

Photo Expert Reveals 4 Collecting Tips And Why David Rockefeller's Money Clip Sold For \$75K



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There are just as many ways to make a killing from collecting as there are to lose your shirt.

Buy With Your Heart, Not Your Pocketbook.



Photo by Heritage Auction Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

O. Winston's Link's Hot Shot East Bound At Laeger, West Virginia (1954)

There are just as many ways to make a killing from collecting as there are to lose your shirt. [🐦](#)

Yesterday, Heritage, America's top auction house, invited me to their tony Park Avenue office to preview their very high-end photo auction on June 5. The fine art photos on display from luminaries like Irving Penn and Ansel Adams will sell for tens, maybe hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The featured speaker, Alice Sachs Zimet, a powerhouse photography collector and advisor since 1985, gave advice that pertains to any type of collecting, including sports cards and memorabilia.



Photo by David Seideman

Alize Zimet, center, and Nigel Russell. The five photos in the background on the left are worth a few hundred thousand dollars.

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The Three D's. Some of the best bargains of choice material become available as a result of others' Debt, Divorce, and Death. Zimet added another good buying opportunity, "Upgrade," when a collector must sell one or more pieces to buy a better one.

Ziimet pointed to a photo behind her of O. Winston Link's expansive view of a train passing a small-town drive-in movie theater with a plane shown flying on the screen, titled *Hot Shot East Bound At Laeger, West Virginia (1954)*. Due to a death necessitating the sale, the reserve, or minimum opening bid, is just \$1,500 for a work expected to command between \$3,000 to \$5,000. (Fortunately for the consignor, it's up to \$4,200, with four days left in the auction I'm crazy about it!)

In the past six months, I've attended two superb sports auction previews in New York City, loaded with bargains that stemmed from the Three D's. A rival auction house spent \$100,000 at one of them and made out like a bandit.

Buy With Your Heart, Not Your Pocketbook. 🐦 "Never buy with your ears because someone has said it's a good investment," Zimet explained. The other version of this axiom I've heard is to "buy what you like, so you're not disappointed if its value drops."



Photo by Christies

Rockefeller's money clip was expected to sell from \$800-\$1200, not \$75,00.

Provenance. This is a fancy term for backstory or chain of custody. Establishing a solid history for an item enhances its value. Several of the photos have impressive backgrounds dating back to the artists' first printing in their studios in the 1920s. Zimet also mentioned the recent Christie's sale of David Rockefeller's 14-karat-gold money clip depicting Rockefeller Center. The pre-sale estimate: \$800- \$1,200. The hammer price: \$75,000, all due to the Rockefeller pedigree.



Photo by Omega Auctions
John Lennon's tooth sold for \$31,000.

At the preview, Nigel Russell, the director of Heritage's photo auction, recalled a pedestrian lawn chair owned by John Lennon selling for \$10,000. I was unable to confirm that sale, but I did find a tooth that the Beatle gave to his housekeeper as a gift in the 1960s which sold for \$31,200. Five years later, a lock of Lennon's hair fetched \$35,000. (Vintage hair is highly collectible.)



Photo by Lelands
Ali's mouth piece from his Rumble in the Jungle: \$4,392.

If that sort of very personal memorabilia appeals to you, consider boxers' game-chewed mouth pieces. In 2016, Lelands sold Muhammad Ali's from his "Rumble In The Jungle" bout for \$4,392.

Always Check the Back. For photos, it's essential to look for signatures, dates and studio stamps, and other hallmarks. "Ask a specialist to open the back if it's framed," Zimet told me. "Look at everything till your eyes hurt."

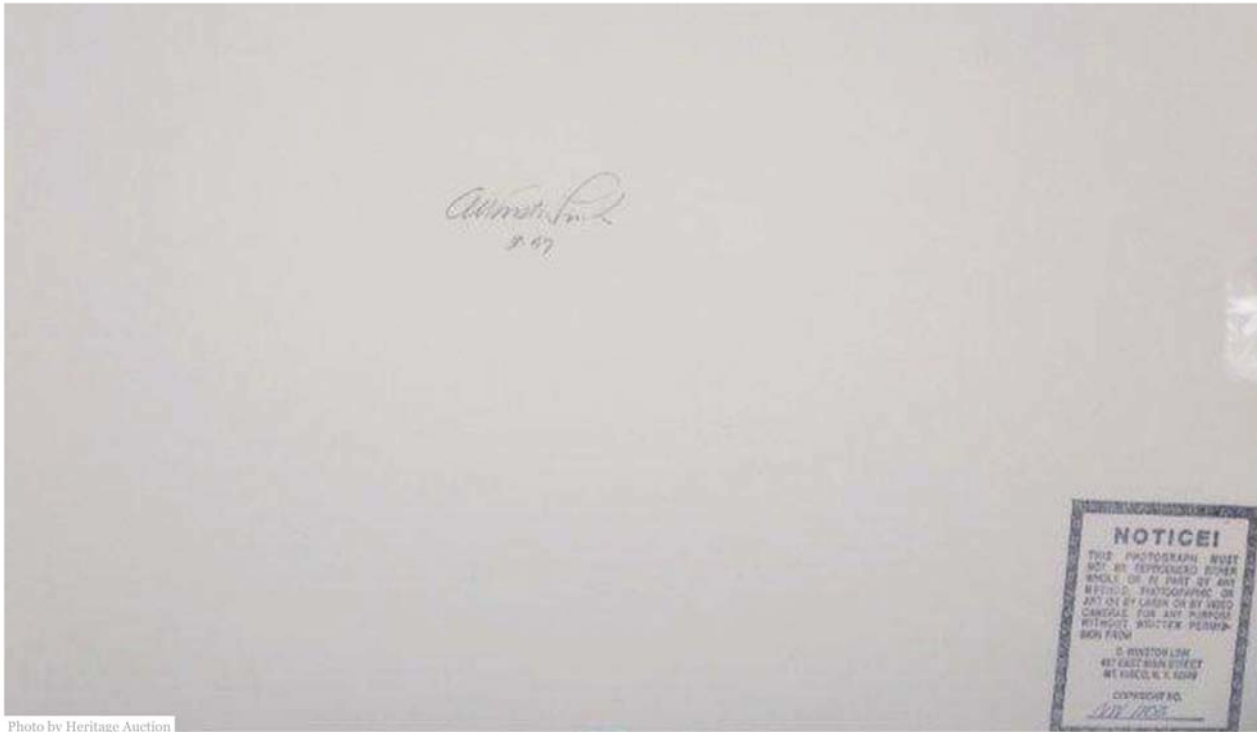


Photo by Heritage Auction
Hot Shot photo. "Signed and dated in pencil with the photographer's copyright stamp on verso."

This exact issue has arisen regarding a professionally framed and matted "1913-1914 circa" [Honus Wagner photo](#) for sale in a current MEARS internet auction ending on June 2. The designation of "Type 1," or the most valuable, first generation, rests on the design of Wagner's uniform and cap from 1913-1914.

But these details don't necessarily determine the printing date. It may have been much later. To be sure, you'd need to tear open the back of the frame to inspect the photo's back. MEARS, a stand-up outfit, absolutely "guarantees" that the Wagner is the real deal.

For good measure you should check the back of **all** sports cards and memorabilia. Yearbooks are sometimes missing back pages or feature modern advertising indicating that they are replicas. The backs of cards are sometimes stained or way off center, depressing the overall value.

One of the most memorable horror stories involves Alan "Mr. Mint" Rosen, the hobby pioneer, from the mid-1980s before third-party grading:

“ “A collector approached my table at a card show with a complete set of 1953 Topps baseball cards. It was the most beautiful set of 1953s I had ever seen in my experience as a dealer and collector. The cards were still glossy, the edges were crisp: they looked as if they had just been pulled off the printing process. The Mantle, Robinson, Mays, and Paige—the four standouts and the most expensive cards in the set—were in perfect shape.



Photo by MEARS

Classic Honus Wagner photo.

[A dealer who bought the set from Rosen returned three hours later with bad news.]

On the back of every card single card was 'LG.' Whoever had owned them was so proud and possessive that he had rubber-stamped his initials in the upper left-hand corner where the official number was printed in the baseball circle.

The cards were essentially worthless, devalued by a stupid mistake. Any card that's altered or adulterated in any way is worth less than it was in its original condition. I made a bigger mistake than LG, because I bought the cards without looking at a single reverse side. Had I checked one card, I would have politely told LG, or whoever was selling the set, that there was little interest in cards with someone's initials on them."

I asked Joe Orlando, president of PSA, [the top grading company](#), how Rosen's stamped 1953s would fare 30 years later in today's world of independent grading.



Photo by PSA

1953 Mantle stamped on the back is "kiss of death."

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