



Blessed with the palest bisque, this first period portrait is a stunner.

Left, Evelyn enjoys creating inviting vignettes with her small dolls.



A gorgeous C Steiner wears a magnificent formal gown.

A Visit with Evelyn Phillips



by Donna C. Kaonis photos by Paula Claydon

Turning sixty-five marked a new, exciting chapter in the life of Evelyn Phillips. Retiring as a clothing designer, she could now, with her children grown, become a full time antique doll dealer.

But before we get to that, let's get to know Evelyn and the fascinating career path that brought her considerable success and accomplishment. Born into a family of three boys, she was admittedly more than a little bit spoiled. Her father worked in New York City's garment district, commonly referred to as the "rag trade" and her mother was a clothing designer.

Dolls were Evelyn's refuge from her brothers' boisterous games. From an early age, she adored dolls and was encouraged by her mother to make clothes for them. During school holidays when her mother had to work, Evelyn would visit her relatives, taking along a doll for which she would make an entire wardrobe. She recalls how she and the cousins would fashion a doll carriage out of a shoe box by poking a hole in one end and putting a string through it with a knot at one end so they could pull it along with their dollies in tow.

Following high school, Evelyn attended the New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology and upon graduation opened a ladies' clothing shop on the lower floor of the family's apartment building. Located around the corner from the city's Grand Concourse, famous for its Art Deco architecture, she named her store *The Shop Around the Corner*, a nod to the beloved Jimmy Stewart movie of the same title. The skills that she learned buying for her



A Kestner 221 googly can't hide her delight that spring is coming!



Several groups of dolls are kept under glass domes, here (left to right), a Kammer & Reinhardt Gretchen #114, Block letter FG, Gebruder Heubach Baby, and Simon Halbig #886 All Bisque.



French and German bisque dolls are a perfect complement. The Bru Jne 4 front and center presides over the group.

Evelyn's favorite dolls are the Simon Halbig 949 and the Kammer & Reinhardt #128 toddler who is holding an all bisque googly with jointed arms and legs.



shop enabled her to become an assistant to a clothing buyer and soon the head of the department.

Pregnant with her first child and unable to find a robe that she felt was fashionable enough to take to the hospital, she designed her own. "My brother-in-law, who has just bought clothing factory, came to the hospital and admired my robe, said Evelyn. "He was keeping his Spanish employees but was in need of a designer and so I went to work for him, at first two days a week and eventually three. I didn't speak Spanish but I showed them how to take the existing patterns and modify them, mostly by adding trim and embellishments." Soon she was designing fine lingerie and robes for Lord & Taylor and Best & Company and eventually had her own dress label at the plus size clothing store Lane Bryant.

Before writing this article I didn't know Evelyn's background but learning of her life in the fashion industry came as no surprise. Always elegantly attired and beautifully accessorized, she stands out from the crowd. I seriously doubt if she owns a pair of jeans. "My friends always kid me about everything being so coordinated. I keep things I love forever," she says.

By the time Evelyn retired from the fashion industry at age 65 she was a serious collector, not only of dolls, but doll carriages, samplers, baskets, doll houses, Staffordshire,



In back, a Gebruder Heubach pouty girl, Kestner Hilda Baby and a rare Baby Stewart with removable bonnet.



Toys, miniature furniture and dolls are always within sight in Evelyn's cozy living room.

ladies' beaded bags, doll sized chairs, toys, dolls' shoes and miniature sewing machines. "My son Billy had moved to Chartre, France and I visited him twice a year. At that time the currency rate was highly favorable and I was able to come home with some wonderful things." One of her finds was a beautiful Jumeau head that curiously was sheared off at the bottom. The shop owner wanted a \$100 for it and Evelyn bought it hoping that one day she could find a body for it. Later she learned it was a head made for an automaton and miraculously was able to purchase the correct automaton body.

The gradual transition from collector to dealer was marked by two fortuitous incidents. "My son was only eight years old when I discovered he and his friends were using a lovely antique chest as a target for their BB guns. I decided if the chest was to survive I better sell it and arranged for a local antique shop owner to come and take a look. The woman loved the chest and offered me a Bru priced at \$12,000 as payment. I was thrilled! My husband Dick was very skeptical of this transaction, but the very next day at a doll show I sold the Bru for a profit. I still remember waiting for Dick to come home that day; I met him in the driveway waving the check. It was a great *I told you so* moment."

The defining moment that changed her life happened over thirty years ago when she saw an ad in *Women's Wear*



Dip Baby in chair, Byelo and a Kammer & Reinhardt 115A.



A Darling Kestner 143 that is celebrating Christmas.



A beautiful EJ Jumeau, shares space with a JDK 243 Oriental Child and a Simon Halbig Oriental all bisque.



A few of the many miniature doll carriages in Evelyn's collection.



Gottschalck stable and house

Daily. It showed a fur vault in the garment district, practically next door to Evelyn's work place, where hanging from the ceiling were dozens of French dolls, none of them dressed or wigged. It turned out that the furrier's brother was an antique doll dealer from Argentina who would visit the states periodically bringing dolls for sale (customs required no clothing or wigs). "The prices were wonderful and I had a customer who was able to wig and costume the dolls. Soon others found about the fur vault loaded with French dolls, but for a time I had an exclusive. It really financed my then fledgling doll business." says Evelyn.

The past thirty years of experience has taught Evelyn that you never stop learning. She has amassed a doll reference library that has served her well. "I still keep a stack of books by my bed, and no matter how many times I go through them, I always see something I didn't see before."

As far as Evelyn's personal preferences in dolls, she will tell you that faces are everything. She has an abhorrence of nylon and polyester and cringes if an antique doll is dressed in synthetic modern fabrics. Her background in fashion gives her foremost an appreciation of quality. She doesn't mind if a doll's clothing needs to be replaced and naturally uses antique



Doll size purses, mirrors, and miniature chairs make a decorative display.



A lovely Jumeau automaton is about to check her make-up.

fabrics, laces and trim to recreate a beautiful costume. For the last few years Evelyn has gradually been divesting herself of some of her dolls, her daughter and eight great grandchildren being the lucky recipients. She loves knowing that her favorite dolls will be cherished in the family. "Appreciating the exquisite craftsmanship of things no longer produced can be an intoxicating source of pleasure, which I hope my grandchildren will pass on to their children."

Two wonderful careers and she continues non-stop. Now in her early nineties, Evelyn continues to find life exciting thanks to her determination to keep on doing what she loves. She is active in her doll club, Tuesday's Child, one of the oldest in the country and maintains her website, evelynphillipsdolls.com. In spite of recovering from a recent total knee replacement, she is looking forward to her next trip to France. Evelyn is an inspiration and a reminder as George Eliot once wrote, "It is never too late to be what you might have been."

A special thank you to Paula Claydon, a close associate of Evelyn Phillips.



An impressive Christian Hacker dollhouse.



Evelyn has always enjoyed folk art, this child's hutch in old blue paint, filled with children's china is an example.



A lovely doll by Rabery & Delphieu has been in Evelyn's collection for over thirty years.



Made for the French trade this all original diminutive S & H 886 is a gem.