

# My Collection, MYSELF

When a person hunts down the same objects over and over again—whether they're books, bird figurines, or even funny fez hats—the result amounts to a lot more than mere stuff. As these six artists, authors, and designers prove, we are what we collect.

BY JOURDAN CROUCH

## DR. MAYA ANGELOU,

author, poet, professor, playwright, and civil-rights activist,  
on her love of books

I have 5,000 or 6,000 books—about 1,000 are first-editions written by friends. I've always loved the human voice. I spent a number of years as a volunteer mute [from age 7 to 12, as the result of abuse]. I could speak, but wouldn't. I loved to hear other people's voices. And books enclose what the human voice has said and says now. If I were on a desert island and could have only one book, it would be *The Negro Caravan*, an anthology of spirituals, slave hollers, and essays and poems by writers like Langston Hughes and Frederick Douglass. In the '60s, when Malcolm X had just been killed, this book helped me get through his death, and I used it again when Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. It reminds me that my people have been putting words together in eloquence for over a century. My favorite authors of yesteryear include Paul Laurence Dunbar, e.e. cummings, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Anne Spencer. Contemporaries I will always love are Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin, and Mari Evans. Going to a bookstore is such a wonderful, embracing experience. I am six feet tall, black, and nearly 80 years old, and it belongs to me. A 4-foot-10 Japanese woman, it belongs to her, too. No book puts its hand out and says, "Don't touch me."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA ANTOLA

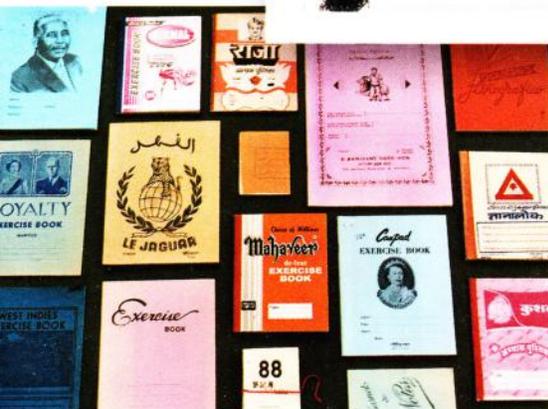




HAIR, MINNIE J. ERVIN FOR ERVIN'S BEAUTY MART. MAKEUP, HERITA JONES.

Dr. Angelou—holding her favorite book, *The Negro Caravan*—sits in the main library of her Winston-Salem, North Carolina, home.

RIGHT: Three of Kalman's fez hats bear her daughter Lulu's name. BELOW: Writing-exercise books from around the world.



LEFT: Kalman and Petey, an Irish Wheaten terrier, sit among vintage suitcases in her Manhattan apartment. ABOVE: "Moses of Long Island" is just one of her carefully sorted and labeled collections.

**MAIRA KALMAN,**  
artist and author  
of *The Principles  
of Uncertainty*,  
Finds quirky  
curiosities around  
every corner

I must have been some kind of specimen collector in a past life, because I love to organize and sort lots of little things. I pick up stuff when I travel—products with funny packaging, fezzes, hotel linens. My collections are like an encyclopedia—they carry a history and romance. I'm drawn to writing-exercise booklets because I had great penmanship as a child. How can you not appreciate an empty notebook from the '60s? Maybe one day I'll have a museum for my things.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
ANDREA FAZZARI



LEFT: Dorian Grey panty hose are one of the products Kalman can't resist. ABOVE: The hotel napkins she uses while painting become a visual diary of her art.



**THOM FILICIA,**  
interior designer and host of the  
Style Network's *Dress My Nest*,  
is awestruck by birds  
of prey

An eagle has been flying over my house in upstate New York for the past three years. He's so majestic and beautiful, and every winter he breaks a hole in the frozen lake. He inspired me to design this wood and slate console [right]. I have an appreciation for organic, natural forms, and I like to see those elements interpreted in a clean, modern way. That's why, after I picked up this pair of black steel eagles for \$200 on Houston Street in Manhattan, I painted them white [two on far left]. My parents saw the bird thing happening and wanted to contribute, so they gave me my grandmother's pair of sterling silver 1920s peacocks. The one that got away was a carved falcon I saw in a Los Angeles showhouse. I wanted to buy him, but I let him go.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREA FAZZARI

Filicia, in his New York City apartment, with three steel eagles, two of which he painted white. The silver manzanita tree is from Roost; the bird sketch is by friend Grant Shaffer.



Adeniran and her mercury glass, in the dining room of her Brooklyn, New York, brownstone. A flea-market painting, *Babylonian Marriage Market*, hangs above the mantel.



## DEMI ADENIRAN,

interior designer, Parsons School of Design instructor, and owner of decorative accessories shop Fabrica,

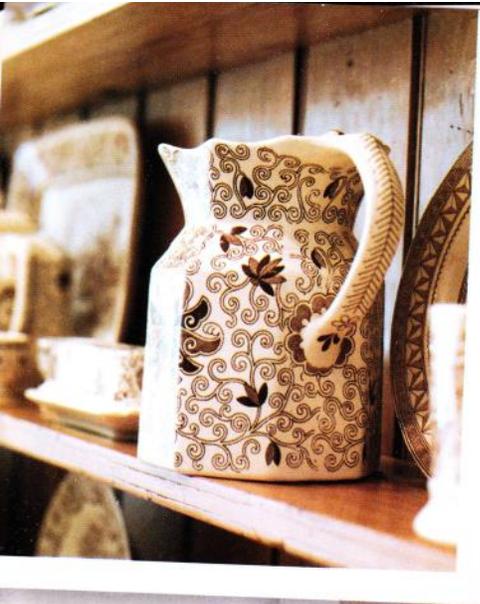
### can't resist mercury glass

I first stumbled upon mercury glass—a vase—at an antiques store in New Orleans when I was there for the jazz festival. I was collecting mismatched silver at the time, and that's what I thought it was. Mercury glass is also called poor man's silver, so I said to myself, *Oh, that's definitely me...a poor man wanting silver.* I have about 30 pieces, which I often get as gifts or discover at street markets and antiques stores. I log on to eBay to drool over stuff, too, though I've never paid more than \$150 for something. My personality is understated and I don't wear much jewelry. But my older sister says mercury glass represents the other side of me—it's my way of having a little bling.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA FAZZARI

First made in the Czech Republic in the 1840s, mercury glass is double-walled glass filled with a liquid-silver solution. Adeniran's pieces include vases, votives, decanters, and candlestick holders.





Transferware—china printed with designs “transferred” from patterned metal—was first made in 18th-century England. Its manufacturers included Ridgway, Spode, and Wedgwood. This coffee pot (above) is part of Walker’s collection of more than 100 pieces.



Walker in his Wisconsin dining room with his wire-haired fox terrier, Shirley.

**ANDRE WALKER,** interior designer and Oprah’s hairstylist, fills his home with transferware

Everything in my collection is over 100 years old, and each item has a stamp on the bottom that tells when and where it was made. But I don’t treat my transferware as if it’s in a museum. I use it all the time—for food or to hold flowers. I bought my first piece at a flea market ten years ago. At the time, I was just looking for anything brown and white. I’ve spent as little as \$8 for a plate and as much as \$1,000 for a tureen. My obsessions change as I change. I’ve also collected terrier figurines and antique children’s chairs. Now I’m searching for mirrored wall sconces.

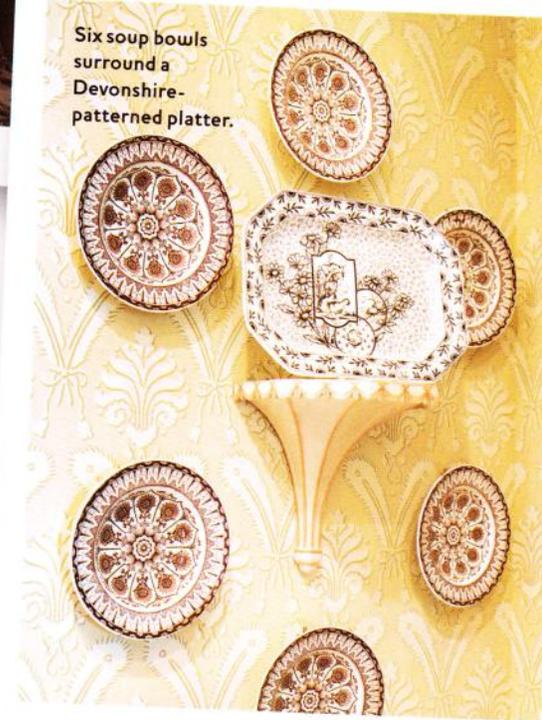
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROY ZIPSTEIN



Walker found this teacup, saucer, salad bowl, and dessert plate set (above) and this pitcher (right) through a Wisconsin dealer.



Six soup bowls surround a Devonshire-patterned platter.



HAIR AND MAKEUP: SOPHIE WILSON FOR DIRECTIONS USA

**CAROL GREGG,**

Founder and head designer of the Asian-influenced furniture company Red Egg, adores kimonos

I love the Japanese aesthetic. The way they put things together—mixing pattern and color—is unique from any other culture. I studied textile design in college and became fascinated with kimonos. I found my first one back then, at a vintage store in California. My favorite is a haori [kimono jacket] that I purchased at Toji temple market in Kyoto, Japan. It was created using the shibori technique of tying threads of pattern on pattern. Now I have more than 40 kimonos, and many are shibori styles from the '30s and '40s. I hang them from rods on the wall. I also use some as room dividers. When I wear them, people have an immediate reaction. They say, "Oh, you're a Japanese hippie."

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROY ZIPSTEIN

Gregg—with five of her vintage kimonos—in Red Egg's High Point, North Carolina, showroom.

