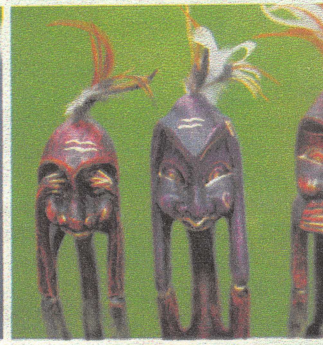




A sampling of the 600 pieces the Fremeds, right center, have collected.



See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Have No Room

Sometimes a Collection Gets a Little Out of Control

In the rear window of Richard Fremed's red Toyota Corolla sit three sets of monkeys—and one set of three bears—primly covering their eyes, ears and mouths. That's barely the tip of the iceberg. Fremed, a corporate accounting consultant, and his wife, Ellen, share their Granada Hills home with hundreds of see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil figurine sets and other see-no-evil paraphernalia. Nearly every room in the house contains a display case crammed with glass, wood and ceramic characters. Even in the bathroom, monkeys gesture on a matching soap tray, tissue holder and wastebasket set.

As a teen, Fremed won a small plastic version of the simian trio at the circus and kept it on his car dashboard. Over the next decade, he occasionally "picked up one or two here and there," including a set he found while in the company of his new bride, Ellen. An occasional acquisition became an addiction. "After we purchased our first set together, we just never stopped," says Ellen. "It's kind of our motto, that you don't get involved in evil, you don't speak badly about other people."

In 35 years of marriage, the two have gone, well, a lit-

tle bananas. An understatement from Ellen sums it up: "They've overrun the house." In this collection, monkeys are merely the starting point. Elephants, bears, pigs and Buddhas admonish would-be sinners at the Fremed home, as do gnomes and Disney characters. There are pewter tie tacks, an ivory-handled razor and a Disney "Winnie the Pooh" set (Mickey Mouse and friends get the message across on a pair of boxer shorts). There are condiment jars and muffin tins, bar implements and gardening tools, marzipan monkeys and X-rated playing cards. (Surprisingly, there is only one salt-and-pepper shaker ensemble among the estimated 600 pieces in the collection.) On the high-end side, there's a Judith Leiber monkey pill case and Limoges Siamese cat boxes. For Christmas ornament aficionados, Christopher Radko monkeys sit along a red-suited Three Stooges set showing Larry, Moe and Curly in a rare display of propriety. The Fremeds also keep a scrapbook of images including a Michael Ramirez cartoon labeling the monkeys "INS, FBI and CIA," and a prescient CFO Magazine from 1998 using the monkeys to illustrate a cover story on corporate fraud.

The couple scour antique shows, curio shops and flea markets at home and while traveling. A favorite item is a photo of the three monkeys carved on the Sacred Stable, a shrine in Nikko, Japan. The monkeys were introduced in Japan by a Buddhist monk from China around the 8th century. They express the teaching of the Vajra cult that if people do not hear, see or speak evil, they will be spared from experiencing evil.

"We told our kids that someday these will all be for Lily," Ellen says, referring to her 2-year-old granddaughter. "And they said, 'What makes you think she'd want them?'" —NANCY SOKOLER STEINER

