





H/6 12/90

# Objects of Affection

Four collectors pursue their passions in very different ways, but they all have one thing in common: they just can't stop

## A HEAD FOR FIGURES

Hubert des Forges is never alone in his New York apartment, even when no one else is around. Gazing down at him from floor-to-ceiling shelves in the living room are 437 figurative majolica pitchers, most of them made in the 1890s by the high-style French potteries at Sarreguemines and Onnaing. They depict caricatured politicians whose faces could have been rendered by Hogarth or Daumier. There are also tail-coat-clad toads straight out of *The Wind in the Willows*, as well as a vast assortment of pigs, parrots, grasshoppers, firemen, chefs, sheep, grandmothers, and monks. Although their proportions are similar—they average nine inches tall by five inches wide—no two are exactly alike.

"They're colorful, they're amusing, and they're good company," says Des Forges, a French-born antiques dealer who came to New York twenty-one years ago and has never given up his heavy accent. He has been a collector since he received a small inheritance at age sixteen—he decided to invest the money in pitchers rather than "spend it stupidly," he says. In his twenties, Des Forges let his hobby determine his profession by opening an antiques booth at Paris's famous flea market, the *Marché aux Puces*. Ever since he arrived in this country he has been selling antiques on Manhattan's Upper East Side (his current shop, Hubert des Forges, is at 1193 Lexington Avenue) and adding new pitchers to his lineup whenever he can. His best finds come from fellow dealers, who, he says, "know only too well what I want."

Des Forges doesn't allow anyone but himself and Oscar Moore, his roommate and business partner, to handle the pitchers; he winces when a visitor lightly pats a pelican's beak. And yet pitchers are far from his only passion. Seven turn-of-the-century majolica umbrella stands in the form of a cat, a dog, a monkey, two herons, and two frogs occupy scraps of floor space in the living room; more than a thousand objects from the 1940s representing black men and women cram the bookcase beside the fireplace; nineteenth-century French Massier majolica parakeets grace the coffee table; and Massier floral plates turn the dining room's forest green walls into fields of blooms. To avoid overcrowding, Moore keeps his own accumulations to a minimum. "I collect good food and friends," he says. "They don't take up much room."

Their store, like their apartment, is packed with flora and fauna. A tiny aisle winds past a bench supported by carved bears and piled with dog-shaped pillows to a wall of twig frames and 1920s tole light fixtures that sprout metal blossoms. "All of this is me," says Des Forges, gesturing around the store. "These are happy things, and I am a happy man."

EVE M. KAHN



Antiques dealer Hubert des Forges shares his New York apartment with hundreds of figurative pitchers, *opposite*. Des Forges also has a weakness for ceramic birds and floral plates. *Left*: His frog umbrella stand, c. 1890. Details see Resources.