

## COLLECT IT

**Obsessions.**  
Ethnic textiles  
inspire an artist's  
own creations.

Put a finger down randomly on a spinning globe, and chances are Kristin Nicholas has a boldly rendered, handmade textile from that part of the world. Sequined Indian saris, Turkish kilim rugs, Welsh double-woven blankets, Panamanian mola pillows, and embroidered Suzani fabrics from Asia are just a few of the pieces in a collection she loves for its humanity.

"I know somebody far away was stitching and expressing themselves using traditions and techniques handed down through generations," says Kristin, who's as likely to scatter wool dhurrie rugs on the floors of her 1751 farmhouse in Massachusetts as she is to drape a piece over her shoulders as a shawl. "It's a piece of another culture. I often wonder: What was the person like who made this?"

These 19th- and 20th-century textiles also fuel Kristin's imagination and serve as powerful inspiration for her own passionately colored and



## OBSESSIONS



patterned paintings, ceramics, and knitted designs. (The three new diamond-pattern pillows, *above*, are Kristin's designs; the daybed is dressed with block-printed Indian tablecloths.)

Kristin's obsession started as a child, when she learned to sew from her mother and her German-born grandmother, who entrusted her with needlework pieces handed down through her family. "I was always interested in handmade things because I like to make them," she says.

As a 16-year-old, Kristin bought her first textile—an old wool quilt that looked as though it had been stuck in a stable for years—for 50 cents at an auction. She still has it. In college, she fueled her passion by studying clothing design and world textiles.

When buying pieces, Kristin looks for color first and then at construction. She picks up pieces at flea markets

and antiques shows, paying anywhere from \$50 to more than \$600 for handmade pieces or machine-made items with handwork. Damage doesn't bother her. "Textiles have hard lives," she says. "Most have been used so very frequently, they're imperfect." When necessary, she does discreet conservation repairs and spot cleans with water.

When not on display, the 100-plus-piece collection is stored in a closet, offering protection from light, which can cause fading of natural dyes; moisture, which can lead to mildew; and moths and carpet beetles, which can wreak havoc and create holes.

Kristin is an equal-opportunity collector: Her collection knows no geographic or decorating boundaries. "Even though they've come from across the world, they all go together," she says.

### KRISTIN'S FAVORITES

#### BOOKS:

*Textile Designs* (Harry N. Abrams, 2002); *Embroidered Textiles* (Thames & Hudson, 1997); *World Textiles* (Bulfinch Press, 1999); and *The Grammar of Ornament* (Dover Publishing, 2001).

#### MUSEUMS:

*These textile collections are must-sees: Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island; and The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C.*

#### INTERNET SITES:

Check out [www.tribalspirit.com](http://www.tribalspirit.com) or [www.historic-deerfield.org](http://www.historic-deerfield.org).

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON KRISTIN, VISIT [WWW.KRISTINNICHOLAS.COM](http://WWW.KRISTINNICHOLAS.COM).