



MEET THE BEATLES COLLECTOR

A fan of the Fab Four since childhood, a Tampa lawyer has amassed an enviable collection of Beatles memorabilia.

BY AMY SCHERZER
PHOTOGRAPH BY
EDMUND D. FOUNTAIN

They sang *Love Me Do*... and we did.

From that first single in September 1962, the bestselling band in history turned on a generation with music as meaningful today as *Yesterday*.

The Beatles scored 20 No. 1 hits in their too-short recording career in the '60s, songs welcomed like old friends whenever they turn up today.

Tampa lawyer Mark Bentley was a young boy when he, along with 73 million others, watched the lads from Liverpool appear on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in February 1964. He remembers their first song, *All My Loving*, still a favorite of his.

At 10 he could play *Please, Please Me* on his plastic guitar; by 14 he was rocking *Day Tripper* with his buddies in their basements and garages.

Bentley grew to treasure the genius of the Fab Four, literally, amassing an enviable collection of Beatlemania memorabilia — singles, albums, film negatives, replica guitars, photographs, tickets and more.

"Think of it like women shoe-shopping at Nordstrom," said Bentley. "They're always looking for that unique pair."

Most valuable is a 1963 photograph taken after a publicity shoot, signed by John, Paul, George

Mark Bentley has been listening to the Beatles since he was a kid. To say he is a fan is an understatement. The Tampa lawyer's office has Beatles memorabilia hanging nearly everywhere there is wall space. By his best guess, he owns about 500 Beatles records but he says his favorite album is probably *Rubber Soul*. The guitars shown in this photograph were not played by the Beatles but are similar to the models they used.

and Ringo. Purchased for \$12,000, it would fetch \$20,000 today. It hangs with a letter of authenticity in Bentley's office in One Tampa City Center.

Also prized: a black-and-white photo snapped at their last concert, Aug. 29, 1966, in Candlestick Park in San Francisco. It is a print of the original negative, signed by the late rock star photographer, Jim Marshall, and framed along with an unused \$4.50 concert ticket and a program book.

John Lennon's handwritten lyrics to *Imagine* hang in the entryway to the office where Bentley represents property rights, eminent domain and land-use cases.

Down the hall, Richard Avedon's iconic, psychedelic-hued, Sgt. Pepper-esque headshots, taken in 1967 for *Look* magazine, enliven the conference room.

When clients' telephone calls must be put on hold, hearing the Beatles sing makes the wait entertaining.

"I started with a few records here and there," Bentley said, guesstimating he has 500 now, including multiple copies and different pressings of varying quality.

"Some are scratched or considered common in the collector's world, so they just have sentimental value."

Bentley owns an unusual Russian release of his favorite album, the classic 1965 *Rubber Soul*, "pressed in St. Petersburg, where it was banned at the time."

And then there's his copy of the controversial *Yesterday* and



I started with a few records here and there. Some are scratched or considered common in the collector's world, so they just have sentimental value."

MARK BENTLEY, guesstimating he has 500 records now, including multiple copies and different pressings of varying quality

Today, the so-called "Butcher" album. When it was released in July 1966, the cover pictured the Beatles in white smocks amid decapitated baby dolls and pieces of meat. Said to be a protest of Capitol Records "butchering" their work, the album was recalled for a new picture to be pasted over the offending cover. A never-opened original, still in shrink wrap like Bentley's, would sell for about \$8,000.

Of late, Bentley said he's hitting the brakes on seeking the greatest hits, largely due to fraudulent sellers.

"The Internet destroyed the memorabilia market," he said. "There's so much counterfeit stuff out there. This is no time to be buying. I got burned on a bogus buy even with a letter of authenticity." The seller eventually bought the item back, but Bentley has no desire to repeat the lesson.

"I've had my fix," he said. "A handful of things are kinda cool, but I'm more into the music than the collecting. I don't even know if it will increase in value."

Most satisfying is sharing the music he loves with his talented children.

Adam, 22, who attends Berklee College of Music in Boston, jams with his dad on the dozen guitars they own.

Daughter Erin, 26, a Hollywood film marketer in Los Angeles, joins them on piano.

Now that's a sound return on investment: a new generation of Beatles fans. ○