

# Collector Profile

## 'If you build it ...'

*New Orleans collector hopes to leave legacy of glass museum*

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“Remember the *Field of Dreams*? We can do that with a museum.” With rose-colored glasses firmly adjusted and a strong desire to leave the world a better place, New Orleans glass collector Ed Kleppinger is planning his own version of “if you build it, they will come.”

For close to a decade, Kleppinger, 64, has been accumulating thousands of pieces of glass, primarily Victorian-era ruby stain pitchers, glasses and plates — much of which he has on display in 35 cases in his private collection in Louisiana.

“My mother collected ruby stain,” Kleppinger said. “I started collecting to round out her collection.”

When his brother ended up inheriting their mother’s collection, Kleppinger’s passion only grew more fervent.

His collection, which also includes thousands of pieces packed away, is a testament to the loveliness and delicateness of the glass from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

“It’s gorgeous stuff,” he said.

“I’ve always been kind of a history buff,” said Kleppinger, a chemist involved with environmental engineering. Through the glass, he added, “You connect with the history of the piece.”

“The whole ruby stain thing is taking off. A lot of people are using it. It was made to be used,” said Kleppinger. “Every now and then, we use some.”

Convinced that future generations will be just as thrilled to experience the jewel-like colors and inherent history in the collection, Kleppinger hopes to leave his legacy in glass.

“What I would like to do is put this into a museum infrastructure,” said Kleppinger.

“You can never reconstruct those early great collections,” he said.

Having a place to house wonderful collections for later generations to see is one of Kleppinger’s top priorities. He said it seems a shame to have people build up large collections, only to have them pieced out after collectors die.

Kleppinger is exploring his options for establishing his glass museum. He has spoken with the Smithsonian, which has an affiliate program.

Right now, he’s entertaining lots of ideas of where to locate the museum (not necessarily in New



*Above, Ed Kleppinger's wife, Willi is just as thrilled about ruby glass as he is, plus, Ed says she's more photogenic than he is! At right, these cruets date to the 1930s and were made by Imperial Glass.*

Orleans, he said) and what it may include.

For example, he’s a proponent of the glass being used to educate visitors. He’d like the museum to allow visitors to touch some items, and he’d like to have a reference library available.

He’s also creating a Web site, [www.rubystainmuseum.com](http://www.rubystainmuseum.com), to track the progress of his collection, museum and newsletter (published sporadically).

Now close to retirement, Kleppinger and his wife Willi are enjoying their free time cataloging and adding to their collection — all the while tracking around their 2-year-old granddaughter Carla.

Kleppinger may live in a house full of glass, but he’s careful to preserve both their history and their forms.

Ever break any?

“Only lost three so far,” Kleppinger said.

