

New York Times

March 21, 1999, Sunday Late Edition - Final

Section: 14WC Page: 6 Column: 3 Desk:

Westchester Weekly Desk Length: 950 words

By PENNY SINGER

EVER since the time of Marco Polo Chinese art has captured the hearts and pocketbooks of collectors. "The early European collectors were drawn to China's ceramics and porcelain, which have a subtle form and color not found in their own decorative objects," said Karen Schlansky, owner of Rose Court Asian Antiques in Chappaqua. Ms. Schlansky has been enamored of Chinese art since childhood. A year ago she started Rose Court Asian Antiques, selling pieces some of them from her own collection, from the Han, Tang and Ming dynasties.

"My business is based on one simple rule," she said. "I won't sell anything that I wouldn't keep for myself. I feel lucky to live with such beautiful things, even temporarily." Despite the recent economic upheavals in Asia, Western demand for Chinese art continues to grow, Ms. Schlansky said. She regularly travels to China in pursuit of her wares. "There has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in Chinese artifacts, sparked by the exhibition '5,000 Years of Chinese History' at the Guggenheim in '97 and by the Met's recent show of Chinese antiquities," she said. "But it's getting harder to get antiques out of China now. The Chinese go back and forth, as they have since the days of Marco Polo." And even in the best of times, Ms. Schlansky said, it is very difficult to do business in China without the right contacts.

"I doubt if I could be importing antiques from China today without the contacts my dad made in China many years ago," she said. "My dad had a worldwide leather importing business, and he had many customers in China. Eventually, both my brother and I went into the family business. We spent a lot of time in China, overseeing the manufacture of leather handbags, wallets and appointment books, and we made very good contacts." Leather, she continued, has been used in China for centuries to make lacquered boxes and trunks. "The Chinese lacquered the leather to preserve it and embellish it, and some of the trunks and boxes that have come down through the years are most unusual," she said. "Boxes were used as pillows made with a dent in the middle, because the box was also used as a safe, and valuable possessions were stored in it." Some of the lacquered leather boxes that Ms. Schlansky sells are 200 years old and include hat boxes used to store cone-shaped hats worn by officials, and cake boxes.

"On my first trip to China I fell in love with a beautiful red lacquer box with a

handle," Ms. Schlansky recalled. "It was used to carry cake to a bride on her wedding day. What I find fascinating about Chinese antiques is the lore. Every piece has a history and a story. You get even more attached to pieces when you know the story." Horses from the Tang Dynasty (705-907), Ms. Schlansky said, are eagerly sought. "Especially the prancing horses," she said.

"During the first half of the eighth century, China was very prosperous, and people were mad about horseback riding and polo. The horse represented endurance, speed, wealth and prosperity. Many of the ceramic horses of the period were made for a burial site, grave goods for the afterlife. Having a horse in one's tomb was a very privileged thing."

Today horses from the Tang dynasty cost \$3,000 to \$30,000, depending on the quality, and, yes, buyers must beware: there are fakes. "The Chinese are masters at replicating," Ms. Schlansky said. "Every piece I sell is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity. If I have any doubts, I send the piece to a lab in Oxford, England, for thermo luminescence testing. They drill a small hole and extract material from the figure to determine the age of the piece." When asked if hole does not detract from the value of the piece, Ms. Schlansky said experts regard the hole made by the testing as a sign of authenticity.

Rose Court made its debut at the antiques show at Caramoor in Katonah in September. "I look for the unusual, not the most expensive, when I buy," she said. "I just got a shipment of interesting fruit barrels, tables and furniture. Most of my pieces sell in the \$1,000 to \$1,500 range, and some, like lacquered boxes and trunks, are much less. Because I sell by appointment only and on the Internet, I keep my overhead way down. Most customers have come through word of mouth. And business has been better than my projections."

Ms. Schlansky, who exhibits her pieces frequently, was recently in a show at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich and is exhibiting now at the Design and Decorators Building on Third Avenue at 58th Street in Manhattan. In May Ms. Schlansky, who lives in Chappaqua, is planning to exhibit some of her most unusual pieces at the Chappaqua Library. "And I'm arranging for a speaker to give a lecture on Chinese antiques," she said.

The number to call for an appointment at Rose Court Asian Antiques is (888) 921-2742.

Rose Court can also be reached on the Internet at this address:

[www.rosecourtasianantiques.com](http://www.rosecourtasianantiques.com)

Images: Photos: Karen Schlansky, owner of Rose Court Asian Antiques in Chappaqua, with some of her antiques, including a Tang horse and two Ming attendants. (Photographs by Joyce Dopkeen/The New York Times)

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