

# Random Shots

by Robin R. Preston

## Meet The Collector: Kevin Wade

The name “*bluroc*” will be familiar to any collector who hunts glass regularly on eBay, not only because he has an uncanny knack for finding the most desirable glasses even before many of us have had time to take the first sip of coffee in the morning, but also because he usually ends up winning them despite fierce competition. The man behind the bidder id is Kevin Wade, one of the online community’s old timers.

Kevin’s eye for the rare is coupled with a laudable — some would say impossible — restraint. He limits himself to the pristine, seldom bidding on a glass with so much as a nick in the rim, let alone anything with a thin or worn label. I later discovered that he also prunes his collection mercilessly on a regular basis, discarding anything he considers mundane or tainted. The result of this constant winnowing is a collection that is relatively small (a hundred or so glasses) but that is equaled by few others in the country in terms of quality. It includes an impressive number of glasses with highly-prized colored labels, many of which can be seen in the final page of this article.

Kevin does not limit his collection to shot glasses. Click on a link to his eBay bidding history and you’ll find jugs, mirrors, flasks, photographs, signs, cigar boxes; anything and everything old. It didn’t take me long to recognize that this was someone to keep an eye on and get to know.

Kevin was one of the first collectors who graciously agreed to be interviewed by Howard Currier for Random Shots. In preparing for this feature, Kevin took it upon himself to photodocument his entire collection. As you can see from this and the following pages, the results of his efforts are nothing short of breathtaking. The text that accompanies the images was provided by Kevin in response to a list of questions compiled by Howard and myself some time ago.



Here, in his own words (and images), is the story of the Kevin Wade collection.

An old coffee can full of arrowheads. Gumball charms. A shoebox of quartz crystals. I came to shot glass collecting late, but I’ve been a collector as far back as I can remember. When I was a child my dad, working at the time for the Missouri Highway Department, would bring home fossil shells from roadcuts. Every job he worked on held some fascinating object. In New Mexico, it was Indian pottery and obsidian. The gold rush country in California yielded pieces of Chinese rice bowls and sun colored glass. Ancient metates (stones for grinding grain) were still in place in areas of the dam site. Excavating the foundation meant rerouting the river in order to remove the gravel and boulders. I heard stories of employees being told to either work or be fired, as gold appeared as bedrock was reached. One engineer showed me a bottle full of nuggets he had picked up.

My collecting was on hold while I was in the Navy. After my discharge I moved to Albuquerque, decided I liked purple glass, and started buying bottles. There wasn’t much to be had, here and there at tourist and antique shops. I read the classifieds religiously, but was usually disappointed by what I found. One day I saw an ad for a large collection so I went to check it out. I got to the house and was stunned by what I saw. The seller had gone to many of the old fort locations in the southwest and detected for uniform buttons. As he came across bottles he would pick them up and bring them back. The garage

was stacked floor to ceiling with glass, all covered with a nasty black fuzz, from buffing brass buttons and insignia. He wanted to sell it all at once. I decided to consult my fiancé. She said under no circumstances did she want dozens of boxes of filthy bottles in our apartment. So, I did what any collector would do, I bought the whole collection. We spent weeks going through it.

There were no bottle shows at that time in New Mexico; I finally made it to my first one when we moved to the Seattle area in 1985. I felt a rush as I walked in and saw the sales tables, the displays, and the people. People with the same affliction as me! One display in particular caught my eye. On a large, butcher paper covered table were an assortment of tumblers, dose glasses and similar items. Some appeared to have writing on them, and as I got closer I could see whiskey brand names. I liked small, obscure, ornate old stuff, and here was something I could sink my teeth into. The glasses belonged to Mark Nelson, premier Washington Territory collector. He had an S. Hyde glass from Seattle on his table, but all I could do was look at it. I was unemployed and too broke to buy anything. It took awhile, but I finally got it [Figure 1].

I don’t remember the first time I met Bob Barnett, at another show, I’m sure. I got on his mailing list and was soon buying glasses from him. For a long time this was my main method of acquisition. The best place to buy glasses, especially if you want a deal, is at shows. Unfortunately, many of the larger shows are in California, a long ways off. Two states over is no big deal in

the Eastern U.S.; out here it's a full days drive or more. So, my collection grew, but slowly. Competition for the better glasses was fierce, and could be frustrating. Even though I would grab the list from the mail carrier, dialing the phone as I did so, I couldn't seem to get thru first. I often settled for glasses that weren't as desirable. Bob had told me that most collectors started out trying to get everything under the sun, until they realized how much was out there. I didn't believe him, not at first. I finally noticed that the Western glasses sold quickly, while many of the Eastern glasses, as nice or nicer, languished. So, I decided to buy from anywhere in the U.S., but only what I found attractive.

I made it to a couple of National bottle shows and bought quite a lot, especially from Paul Van Vactor, one of the biggest dealers around, and a true Southern Gentleman. I also got to meet Barbara Edmonson at a show in her hometown of Chico, California. Barbara's books were (and are) the bible for pre-pro collectors. I've read them over and over again. I also did some buying/selling with Ken Schwartz and Ralph Van Brocklin, two prominent members of the collecting community, as well as people I met through bottle mags. I still didn't have any hand enameled or L.U.G.'s.

I finally picked up the DOUBLE EAGLE WHISKEY [Figure 2] from a local antiques dealer after I bought a couple of

glasses and she casually mentioned that her father had collected them. This was a definite coup for me. I'm not much at networking (something that all great collectors are good at); it's a must for ferreting out scarcer pieces. Shoulda been here earlier dept...I contacted a dealer in a depression glass sales rag about two pre-pros she had listed. She told me that they were the last two of a 300+ collection she had accumulated. Ouch!

What's different about pre-pro? It seems to me that in most collecting hobbies, there is a base of common to scarce items, which collectors can find, and then a few rarities, which are fought over. The pre-pro glasses seem to be upside down. There are a few common glasses, the Hayners, Zimmermans, Riegers. Everything else is scarce to rare. I think that most collectors want local items, primarily as go withs. To collect nationally means going after glasses that were made for small, localized markets, so there aren't very many of them to begin with, and the locals compete strongly. It's not like bottle collecting on a national scale, where you can usually acquire the piece you're after with enough patience. The scarcity factor also means values are not fixed; an unlisted glass comes up virtually weekly. There are probably more unlisted than listed. So, there is still plenty of appeal there, the great unknown. It can get discouraging, so I would have to say go where the glass is, the bottle shows.

Decide on what you like and buy accordingly. You won't be disappointed if it appeals to you. Condition wise, most collectors, myself included, will tolerate damage if confined to the rim of the glass, but a strong, unfaded etching is a must. It helps to carry a picture or an example, because there are still many people who don't know what you're after. Reproductions haven't been a problem; I have yet to see a credible replica.

So it went until... eBay! I began seeing glasses I had only dreamed of. Problem was, I had no computer, just a hotmail address, so I couldn't register. For a while I phoned in my bids to a friend, but this became too cumbersome. Another friend I work with offered to register for me, and he created the account and user ID "bluroc" (he's a guitar player). Things really took off after that.

Have eBay and the internet ruined the hobby? It has been great from my point of view (except I'm still all over the road when it comes to buying); I have access to rarities that are seldom seen. The information available is staggering. Robin Preston's website, pre-pro.com, is unprecedented in gathering data for collectors, and getting them together. On the flip side, I fear that as Google and other information technology takes hold, antiques will become another commodity. This is a ways off. I would hate to see the day when the thrill of finding a rare or unusual item is gone. As much as



**Figure 1:** Hyde was a wholesale and retail liquor dealer who listed in the years leading up to Washington state Prohibition.

*Photograph copyright Ken Schwartz, 2006: from the Ken Schwartz collection, available online at [www.pre-pro.com](http://www.pre-pro.com).*



**Figure 2:** The DOUBLE EAGLE WHISKEY picked up from a local antiques dealer. After the purchase of a couple of glasses, she casually mentioned that her father had collected them.



**Figure 2:** One of Kevin's favorite glasses, Morning Joy. He imagines the lady illustrated on the glass enjoying her morning "break" after the husband is gone and the kids are off to school.

I have benefited from the internet, hunting, researching and spending time with friends are really the worthwhile aspects of collecting. I think my bigger concern is whether enough replacement collectors are in the pipe. Let's face it, there are a lot of graying heads out there. The things that drew me, the reminders of the past and the places to roam and explore freely, are disappearing. With new technologies

changing our daily lives and the way we spend our free time, I hope there is always room for collecting.

My favorite glass? The one I haven't found yet. Looking forward to the next great thing is what keeps it fun. I do like the Morning Joy glass from Chicago [Figure 3]. Yep, the husband's gone to work, kids are off to school, and the breakfast dishes are cleared away. Time

for my morning break, and a big glass of Morning Joy!

You can view all of Kevin's collection online in "Collector's Corner" at [www.pre-pro.com](http://www.pre-pro.com). Questions and comments can be directed to Robin Preston at 245 N 15th St., MS#488, Philadelphia, PA 19102, e-mail [oldwhiskey@pre-pro.com](mailto:oldwhiskey@pre-pro.com).



