





# THE PORN HUNTER

There's  
cash in  
Grandpa's  
dirty  
pictures.  
BY  
JENNIFER  
KABAT

Mark  
Rotenberg,  
with a  
fraction  
of his vast  
porn  
collection.

**M**ARK ROTENBERG greets all the waitresses at his local New Jersey diner by name. “They have no idea what I do,” he whispers as we sit down, “or that I’ve got a thousand bucks in my pocket right now. You never know when someone wants to sell some smut.”

Rotenberg is one of the country’s preeminent porn collectors. Four Taschen books have been based on his personal stash—nearly 200,000 pieces and growing. “I want to acquire all that I can afford,” he says. “EBay is like New York to me—it’s the land of temptation. There are vintage-nude-photo auctions ending every 30 seconds.”

Rotenberg became a porn-hound back in Brooklyn Heights in the late seventies when his neighbor—an heirless man who had been hoarding prints, magazines, first editions, and pornography for decades—died. City workers hauled armloads of obviously valuable first editions out of the apartment, but they left everything else to be tossed into the trash. Already something of a pack rat, the then-26-year-old Rotenberg scavenged Cruikshank drawings, Civil War newspapers, signed Picasso lithos, and lots of erotic material. He wasn’t even into the porn at first. It was only after a friend suggested he show his finds to an editor at *Screw* that he realized there might be money in it.

Today, Rotenberg earns his living from pornographic books and sales on his Website, [vintagenudephotos.com](http://vintagenudephotos.com). Recently, a single buyer bought \$1,400 worth of erotic playing cards, and Rotenberg was once offered \$30,000 for a rare film by the early-twentieth-century California photographer Albert Arthur Allen.

Porn collecting isn’t codified into an industry like baseball cards and comic books. There’s no value book and little turnover, so firm prices are hard to come by. Complicating matters further is the rather Proustian tendency of porn buyers to be most attracted to what they saw when they were young. Still, there are a few uncontested holy grails for a porn hunter: The most valuable magazine is the first-ever *Playboy*, with Marilyn Monroe on the cover (\$7,000), and the most prized dirty book is one of the seven remaining original copies of *My Secret Life*, a Victorian hard-core sex diary (\$500,000). But the erotic artifacts most fantasized about are the possibly apocryphal blue movies made by mainstream stars like Marilyn Monroe and Joan Crawford. If these films do exist, says Rotenberg, their discoverer would make a mint.

Back at Rotenberg’s old stone farmhouse, he tells his wife, Laura Mirsky, about the day’s unexpected haul. A local auctioneer gave him four boxes of material—“including a 16-mm. reel of Candy Barr getting down and verrrry dirty.” The seller, he explains, didn’t want these items to be associated with her late husband, so she asked the auction house to destroy them. “Two boxes did make it to the bottom of a very wet Dumpster,” he laments, “while the others were delivered unto me.”

His wife sighs indulgently. She writes the introductions to his books, and her only qualm with the collection is that it has taken over the house. The photos are organized in binders, and the binders are multiplying: Victorian hard-core, Edwardian postcards, fifties cheesecake—which is itself subdivided into blondes, twosomes, threesomes, big breasts, fetish, famous models, Irving Klaw, bondage, whips, Asian, black, and older women. At the request of Dian Hanson, head of Taschen’s Sexy Books division, there’s even a category for dirty feet. “I don’t even keep the *Playboys* anymore,” says Rotenberg. “How many copies of June ’73 does one person need?” ■