

Collector Editions

JUNE 1990

Dickens Cottages
& Figurines

Top Children's Artists
Discuss Their Work

Collectible Clocks

Age-old Elegance
In Silver



Outstanding Russian Glass



Collector Editions

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On our cover is one of the outstanding pieces of
Russian glass on exhibit at the Corning Museum
of Glass, Corning, New York. Probably designed
by Victor Alexandrovich Hartman, about 1870-
1880, the ten-inch decanter was made at the
Imperial Glassworks, St. Petersburg. See page
24 for more on the exhibition. (Photo courtesy of
the Corning Museum of Glass) Above is "Green
Jodhpurs" by P. Buckley Moss. An 11³/₄- by
9¹/₂-inch print of this watercolor sells for \$70.
For more on children's artists, see page 32.

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Star Hang-Ups

Movie posters have come into their own as desirable, collectible works of art

by Bradford G. Boyle

Twenty-five years ago, only serious film buffs bought movie posters; today, there's an active and growing group of movie poster collectors and a liquid marketplace where posters can easily be bought and sold. Accompanying this change, however, has been a dramatic rise in prices. The evolution is similar to that of comic books and baseball cards: these items, once dismissed as basically worthless by all but collectors, have appreciated at dizzying rates.

For instance, *Wizard of Oz* fans who bought the poster in 1965 probably paid the then-going rate of about \$15. If you're lucky enough to find one of these today, it will probably carry a price tag of several thousand dollars. Not all posters, of course, have soared in value. It's posters from movies that have had an impact on people in some way—those movies that do not fade away—that see the greatest rise in value. For instance, posters from Clint Eastwood westerns or the James Bond series are worth substantially more than many of their chronological counterparts.

The price of movie posters, as of most other collectibles, hinges on supply and demand. Unfortunately, this means that the posters you want the most may very well be the most expensive and most difficult to locate. But plenty of posters, even older ones, can still be found at relatively inexpensive prices, providing you know what to look for and where to look.

Types of movie posters

To be a savvy collector, you should understand the following terms so you know what you're talking about—and what you're getting if you shop by mail.

- One-sheets are by far the most common type of poster. They're the ones you see in display cases outside theaters. Originally, they measured 28 by 42 inches, but they're now 27 by 41 inches. They are usually printed on paper and come folded. A folded one-sheet is normal—it is expected and does not decrease its value.



Among the posters featured at the Sotheby's, New York City, December 15 and 16, 1989, "Collectors' Carrousel" auction, was the *This Gun for Hire* three-sheet, above. It brought \$950 against a \$1,000/1,500 estimate.

- Three-sheets are, as you have probably deduced, the size of three one-sheets, or 41 by 81 inches. They, too, are printed on paper and folded. They usually come in two pieces. Because of their size, they are expensive to frame for display; on the other hand, they'll certainly fill a wall. Three-sheets are not as common as one-sheets, but they are quite prevalent.

- Six-sheets are truly gigantic (six times the size of one-sheets) and are rarer than one- or three-sheets.

- Half-sheets, measuring 22 by 28 inches, are also known as display posters. Unlike the other "sheet" posters, they are printed on lightweight cardboard stock.

- Inserts are vertical posters that measure 14 by 36 inches. They are also printed on lightweight cardboard. Typ-

ically, they are rolled, but they may also be folded.

- Window cards are 14 by 22 inches and are cardboard. The term "window card" originates from the fact that they were given to store owners to hang in their windows, often in exchange for free movie passes. They may have handwriting on them, telling when and where the movie was being shown.

- Lobby cards, usually produced in sets of eight, are small, measuring 11 by 14 inches. Their name arises from their usual place of display—the theater lobby. One card in the set is the "title card" and contains the film's title and some credits; the other seven are "scene cards" that depict (you guessed it) scenes from the film.

Where to buy movie posters

Once you've decided you want a certain poster from a certain movie, how do you go about buying it? And how much should you pay? There is a price guide for movie posters (*"Grandma's Scrapbook" of Silent Movie Stars*, by John M. Kaduck), but the prices in it—as in all collectible price guides—should be used as rough guidelines. As simple as it sounds, a poster is worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it—sometimes more than the guide's price, but usually less.

The easiest way to buy movie posters is from shops and galleries that specialize in movie memorabilia. Dealers often have an intimate knowledge of the market, and if they don't have the poster you're seeking, may be able to locate it for you. Of course, they exist to make a profit, and their prices reflect that.

A less expensive (and often more fun) way to shop is to find a fellow collector who is selling what you want. This is not always easy, but a couple of good sources for locating collectors exist. An excellent one is the biweekly tabloid, *Movie Collector's World* (PO Box 309, Fraser, MI 48026). It's chock-full of ads from dealers and collectors. If you can't find what you want, an ad in this publi-

cation listing your desires has a good chance of getting a response. Advertising rates are reasonable; a one-year subscription costs \$26.

Another option for finding collectors who may have what you're looking for: visit the dealers' rooms at science fiction or Star Trek conventions. While many of the tables at these events are bought by the big dealers, lots of small dealers and collectors can be found peddling their wares, too. Most major cities have these conventions, and wandering through them is fun. You may even run into Leonard Nimoy. Also, at conventions you can inspect posters firsthand, instead of relying on the seller's personal appraisal of its condition.

Proof that posters have become desirable and sometimes pricy collectibles is that they are now being sold through major auction houses. More and more "privates" (the auction world's term for average people like you and me, as opposed to dealers) are discovering that bidding at auction is fun, and there are still deals to be had.

Butterfield & Butterfield, headquartered in San Francisco, featured more than 150 movie posters at one of their sales last December. Surprisingly, few ►



This rare *Dark Victory* one-sheet's current value is in excess of \$10,000, according to Crowell Haven Beech of Gone Hollywood, a poster shop in Belvedere Island, California. The movie starred not only Bette Davis, but also Humphrey Bogart, George Brent and a lesser-known actor who went on to gain fame in another arena.

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1988	Little Fiddler, Little Sweeper, Stormy Weather, Doll Bath and Merry Wanderer, all TMK-3, except Little Sweeper	525.00
1988	Set of five, as above, except all with TMK-3 Bavarian village (\$100) and Bavarian cottage (\$60)	835.00

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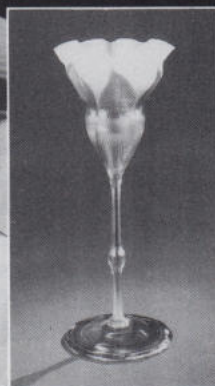
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continued

of them sold—apparently because many of the posters did not meet the reserves. According to a spokesperson in the auction house's press office, movie poster collecting is big out in California, but because posters are so plentiful there, the prices for many of them are quite low.

Sotheby's, New York City, runs movie poster and movie memorabilia auctions two or three times a year. "Movie poster collecting especially has gained wide popularity in recent years and rising prices reflect that phenomenon," says Craig Inciardi, a specialist in Sotheby's Collectibles Department. "The enterprising collector tries to get stars featured on the posters to autograph them. If Ronald Reagan could be nailed to autograph one of his old movie posters, the value would multiply by several fold," he adds.

At Sotheby's, New York City, "Collector's Carrousel" sale in December 1989, a number of movie posters were bid in at more than their pre-sale estimates. The original 1936 poster for *Stowaway*, 43 by 79 inches, brought \$2,250, for example, against a \$1,000/1,500 estimate; this linen poster depicts a large image of Shirley Temple, plus images of Robert Young, Alice Faye, Eugene Pallette and Helen Westley. And the original 1936 poster for RKO's *Follow the Fleet*, 22 by 28 inches, brought \$1,600 against a \$1,000/1,500 estimate; printed on mat board, it depicts a dancing Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in sailor hats.

Finally, desperate shoppers can approach theater owners and ask if they have any old posters laying around. Legends abound about collectors who were given priceless posters just for the asking. However, this probably won't happen to you (it never has to me) as theaters are typically owned by corporations nowadays, and the individual owners that are left are probably aware that old posters are valuable.

Storing and displaying posters

One thing you'll find if you start collecting movie posters is that they are big. It doesn't take many framed posters to fill even a large room. Therefore, you'll probably take the route most collectors do—framing your favorites and storing the rest. In both instances, posters deserve and need special care.

The best method of storage is to keep the posters in Mylar bags. Plastic contains harmful chemicals that can cause



The going rate for this one-sheet from John Huston's classic *The Maltese Falcon* is about \$4,200, according to Beech.

the premature demise of these gems; Mylar doesn't contain these compounds. Specially sized Mylar bags are available for posters. If you can't find them locally, write to Bags Unlimited, 53 Canal St., Rochester, NY 14608, and ask for a price list.

As for those favorites you want to display—do not have them dry mounted. The advantages of dry mounting tempts many new collectors: it makes posters lay flat and helps remove the creases caused by folding. But dry mounting typically reduces the poster's value, so only do it if you are sure you're never going to sell the work.

Posters can be framed without being dry mounted; the framer can tape the poster to a backing. This method is preferable, since it is not permanent. Whatever the case, make sure all framing materials the poster comes into contact with are acid-free. These materials will add to the cost of framing, but are worth it if you want to keep the poster in pristine shape. Also, whether storing or displaying, keep your posters away from direct sunlight, extreme temperature changes and humidity.

Movie posters are a legitimate art form and provide an attractive way to fill your walls. Unlike many artworks, one knows the "story" behind them—if you're a real movie fan, you can probably also get the film they tout on video cassette. And, of course, there's a chance that your posters may be worth a lot of money someday. ■