

Susan Quinlan, founder of the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library, looks over the beautifully costumed "Talulah" by Joanne Mitchell. Photos by P.J. Heller/PhotoReporters



She didn't have many dolls or teddy bears when she was growing up. But now, at age 68, Susan Quinlan has made up for that childhood scarcity, amassing a treasure-trove of bears and dolls, which she has gathered into one of the largest museum collections in the United States.

A stroll through the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library in Santa Barbara, Calif., not only brings back childhood memories of teddy bears, dolls and favorite bedtime stories, it offers a glimpse of one-of-a-kind and limited-edition teddies and dolls with an emphasis on the California artists who created them. Along the way, visitors also get an enjoyable lesson about California history, with bears and dolls arranged by the ethnic groups that helped settle the state.

A Big Hug

The collection contains the ubiquitous Barbie dolls and Cabbage Patch Kids, along with cloth, composition and wooden dolls, dolls that date back 100 years and befit California, and a host of celebrity dolls. There is also a large assortment of

A Trove of Treasures

A treasure-trove of teddy bears and dolls are on display at the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum. • By P.J. Heller

teddy bears, including an entire selection devoted to Teddy Roosevelt.

"I tried to make a bear once," Quinlan admits. "That's why I really appreciate what bear artists do. I'm just in awe of what they do."

Her bear assemblage features examples from both manufacturers, like Steiff, and individual artists, such as Martha Leeds, Francisco Carreno Stewart, Martha Burch,



Penny French's bears depict characters from the film *The Name of the Rose*.



Martha Burch's "Mother of Pearl" features the detailed costuming and accessories the artist is known for.

Denis Shaw, Cindy McGuire, Ethel Hughes and Robert Raikes, who started out making bears with wooden faces.

The collection also includes one-of-a-kind prizewinners from the annual Teddy Bear Artist Invitational and even a bear designed by the late actor Larry Linville, who played Major Frank Burns on the popular television series *M*A*S*H*.

Some of the bears are decked out in elaborate outfits—everything from a wedding dress and tuxedo in Cindy McGuire's "Wedding Party" to a seashell-accessorized outfit in Martha Burch's

"Mother of Pearl." There's also Diane Gard's Peter Pan bear, with his shadow stretched out on the floor; a masked Zorro bear by Armella Dana, which won an award at the 2007 Teddy Bear Artist Invitational; and Penny French's highly detailed bears based on the film *The Name of the Rose*.

There is also a selection of bears made from real fur. "They often used recycled fur coats," Quinlan notes, pointing to one bear made with a combination of badger and fox fur, another with mink

and yet another with lamb's wool.

Quinlan says teddies designed by bear artists are of particular interest to her since each one is created individually. "They have to create their own patterns and they have to make each one different if it's a one-of-a-kind," she notes.

"Even art museums are beginning to recognize that dolls and bears are works of art," she adds, noting Martha Leeds was commissioned to create 12 bears for the Louvre. "I look at them as works of art, but most people approach them as toys. I have trouble with this because I feel they are just such wonderful artworks."

Selecting bears for her collection is no easy task. "There's always the one that looks at you and says 'take me home' and you have to take it home," she confides.

"They're such comfort toys," Quinlan says. "You can hug them. You can tell them everything in the world, all your secrets. They just have wonderful expressions on their faces; this is true of dolls, also. Both of them can become confidants and companions."

While Quinlan looks for unusual bears and dolls, she also tries to focus on California artists. "The other thing I tried to do that I thought might make the museum a little different was to emphasize California doll makers and teddy bear makers. I haven't come across a lot of museums that emphasize their state to people. We also present a little of the state's history. So I gave it a California bent," she says.

"Not only do I find absolutely wonderful treasures as far as dolls and bears, but the people involved in this whole thing are such wonderful people," Quinlan notes. "As you get to know the artists, they are just so nice. Their creativity just



astounds me. I cannot believe what they can do, taking simple materials and creating actual works of art out of them."

Coming Home

Opening the museum in Santa Barbara, a popular tourist destination about 100 miles north of Los Angeles, was a homecoming of sorts for Quinlan. She moved to Santa Barbara as a youngster and attended junior high and high school in the town. After she married, she moved to San Francisco, where she lived for 35 years. After taking early retirement, she and her husband returned to Santa Barbara around 1999-2000 with the intention of setting up the museum, which opened at the end of December 2005 (although Quinlan puts the official date at January 2006).

"I had just been collecting and collecting and collecting, so my husband one day finally said, 'I think we need to find a place to put all this,'" she recalls. "So we started looking."

Her interest in dolls began in San Francisco when she and a friend

A Labor of Love

The Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library, located just two blocks off Santa Barbara's main drag, is open to the public Fridays through Mondays (admission is \$6.50 for adults and \$3.50 for preteens). A reference library containing some 10,000 books, which Quinlan says is the largest known collection of books on dolls, dollhouses and teddy bears, is open to researchers by appointment. The library also boasts a large collection of books on toys, puppets and costumes.

If requested, Susan Quinlan will provide a running commentary to visitors about the 2,500 dolls and 500 teddy bears currently on display. It's obvious this former librarian not only is the doyen of bears and dolls, but she truly loves every item in her collection.

For Quinlan, creating the 10,000-square-foot museum has truly been a labor of love. "Oh yes, I love it," Quinlan admits while sitting in the museum's tearoom, where she serves up tea, coffee and cookies to museum visitors. The walls of the room are adorned with colorful murals of a doll and teddy bear tea party and picnic, with the ocean and mountains in Santa Barbara as backdrops.

In addition to the library, tearoom, and doll and bear displays, the museum has a collection of puppets and a small variety of sewing machines, including one Quinlan's mother used to make doll clothes. "I learned on it and I loved that machine," she shares. There is also a gift shop offering books, dolls, teddy bears and other collectibles.



One of the three bears reads a *Goldilocks* pop-up book in this charming creation by Darleen Allen.



Left: Some 2,500 dolls and 500 teddy bears are on display at the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library, one of the largest such museum collections in the United States. **Top right:** "Little Red Riding Hood" is shadowed by the "Big Bad Wolf" in this Francisco Carreno Stewart creation. **Center right:** Award-winning "Zorro" (and friend) was created by bear artist Armella Dana. **Bottom right:** These bears by Ethel Hughes were based on *The Maltese Falcon*.



Her love of doll and teddy bear books came about after she won a raffle at a doll show. The prize was a set of Golden Books about dolls. "Being a librarian, I thought this would be a nice side interest," Quinlan says. "After all, how many books can there be about dolls? I thought I'd start collecting them. Now I've got 10,000 books on dolls, dollhouses and teddy bears.

"There were more than I ever dreamt there would be," she says with a laugh.

Displays at the museum showcase books featuring dolls and bears or creations that have spun off those books. Among them are *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Mary Poppins*, *Winnie the Pooh* and *Madeline*.



More Than Meets the Eye

Quinlan has more dolls and bears in storage, including American Gothic teddy bears, that she hopes to eventually showcase as more display cases are constructed. She admits she never tires of walking through the museum or talking to visitors about her collection. "I love to go around [the museum] because it gives me a chance to see all my things," she says.

She won't say which specific bears or dolls are her favorites, but she admits "there are certain ones I love the most. If there was a fire, I know which ones I'd grab first."

As she strolls through the museum on a day when she normally isn't at the facility, Quinlan notices a few of the dolls and bears have toppled over in their display cases. She hints there may be more to it than meets the eye. "Oh, he's fallen over," she says, looking at one of the dolls. "He didn't make it back in time today. I found a few that didn't make it back. They didn't expect me in." 🐾

Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library, 122 W. Canon Perdido St., Santa Barbara, CA, quinlanmuseum.com, (805) 730-1707



"The Wedding Party" is an elaborately costumed bear affair by Cindy McGuire.

started a doll club and eventually launched a small weekend business going to doll shows where she would buy and sell items. She began collecting dolls in 1979.

"As I expanded the doll collection, I began going into teddy bears as well," she shares. "There are fewer teddy bears here because they came in later. But I love them both."