

COLLECTIBLES FOR INSPIRED LIVING

# Collector Editions

New Plush  
Items & Trends  
Halloween  
Products

CIB Collector's  
Choice Awards Winners

Fall 2009

\$4.50 U.S. Canada \$5.50



Inside this Issue!

**ROMERO  
BRITTO**

# Welcome To Hauntsville

HALLOWEEN COLLECTOR JERRY DIEGO IS A GRAPHIC DESIGNER BY DAY & DEPARTMENT 56 DISPLAY GURU BY NIGHT.

BY SUSAN K. ELLIOTT

Halloween collector Jerry Diego is a master of all things macabre, but is especially fond of his Halloween village building collection.



Imagine a room with spooky music playing, a fog machine to create a misty presence, eerie lighting, and floor-to-ceiling displays of gothic Halloween buildings — just a few of Jerry Diego’s favorite things. Since he discovered Department 56’s “Ghostly Carousel” in 2003, Diego’s Original Snow Village Halloween® collection has grown steadily each year. Now thoughts of Halloween shape the California collector’s life.

By day, Diego works as a graphic designer in San Francisco, but in his off-hours he focuses on Halloween.

Before and after the ghoulish holiday, he’s planning displays for the next year or working on his Halloween Web site ([www.myscaryhalloween.com](http://www.myscaryhalloween.com)).

Diego begins conceptualizing his home display in July with the final arrangement coming together in mid to late September.

“From its humble beginnings, my Hauntsville Village has been expanding and becoming more intricate,” he says. “My displays are out of control,” he adds, thinking about how he will display his 60 to 70 Halloween buildings this year. “I have so many that I can’t display them all.”

Diego currently lives in San Jose, nestled between two of the Bay Area’s oldest cemeteries and just a few blocks from the famously haunted Winchester Mystery House. “It seems that wherever I go, I cannot escape the scary,” he says.

Diego continues, “During the seven years that I lived in San Francisco, I lived in one truly haunted Victorian flat. We saw ghost faces show up in pictures, objects would disappear and reappear, we occasionally felt like we were being watched, and our hallway sometimes smelled like an old woman’s flowery gardenia perfume. We held a séance there one night in October and the old woman made her presence known — and she did not like us one bit. After the séance, we continued to experience the same things so nothing really changed. At least we know what, or rather who, it was.”

Diego got into wood crafting to create elaborate platforms for his display, buying power tools to build things such as last year’s cabinet with a silhouette of two trees on either side. It looked like a bookcase in the form of a tree. Crafting new designs every year, he uses last year’s wood and re-cuts it.

His arrangement depends on how the buildings fit together, whether a piece is long, square, or round. “I put businesses together in one area and houses together in another. Some buildings look better together than others,” he says.

As a decorating tip, Diego suggests blending colors and directions for lighting. “I like a mixture of cool and warm lights together. Last year, on my porch I had a scarecrow in the middle with an orange light focused in the middle and a backdrop with green lights on top and bottom. It created a nice mix of color. Lighting can be an easy and cheap way to introduce interesting elements at very little cost. Even exchanging a light bulb in a room with a red bulb changes the atmosphere of a room.

Diego's terrifyingly terrific Department 56 Halloween village display keeps growing vertically. Diego has to think creatively when trying to fit his expanding collection into his 1,000-square-foot house.



on candy, costumes, and activities in the United States alone, most in a six-week period. If it seems like Halloween's popularity is increasing, HIA reports that sales have doubled in the last few years.

"Halloween collecting gives me something to look forward to every year. Whenever I'm stressed or something bad happens — all that terrible news — it's my happy go-to place," says Diego. "There are things I can work on for the site or I can plan next year's decorations. Halloween collecting has given me a creative resurgence in my personal and professional life. I have made friends online with people who find the Web site and say, 'I like your movie choices.' It's also a great way to touch base with friends from the past."

Is there anything missing from Jerry Diego's collection? "There is one piece," he says, "the Holy Grail [of Halloween collecting]. It's the first D56 piece, 'The Haunted Mansion' (released in 1998 and retired in 2000). The last time I saw one it was over \$500." Among his favorite pieces, he says, "are two that I always think of first, both from 2003: 'Mordecai Mould Undertaker' (Dickens' Village Series\*) and 'Spooky Farmhouse.'"

This October, Diego plans to share his Halloween knowledge with a weekly Friday newsletter, "offering two or three items per e-mail such as new movie releases and product releases that I see in the stores that people have to have."

What would he suggest to someone else considering starting a Department 56 Halloween collection?

"Know what you're getting into. It's not only about the buildings. Once you get a taste for Halloween collecting you want to have everything. One building grows to four, and more. You have to think about where to store them, where to display them. It's quite the endeavor. I didn't know my collection would be as big or cause as much headache as it has," says Diego.

Headache or not, his spooky collection clearly has a tight grip on him. ☺

"My house is 1,000 square feet, so it's a challenge to keep the village going in the space I have. Everything is going higher," Diego explains. "I have high ceilings and I'm thinking about building a six-foot structure, but in earthquake country that might not be wise with porcelain pieces."

Diego may solve his space problem this year by moving to a new home. If moving interferes with time to set up his display, he expects to focus on his Web site, now in its eighth year. His 13 sections include "Horror History," lists of scary movies, music, books, art, "Dreadful Shopping," and his newest section, "Eerie Entertaining." Halloween fans will find party ideas, decorating tips, activities in the Bay area, and favorite recipes.

*"Halloween collecting gives me something to look forward to every year. Whenever I'm stressed or something bad happens — all that terrible news — it's my happy go-to place," says Diego.*

According to the Halloween Industry Association (HIA), a non-profit trade association, Halloween has become the second largest commercial holiday in the United States. Consumers spend more than seven billion dollars yearly



Diego counts "Mordecai Mould Undertaker" (a 2003 release from Department 56's Dickens' Village Series) as one of his favorite pieces.