

# STAR-NEWS

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## Marble mania

Collectors can find largest selection at Chuck's Antiques

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PASADENA — Charles Porter's customers act just like little kids.

"Marble collectors hit that door and they take about two steps and it's, oh my God!" Porter said. "They're all there on the floor, picking out marbles like a big family."

Porter, 58, may be the nation's leading marbles maven. The Altadena resident has devoted virtually every square foot of his tiny Pasadena shop to marbles — half a million of them. Collectors say Chuck's Antiques is the only marbles shop in the Southland and may have the biggest selection in the entire country.

Some people are shocked to learn anyone collects the humble multicolored spheres they played with years ago, let alone buys them for hundreds of dollars. While most of Porter's inventory sells for less than \$20, some new marbles in his store — like the "left-handed swirls" handmade and signed by marbles artist Rolf Wald — sell for \$600.

Porter said customers collect marbles as adults because they liked to play with them as kids.

"They all brag about how, when they were kids, they were state champs," Porter said. "When you have that kind of interest in it, it kind of sticks with you."

Porter played marbles as a child in Oakmulgee, Okla., and even then valued his small collection. He said he polished his marbles, stored them in a leather pouch and traded the ones he liked least.

But Porter didn't get serious about "corkscrews" and "cat's eyes" until he stumbled upon some antique marbles at a swap meet about 10 years ago. He became a collector, haunting flea markets around the Southland and picking up more marbles every week.



Jonathan Alcorn / Star-News  
**Chuck Porter:** Adults collect marbles because they liked to play with them as kids. "When you have that kind of interest in it, it kind of sticks with you."

He went into business in 1990, after he retired from his job as a nuclear medicine technologist. That's when his wife, Mazree, told him to get his marbles out of the house, he said.

His shop at 23 N. Altadena Drive is a mecca for a small but dedicated corps of Southland marbles collectors. Porter prides himself on turning people with a passing interest in marbles into full-fledged enthusiasts.

Glendora resident Dan O'Connell said a habit of wandering around Pasadena looking into thrift shops and antique stores brought him to Chuck's a year ago.

"(Chuck's) just drew me in like a magnet," he said. "I started getting turned on by (marbles)."

O'Connell began carrying marbles in his own booth at an antique store and gets most of his inventory from Chuck's.

Most people have never seen so many marbles in their lifetime. Hidden behind Chuck's modest storefront are revolving glass cases, trays, jars and bins filled with solid and patterned marbles in every color imaginable, ranging in size from ¼-inch

"peewees" to five-inch spheres. There are even some marbles fashioned out of semi-precious stones.

Porter even carries plastic comics marbles — "really cheapies," he says. Kids like them but collectors buy them just to complete their collection with caricatures of Hulk Hogan, Teen-Age Mutant Ninja Turtles or Bart Simpson. Like the marbles of yesteryear that increased tenfold in value, even these will be valuable some day, Porter said.

And then there are the real prizes — new hand-crafted marbles, signed by their creators, and multicolored antiques dating to the 19th century.

Porter likes marbles made of "Vaseline glass" the best because they take on a phosphorescence in black light. Porter says he and his wife sometimes sit in their shop at night, flip on the black light and watch the glow.

Marblemania is not bounded by profession or age. Assemblywoman Glen Moore of Los Angeles has a "true antique" on

hold at Chuck's, Porter said. Handmade in Germany around 1865, he said she likes it because embedded in the clear glass is the figure of a bear much like the one on the California state flag.

Diane Stoner, an Arcadia engineer in her 40s, began collecting two months ago. She said she was initially overwhelmed by the selection and marble trivia she found at Chuck's.

"(Chuck) is so helpful," she said. "He tells you everything you need to know about (marbles)."

Ryan Ellis, 11, began collecting marbles when he was 6. According to Porter, Ellis is not only the youngest marble fan to come to Chuck's, but he has the most extensive collection Porter knows of, valued at over \$50,000.

Ryan makes the 45-minute drive to Chuck's from his home in Rancho Palos Verdes at least once a month.

"I get quite excited when I'm in there," he said. "It's 50 times better than a candy shop."