

LONDON FINANCIAL TIMES ARTICLE by Virginia Blackburn : June 14, 2016

Below is an excerpt from the article published in the London Financial Times "How to Spend It".....

The striking geometric chief's blanket hanging in the bedroom of property investor Peter Herfurth's Tucson home looks surprisingly modern, given that it was created in the 19th century. This Navajo weaving was passed down to Herfurth by his parents, and he has inherited their collecting passion too. "I started buying in 1981 and by 2002 I was an avid collector," he says. He spends

between \$5,000 and \$180,000 for the best work and owns some 40 pieces, chosen primarily for their design and colour. (some pieces purchased from Nizhoni Ranch Gallery in Sonoita, AZ)

Today the weavings created by the Navajo people of the southwestern United States are considered some of the most desirable of all Native American textiles. In 2012, California's John Moran Auctioneers sold a chief's blanket from the mid-19th century for \$1.8m. This represented a considerable leap in prices; until then the very best pieces went for around \$650,000-\$750,000. But the rarity value, combined with the fact that the bold designs are suited to modern interiors, means that these rugs and blankets are highly sought after.

One UK dealer drawn to the Navajo designs is Cotswolds-based Brian MacDonald. "I sell them when I can find them," he says, "but good examples are hard to come by outside the US. The last one I sold was a two-tone c1900 rug for £1,000. It was bought by an interior decorator for a London apartment and looked great on the wooden floor."

A distinction to be made between blankets and rugs.... The blankets were primarily produced for the Navajo themselves and tend to have simple banded designs, whereas the rugs were intended for a wider commercial market and are more complex.

The latter were produced in what is known as the "transitional period", from around 1890 to 1915, and the finest examples sell for between \$35,000 and \$60,000.



c1870 Historic Navajo Late Classic Serape
Museum Quality Governor Axtell's Navajo Blanket
\$45,000 from Nizhoni Ranch Gallery

"The rugs came in after trading posts were established," says Steve Getzwiller, who runs the Nizhoni Ranch Gallery in Sonoita, Arizona. Among his wide range of stock is a c1900-1910 Germantown Storm Pattern rug for \$12,500, while a beautiful striped 1870s blanket that once belonged to Samuel Beach Axtell, governor of New Mexico Territory at the time of Billy the Kid, is \$45,000.

Another popular area for collectors is rugs dating from about 1900 to 1925, which start at around £5,000. "These are known as 'dazzlers'," says Jan E Finch, partner at London-based Finch & Co, a specialist in ethnographic art that sometimes sells Navajo pieces, "as there is a lot of movement and colour in the geometric shapes."

But not all collectors want to be dazzled. "I look for natural colours of the desert," says Fred Klein, an attorney based in Frankfurt who fell in love with these textiles while working in the US in the 1980s. "I bought my first one in New Mexico and now have about 35, including several chief's blankets." Many of his pieces were bought from Nizhoni Ranch Gallery. "But I'll have to stop buying now – I've run out of wall and floor space."

c1900-1910 Germantown Wool Storm Pattern rug,
\$12,500 from Nizhoni Ranch Gallery

