

Accidental Beauty

COLLECTORS SHARE NAVAJO TEXTILES THROUGH PLANNED GIVING

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Bob Uphaus says it was “purely accidental” that he and his wife, Lois, became Navajo textile collectors. In 1991, on one of their many trips to New Mexico, the East Lansing, Michigan, couple saw a textile in an Old Town Albuquerque gallery. “I had never paid attention to textiles,” Uphaus says, “but we were both attracted to it.” It was the beginning of a fascination with this unique Navajo art form that has since led them throughout the Southwest.

Today the Uphaus collection comprises over thirty-five Navajo textiles on display in the couple’s home. They still own their first acquisition, a traditional *Tec Nos Pos* textile purchased in Santa Fe. The rest of the collection is ever-changing as Uphaus sells, buys, and trades with other textile enthusiasts. Still, Uphaus does not consider himself an expert.

“Several years ago, someone asked me if I was a collector. I had never thought of myself as a collector, but then maybe I am. But by no means [am I] an expert,” he says. “We buy what we like. We put more emphasis on the visual appearance and design than, say, the quality of the materials. We are looking for something unique and different and pleasant to the eye.”

Upon his retirement, Uphaus, a Michigan State University English professor for thirty-two years, began considering the future of the collection. A story in *El Palacio* about the late Santa Fe artist whose major estate gift launched the foundation’s planned giving program prompted him to join the Maggy Ryan Legacy Society. “I was touched by her story and the response to her death,” he says.

Uphaus has since donated four Navajo textiles to the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, as well as four textiles to the Museum Shops’ Collector’s Corner Program. Eventually, other works from the collection will be bequeathed to the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture.

“I am less the owner than the custodian of the weavings,” he explains. “I feel they should benefit other people as well.”

For more information about charitable estate planning, contact Kirsten Jasna at kirsten@museumfoundation.org or 505-982-6366, ext. 113. ■



Bob Uphaus and Lois Rosen, museum members from East Lansing, Michigan, have donated pieces from their prized Navajo textile collection to the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture as part of the foundation’s planned giving program. Photo by Raymond D. Kopen.