

# Husband, wife light up time together by collecting antique lamps

Karen and Phil Ruberry love the stories that go along with the nearly 300 antique lamps in their collection. For five years they have found their treasures through dealers, collectors' clubs, e-Bay, trade publications, antique shows and auctions, and antique-ing on weekends.

They own unusual kerosene lamps, early whale oil lamps, pewter lamps, miniature oil lamps and others.

"The hunt has become so much fun," said Mrs. Ruberry, a St. Ursula School, Parkville, art teacher, "and our circle of friends has greatly widened."

The parishioners of Shrine of the Little Flower, Baltimore, own a pewter bulls-eye lamp that once belonged to John and Jackie Kennedy, and another lamp manufactured in Baltimore in the 1800s.

"I'm very focused on what I collect," said Mr. Ruberry, 57, referring to early whale oil lamps in glass, pewter and brass dated 1815 to 1870. His wife hunts for miniatures, or night lights, dated up to 1910, the type once placed on nightstands. She especially likes those crafted of decorative glass; her favorite have pedal feet. Thousands of patterns were once made, and some in her collection, stored in the see-through kitchen cabinets, may never have been used, she said.

Three of the rarest pewter lamps on the market are part of Mr. Ruberry's collection, and he said the most he spent on one lamp was \$5,000 because it was a very rare color.

Lamps in the couple's estimated \$100,000 collection are scattered throughout every room in their modest White Marsh home, with the bulk of them on display in glass cabinets, bookshelves and in an antique wooden cabinet in a downstairs spare room.

"We find this is something we enjoy doing together," said Mrs. Ruberry, 59, of the hobby. "I used to take him shopping! Even if we didn't buy anything that day, we'd be together."

Mr. Ruberry's first activity of the day after waking at 5 a.m. is usually research and reading about antique lamps, with collectors' books lining shelves nearby.

"People are back into realizing things from 100 years ago are worth collecting," said the clean-cut accountant and graduate of Archbishop Curley High School, Baltimore. "Only in the last 150 years has lighting made any advancement."

The collector described how people probably worked in the fields then went to bed. When the world became more industrialized, only then did people have more need for light.

"To me, it's mind-boggling how little there was to do (without light)," he said. "I get an appreciation for how physically hard their lives were."

He recently acquired a few small redware, bronze and terracotta lamps dated 32-100 A.D. These once held oil, dry moss, hemp or olive oil, he said. Using a binder, Mr. Ruberry methodically records each lamp's provenance, cost and condition.

The three Ruberry adult children are not "turned on" by their parents' collection. Well, guess there's always the grandchildren.