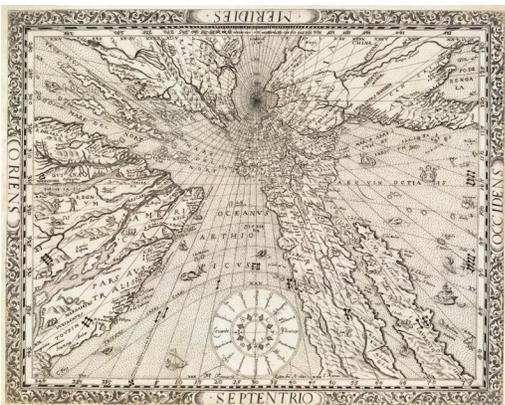


A Collector with a Worldly Perspective

By Joe McAlhany & Eliane Dotson

A collection does not begin with the acquisition of that inaugural item, but with a series of long-held interests that eventually coalesce into a fascination with a certain type of object; therefore, collections are ways to materialize an enthusiasm, to externalize a passion. For one collector (who will remain anonymous), those passions were geography and history, subjects he was drawn to in high school. When he was introduced to antique maps during a year spent in Scotland, he realized that maps existed in the overlap between the two subjects. In Edinburgh he noticed with great curiosity the antique maps that seemed to be on display in every household. He wound up purchasing many maps over the course of his stint in Scotland. Thus a collection was born.



The collector was born in India, while the region was still under British rule. He immigrated to the United States in 1969 to continue his education, earning a MS in engineering at the prestigious Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York, the oldest engineering university in the English-speaking world. Later, he would receive an Executive MBA from Stanford University. During the 80s, he relocated to Silicon Valley to work in the thriving semiconductor industry. He held an executive role at Texas Instruments, and it was around this time that he began collecting maps in earnest. Now retired, he remains involved in the tech industry as an investor. Ready to

begin a new phase in his life, he has consigned his maps to Old World Auctions and is concentrating on traveling the world.

As he was starting his map collection, the collector sought out maps of the world, colonial America, and, because of his heritage, India. After his initial buying spree in Scotland, he came to rely on outlets such as dealers, collectors within the map community, and auction houses, including Old World Auctions, to find the maps he desired. He also purchased some maps during his visits to India. Besides his regions of interest, his guiding criteria in selecting maps to purchase were quality, rarity, and the map-maker (he is particularly fond of Speed, Linschoten, de Jode, and Blaeu). In his map collection, as well as other collections he has built, the collector made an investment decision to buy items related to China, India, and Russia -- countries with an ascending upper-class looking to obtain art and cultural relics with their newfound wealth.

Of course the collection was never just an investment. In fact, until his recent decision to sell his maps, he never sold one in his more than twenty years of collecting. "I love this old paper, the smell of it, the feel, the script, the cartouches, and all the imagination of it," he says. For the collector, a lot the thrill of collecting came from "connecting the dots," the continuous and involved process of learning that incorporated so much of the history and geography he loved his whole life. He credits much of his learning to the meetings of the California Map Society (of which he is a member) and to the simple pleasure of actually looking at and analyzing maps as crucial to his education in antique maps. Like many collectors, he also read cartographic reference books which inspired him to hunt down new maps he found in the books' pages.

Besides being a wise investment and a source of intellectual stimulation, his collections help to characterize him as a man with an interest in the world at large. In addition to maps, he has been a collector of antique coins, fine wines, Chinese antiques, and old silver, and these objects are on display in his household, or, in the case of the wine, consumed. "We don't hide them," he says, referring to his antiques, "we live with them -- they are all around us." He takes great pride in his collections as they distinguish him as more than an Indian or an American: he's a man with a truly international perspective.



Now that he has retired, this man of the world has sold off his coin inventory and is auctioning off his maps so that he and his wife can transition from collecting to traveling the globe. Much of their traveling will be informed by his collections, with visits to Greece and Italy (where many of his coins came from) planned, and trips to the Middle East and Israel possibly on the horizon. Even though he has sold his beloved coins and is in the process of selling his maps, he says, "If I find something good during my travels, I'm going to pick it up, of course."



As a long-time collector, his main word of advice to novice collectors of any sort is to focus on quality and rarity. For the map collector, this means paying premium prices if necessary in order to have substantial maps, the kind of maps that could one day go to a museum or university, rather than amassing a lot of mediocre maps. He also recommends specializing in one area or subject, emphasizing the importance of a collection with depth over one with breadth.

The collector's maps, including his three personal favorites -- Ritter's untitled sundial world map, Andries and Hendrik de Leth's *Carte Nouvelle de la Mer du Sud...*, and Blaeu's carte-a-figures world map -- will be featured in the February auction through OWA.