Women combine talents to scour world for art

By DIANE ABRAMS

When a world traveler met an interior designer, the result was Artifacts. This home business deals in cultural and primitive art pieces.

It started about a year ago when Bobbie Beser of Bloomfield Township, sought the assistance of Linda Golden, owner of Socially Yours, an interior decorating shop in Oak Park.

Ms. Beser, who spends most of her time traveling to foreign countries, has collected a melange of rare art objects. With Ms. Golden's help she artfully arranged the pieces throughout her home.

Everything, from Peruvian burial dolls to a primitive coffee mill, has its own history. The Beser home is like a museum, filled with extraordinary pieces providing insight to past cultures.

Ms. Golden, a passionate basket collector of 12 years, said she was fascinated with Ms. Beser's assemblage.

NOW THE TWO have combined resources to form Artifacts. With connections throughout the world, their inventory constantly changes.

"The pieces can be previewed by appointment at Bobbie's house, but we will go to perspetive buyers and assist their arranging the work. My background as an interior designer is compatible with the kinds of things we sell," said Ms. Golden.

Their stock, however, goes beyond decorative pieces for homes. It includes jewelry and practical things. Because most of the pieces are old, stories accompany them.

"We can only speculate about the symbolic representation behind some of the pieces, because it's impossible to trace the exact origin of a lot of the work. Collecting artifacts is an intricate network," said Ms. Golden.

An old African necklace is a prime example. The small beads are held together with animal hide. Being unable to trace it origin the women can only guess about its meaning.

"We think the beads symbolize the stages of life. The time of puberty and coming into manhood may be represented by the individual beads," said Ms. Golden.

Other pieces without any apparent symbolism can be appreciated for their beauty alone. An African plantain of a zebra is displayed in Ms. Beser's living roon. It typifies the detailed work of many of their things.

"PLANTAIN MEANS BANANA skins, which is what the piece is made from," explained Ms. Beser. "The zebra is a wood cut sculpture mounted on burlap. The banana skins are dried then glued to the backing."

An Australian tappa painting is displayed in Ms. Beser's home.

"Tappa is a process in the same sense as a lithograph. It is a painting done on bark. The wood is dried and then hand-painted," said Ms. Golden.

Next to the tappa piece sits an Indian sand painting of a warrior.

"The sand is all naturally colored and put on by hand. We believe that the warrior is represented in a symbolic rain dance. It would take a tremendous amount of patience to create to something like this," said Ms. Beser.

Part of what makes Artifacts so unusual is turnover. In one month, the entire stock can change. However, when special pieces are requested they can be ordered.

"Now that we are fairly well established, we have direct contacts in Morocco, Hong Kong, Bali, Figi, Bangkok and other places throughout the world," said Ms. Golden.

This summer Ms. Beser will go to Greece and Turkey to make purchases for artifacts.

Twice a year Ms. Golden buys strictly for those interested in baskets and primitive art necessities.

Other items are shipped here two or three time a year. One of these is a variety of Sahara soap stones.

"The soap stones are always a popular item. They are sold and priced by weight and are generally inexpensive. They sell anywhere from $6 to $50," said Ms. Golden. "There are tremendous variations in the texture and color of the hand carved figures."

ANOTHER POPULAR ITEM is the Peruvian burial dolls. The handmade textile figures are colored with vegetable dyes. Their age is unknown and the history behind them is purely speculative.

"The dolls age beautifully and, needless to say, the older they get, the more valuable they become. The small dolls cost about $25 and the four figures woven together run about $110," Ms. Golden said, adding, "It's hard to give a definite meaning to what the dolls represent. We believe the mother and child figures may symbolize someone who died in child birth."

Because most of the work sold throuth Artifacts was created years ago—before modern conveniences—there are traces of human imperfection to be found in various pieces.

One Indian cloth, estimated to be 50 years old, has penciled markings where it was to be sewn. The cloth is valued at $245 in spite of, or maybe because of, its incomplete finish.

Other cloth pieces have practical purposes behind them. An Afghanistan pouch, woven in Bhutan, was used for transporting materials. The pouch is made from cloth fragments, each piece from a different country.

ARTIFACTS ALSO REPRESENTS a number of American artists whose work is compatible with their stock.

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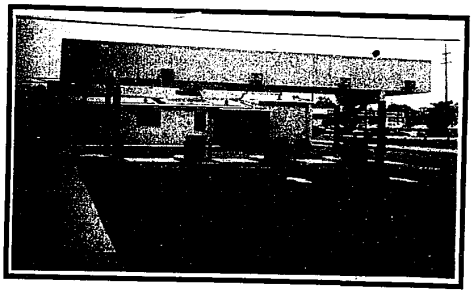

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