



*Ken Shores sits with Raj, one of two Bengal cats who, he notes, have never broken anything. "I like to sit in here and marvel at the artists and the results of their work," Shores says. "Without collecting, what a drab and uninspired life I'd have."*

Artist **Ken Shores** transforms his home into a museum, filling every inch with collectibles from around the globe

## Hunter-Gatherer

**ANY VISITOR TO KEN SHORES'S** Goose Hollow home might be forgiven for feeling either awestruck or claustrophobic. No wall, shelf or table remains unfilled by antiques and art—not one square inch. Some newcomers tour it like a museum, Shores says. Some just wonder how he cleans it all. But to Shores, the house is simply a library, every piece a textbook on cultures and religions and an inspiration for his own artwork.


Since college, Shores has created contemporary mixed-media sculpture and ceramics with a decidedly global perspective. His work and his collections will be featured in a book and a retrospective exhibition produced by Portland's Museum of Contemporary Craft that opens April 10. They are integrally related, but

he finds it difficult to accurately describe how one would be the same without the other. "Subconsciously, when you see something, it lodges in your mind and comes out in a different way. Travel and collecting cause inspiration," Shores says, and after a pause, "and distraction."

Indeed, since he retired from teaching at Lewis & Clark College a decade ago, Shores's collections occupy most of his time. The pieces' placement in his home—one part curation and two parts squeezing—is the result of careful consideration. He blithely calls the result "organized clutter."

Shores's own work graces the permanent collections of museums as far away as Kyoto, Japan. Still, his home is arguably his masterpiece. Most rooms are themed by geography

(European work in the living room, East Indian in the breezeway and Asian in the dining room), and many of the objects are religious. But Shores's taste knows no theological boundaries. He's just as likely to pick up an Indian Ganesha as he would a Christian crucifix.

This acceptance of all kinds of beliefs is a central principle of the Vedanta Society, a group that Shores has belonged to for 56 years; they stress that all religions lead to the same god. The objects filling the shelves surrounding him, he admits, might seem like a violation of the society's principles. "You're not supposed to be attached to anything," Shores says. "But I feel like I'm the caretaker of these things for future generations. They will go on after me." 

“All the pieces have a story,” Shores says. “For example, I feel very strongly about woven rugs. **An entire year of the person’s thoughts who made it are embedded and woven into the rug.** You see the artist’s touch, their fingerprints almost.”

**RIGHT:** *These Ghandaran* heads may be Shores’s oldest pieces, dating back to 200 B.C. They were probably sculpted by men who stayed in what is now Pakistan after Alexander the Great’s conquest, thus the Greco-Roman features, Shores explains. By about 400 A.D., the faces appear more Asian.

**LOWER RIGHT:** *Three signet rings* from Persia and Afghanistan sit on Shores’s coffee table; they are some of his newest acquisitions, found at Antiques & Oddities in Portland. “I saw them before and didn’t pay any attention,” Shores says. “But there are some things that give off a vibration and an essence, just like people do.”

**BELOW:** *A collection of wood, brass and porcelain crucifixes* sits on Shores’s bedroom dresser. They range from 100 to 300 years old and hail from France and Germany. “With religious art there are no names,” Shores says. “In all these great temples, all the work is anonymous, egoless. I like admiring work regardless of who did it.” He especially cherishes one small, unusual piece that shows Jesus without the cross.





*In his bright yellow living room, Shores rearranges European crucifixes, altars, angels and paintings. In the foreground, the pink and orange East Indian room is filled with treasures found on Shores's 14 trips to India.*



*The East Indian room* leads directly into the green dining room, where a painting by longtime friend Richard Davis hangs above Chinese furniture. Shores purchased the mercury balls suspended from the ceiling from the owner of a former Portland landmark, Henry Thiele's restaurant, who thought they were just Christmas ornaments. In fact, they're ubiquitous décor in Indian palaces.

Shores's own fingerprints can be found on the history of the American Craft movement. **"I'd like to think that people will see parts of me in my work,"** he says. "Successful art has a relationship to the artist in some aspect. I guess history will take care of that."



**LEFT: Most of the Buddhas** in Shores's dining room are Thai; he can tell by the more elaborate pointed head-dresses they wear. Buddhas, he says, are objects that used to go unnoticed by Western collectors, but an interest in other religions has led to a surge in popularity. "I think people now are more sophisticated and enlightened to other cultures," he says. "People are attracted to the exotic and the unknown."

**BELOW LEFT: Naturally formed** scholar stones, or *gongshi*, are Chinese rocks often used for philosophical contemplation. Each base is carved to fit. "They're not an emblem of any particular religion," Shores says, "but they emanate a spiritual essence." He recently purchased four stones from a Japanese dealer, and they now sit on his dining room table among the Buddhas.

**BELOW: Shores's basement** studio is filled with his own artwork and more antiques. He is currently incorporating metal crucifixes into multimedia assemblages and collages. "I've lived a kind of divided life," Shores muses. "When I think of all the time and money I've spent on collecting—if only I had put that into my artwork. But who knows how my art might have been different if I didn't collect." ■

➤ See The List, page 129

