

Limping ahead of other glass cane collectors?

Ralph Finch admits that—he is cane and just able to bring a monster cane home... and it is now called—"Canezilla."

Photos by Janet Finch



Collecting should just be about...collecting, and the fun of it, and sharing with other collecting friends, not sticking it into the faces of others and saying, ooooooh, look what I've got. Still, and going to hell with doing it, I must casually say,

"Ooooooh, look what I've got"

OK, I'm on the brink of being 83 and adhere to the old adage: He who dies with the most toys wins.

I've got a long way to go, but...I must admit that while Janet and I collect glass canes—we have maybe 125, most around the standard three-to-five feet long. One that has been the Glass Holy Grail is about nine feet long (tall?) that a friend has.

Sure, the canes with many colors blown in or the ones with fancy swirls are great, but what about the reallllly long ones? Not only the question of how a glass blower makes a very, very long glass cane but how would an extremely long one survive over a century plus of handling?

I know that a lot of people appreciate glass canes, but know only three who seriously collect them: John Pastor and Elizabeth Maxbauer of Michigan, Jim and Jodi Hall of Illinois, and Femia Alberts of Michigan. I asked them about their interest (and which is their tall cane), and one replied.

John explained his interest: "We have perhaps a dozen or so different canes. It's not so much that we collect canes; it's that we actually collect across almost all bottle categories, including whimsies and 'misc.' They tend to be colorful, and when you study them, they can vary greatly in terms of twists, colors, handle treatment, etc. It would be hard not to include at least a few in any well-rounded general collection of antique bottles and related glass as they represent the skill, and the art, of the glass blower. Our longest is probably around six feet. Yes, we have seen longer examples."

Thanks, John. See, some people don't like to buy large glass at auctions and have them wrapped and shipped hundreds of miles...things that often don't survive the trip.

And the Finches? Recently, at an auction house in downtown Detroit, an interesting glass cane came up for sale and we thought that we might have a chance.

The gallery, DuMouchelles, is only a 25-minute drive, and we thought we could also stop at a new barbecue restaurant for lunch. So we bid, and on Feb. 21, we picked up our new glass cane.

(FYI, DuMouchelles claims to have been in existence since 1927, and while it has gone through...valleys the past few years, it seems to have been doing well. In fact, this has been the third item we have gotten there.)

And did the glass cane survive? When we pulled up, the auction house had it wrapped in a spongy foam and taped to two large boards. And the only problem?

The auction house said it was nine feet long—which would have been amazing, but...they were wrong: The cane is nine feet, 10 inches long! Can anyone top that?

The only problem is: Where the heck does a 9-foot-10-inch glass cane go? As I write this, we are still looking. It is now on the dining room floor, which, fortunately, is 10 feet wide.

And

Chris Davis of Newark, N.Y.: "It's taken me a while to respond, sorry. Anyway, here's what I came up with briefly: "I no longer actively collect glass canes, but I still have about a half dozen. I tend to resell them more now, mainly due to lack of space. I've had several that were close to seven feet. "I remember the late Joyce Blake (Glasshouse Whimsies) used to talk about an 11-foot cane that hung in a tavern in Lancaster, N.Y.



So there it is, Canezilla, stretched out on our dining room floor like a multi-colored black snake? At nine feet and 10 inches long, where will we put it?

"I started collecting them back in the early to mid-1980s. I attended an outdoor antique auction in Geneva, N.Y. The auctioneer sold three nice glass canes as one lot. I bought them and remember standing in the crowd trying to hold onto them all!

"That got me started in a big way. I went right into other types of glass whimsies, became good friends with Joyce Blake (who lived near Buffalo and had a memorable display at the 1976 FOHBC Expo in St. Louis, which I admired greatly).

"I founded the Whimsey Club with Jeff Waterhouse at the 1988 Expo in Las Vegas, where we held our first meeting. Jeff became the newsletter editor and today is an accomplished glass artist in Pennsylvania. There were members from England, Canada, and a number of states. We met and displayed at the Rochester show every year."

Kim Kokles of Texas (where Texans usually brag that things are bigger there) recalled: "We visited Norman Heckler several years back, and he was bragging he had the longest glass cane..."

Norman Heckler of Connecticut replied: "Oh, Ralph! My two canes are 9 feet, 6 inches in length. Hecklers' {auction house} might be a good place to put your cane!"

So, we brag to Norman, and that isn't easy since Norman has some of the greatest—and most diverse glass in the entire country. FYI: Norman is also a heavyweight when it comes to collecting... New England stone walls; now that's heavy. (The lightweight Finches have about a dozen antique bricks along our sidewalk, so... we yield).

And as the parade ends, holding our cane high, I conclude with: "Ours is nine feet, 10 inches!" If I die today, I leave this world as the king of glass canes(?) (and bad puns).

And other collectors comment:

John Pastor of American Glass Galley said: "9 feet long is crazy!"

Ferdinand Meyer V of the FOHBC commented: "That's insane! The double-boxed jug (you recently purchased) is delivered broken, and then this package-of-all-packages!"

James Hagenbuch added an earthy comment: "When I was a young boy walking around in the woods at my grandfather's farm, I was spooked by a 10-foot-long black snake. I don't know which is scarier the black snake or the cane!"

Femia Alberts of Michigan said: "A miracle it survived. But it looks awesome. In my small house, it would have to be mounted above a doorway or window. Looks like you will have to tread lightly in the dining room for a while."

Ted Krist, the bitters Baron from Ohio, asked? "OMG! Do you call it Canezilla?" Thanks, Ted. I think I will use that word in the headline.

