

# The Collector

This month: **Kate Koeppel**



**Kate Koeppel** is a graphic designer and founder of Koeppel Design. Koeppel Design makes handcrafted wood products to organise and display vinyl collections, as well as other types of analogue media. Kate lives in San Francisco, CA.

## Interview: **Hannah Vettese**

### What do you collect, and why?

My husband and I have pop, hip-hop and lots of international and indie rock. I tend to collect in an emotional way – if an album reminds me of a certain time in my life, or I’m curious about a different era of music or history, then I focus my collecting there. The act of listening to a record is physical and forces me to be present in the moment. I have a bad habit of multi-tasking, and listening to records is a good time to put down my phone, work, worries, and just be in the experience and sound.

### How big is your collection?

We’re rounding the corner on 700 records. In my professional work, I see photos of record collections of every size and that has impacted my interest in maintaining a smaller, often-used collection. My partner and I both buy records, but we try to purge a few records when we bring home new ones. If we’re not listening to it, why are we keeping it? We have a few disagreements from time to time (re: large The Smiths collection) or duplicate albums (one

original, one re-pressing)...

### What do you think it’s worth?

The answer to this doesn’t matter to me particularly. I generally know what I’ve spent on records, but I don’t care about its perceived value, necessarily. Discogs has a number for us, but I think the value is in the way it makes us feel, and how we can share it to connect with friends and family. Considerable time is invested in feeling good with the help of music, so in that sense it feels invaluable to me!

## “Exploring albums is like flipping through an art collection”

### How and where do you store it?

In our home we have a firm rule that the record collection cannot exceed our furniture’s storage capacity, which means we’re nearly at our limit of 800 records. Our records are kept in the centre of the house, where we spend most of our time, so we’ll see them and listen to them. Our main collection is stored on open shelves, organised alphabetically, with a few genre sections of international, hip-hop and soundtracks. Our newest as well as our most-played records are stored vertically in a beautiful walnut record stand by Atocha

Design, so we see the album art and flip through those records by genre.

### What’s the rarest/most unusual/most valuable item you have?

Probably some first pressings – I think the 1991 original pressing of Nirvana’s *Nevermind* might be the most valuable... followed by the *Marie Antoinette Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* from 2006.

### What elusive gem are you looking for?

I love cover versions and I am a sucker for classic songs in other languages. Nat King Cole singing in terrible Portuguese and Spanish on *A Mis Amigos* (1959), I love that. Nina Simone singing in French is beautiful, and I’m after her tracks recorded in Italian. A friend told me that The Beatles were re-recorded with Soviet-approved lyrics in Russian, I want to hear that!

### What’s given you the biggest thrill?

Amerigo Gazaway’s *Soulmates Project* is incredible! Gazaway makes mashup conceptual collaborations between artists from different generations – my favourite is Nina Simone and Lauryn Hill: *The Miseducation Of Eunice Waymon* [2018]. It’s a beautiful, imagined conversation between the two artists. I searched for months for this and was convinced I wouldn’t find a copy because his vinyl gets snapped up very quickly. This album

Photos: (Kate Koeppel) Elisa Watalia. All other photos by Koeppel Designs

has surged to the top of my list, though technically, it's probably not actually legal.

### How do you track stuff down?

In the last year, I've found my attention span and desire for crate-digging has decreased, so I don't do very much of it these days – a side effect of my profession being so closely tied to vinyl, I think. These days, most of my music recommendations come from friends, though my husband loves a good dig and finds it very relaxing. I get the benefits of his effort, without the work!

### What's your favourite record shop?

My favourite shifts every few years, depending on what I'm listening to. My local go-to is Original's Vinyl in San Francisco, but when I'm back home in Seattle I love Easy Street Records & Cafe in West Seattle. It's hard to beat a good browse, coffee and brunch in one place.

### How often do you listen to the stuff in your collection?

If not daily, I'm listening to records every week, always on the weekends and during dinner. The best mornings are when one of us puts on a record and makes coffee while the other person gets to stay in bed and enjoy the music and coffee. I'm usually the one getting a few extra minutes of sleep, so I feel pretty lucky on those mornings!

### Is there a visual side to collecting for you?

I think the cover art is a big part of the pleasure of collecting. With streaming music, you don't get to enjoy the art and physical elements that used to be a central element in owning and collecting music you love. I'm a graphic designer and often look to the past for inspiration, so exploring albums is like flipping through an art collection.

### How will you eventually dispose of your collection?

I'd like to think our family may want our collection someday, but realistically, we'll eventually sell parts and donate the rest when we get to the point that we're no longer using it. I can't imagine not wanting to listen to records, so this will be decades from now!

### What's your all-time favourite record, regardless of value or rarity?

Dinah Washington's 1959 LP, *What A Difference A Day Makes!* I paid \$2.99 for it; I'm sure there are countless copies out there. The album has so many classics, but *What a Difference A Day Makes* is the best mood-busting song and I will always love it.

See [koepeldesign.com](http://koepeldesign.com)

