

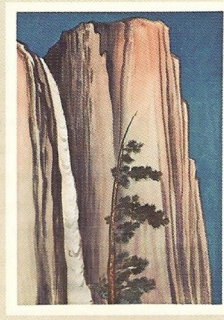
For 11 seasons, **Frank Castle '62** has appraised Japanese art for would-be millionaires on “Antiques Roadshow” on PBS—and he knows a photocopy of an Asian print when he sees one

KEEPING *it* REAL

By SAMANTHA B. BONAR '90
Photos by JIM COIT



RIGHT: Sorry, Oxy: This print of *Night Snow at Kambara* (ca. 1833-34) by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) from the College's Special Collections is a photocopy. **CENTER:** *Misty Spring Evening* (ca. 1924-27) by Takahashi Shotei (1871-1945), belonging to the author. In better condition, its value is \$500-600. **FAR RIGHT:** *Evening Glow at Yosemite Falls* (1930) by Chiura Obata (1885-1975), from Castle's personal collection.



EVEN TO THOSE WHO KNOW him well, Frank Castle '62 is somewhat of an international man of mystery. After losing track of his Kappa Sigma fraternity brother for a few years following graduation, Dave Berkus '62 was shocked to find Castle living in Japan, married to a Japanese woman, and dealing in Asian art—especially as Castle hadn't taken one course in art or Asian studies while at Occidental. Many years later, Carl Brakensiek '64 was surprised to see Castle on television as an Asian art appraiser on the popular PBS series "Antiques Roadshow."

"One night we were watching it and all of a sudden my wife said, 'Hey, there's Frank!'" recalls Brakensiek, Castle's roommate at the Kappa Sig house. "I have no recollection of him being interested in Asian art when we were roommates."

The more time you spend talking to Castle, the more "extraneous" details emerge about him: The two-mile run he took with Muhammad Ali along a golf course in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1973. The front-row access he had to Bob Hope and Raquel Welch during a USO stop in Da Nang as an Army photo officer in Vietnam. Or the time he lunched at the House of Lords as the guest of Lord John Hunt, who led the 1953 British expedition of Mount Everest.

"There's the old saying that when you're doing something you love, you don't have to work a day in your life," says Castle, who has been a fixture on "Roadshow" since 1999. "Well, that's not quite true, but it sure does make it a great deal easier."

Castle has specialized in 18th- through 20th-century Japanese woodblock prints for

the last 35 years, building a hobby into a global business. "I love what I sell, I love what I've collected through the years, and I think it comes across to my clients," he says. "I enjoy finding fine things good homes."

A native of Glendale, Castle transferred to Oxy as a junior from Glendale City College. After graduating with a degree in communications/speech in 1962, with the Vietnam War looming, he enlisted in the Army and received his commission at Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning. He was stationed in Korea, followed by two short tours in Vietnam. While there, he interviewed with the U.S. Information Agency and received an offer to go into the Foreign Service. Castle spent 18 months in the Foreign Service in Saigon—and ended up staying in Asia for 27 years.

While Castle says his interest in art began as a child—his grandfather was an amateur watercolorist who designed sets for New York stage productions, and young Frank was taken to museums and art exhibits—his penchant for Japanese culture began when he lived in Japan for 18 months at the impressionable age of 12. His father was stationed there as a field director in the American Red Cross and brought his family over in 1952.

"While we as a family didn't buy anything important, we traveled widely and had some really interesting opportunities to meet the Japanese people," Castle says. "I stood out because I had curly blond hair, and people would come up and touch my hair just because I was different."

Castle bought his first pieces of Japanese art when he was in the Army in Korea and was given leave to attend the 1964 Olympic

Games in Tokyo. "I was there for the entire two weeks, including opening and closing ceremonies and all the track and field events," he recalls. At that time, he bought his first two Japanese woodblock prints: a minor work by Utagawa Hiroshige ("long since sold") and a landscape by 20th-century printmaker Hiroshi Yoshida. "That was my start of collecting. Whenever I'd go to Tokyo after that, I'd look for prints."

When you add Castle's passion for the outdoors into the mix, the puzzle pieces of his personality start coming together. Many Japanese woodblock prints portray scenic landscapes, often with mountains in the distance. "They can capture such a wonderful feeling of nature," he says. "I think it dovetails very well with my love of nature. I love to see how in some cases the artists have done very powerful landscapes and sometimes very tranquil ones."

As a youth, Castle enjoyed camping and backpacking with his family. "I was always interested in what was on the other side of that ridge," he says, a curiosity that eventually led to him scaling mountains on seven continents. Castle has summited all over the world, including a first ascent of Mount Bokkra (17,500 feet) in the Siguniang Range of China, self-portered ascents of Kilimanjaro and Mawenzi, and, last December, at the age of 69, tackling two peaks in Antarctica.

In June 2002, he completed his goal of ascending all 15 peaks in California over 14,000 feet. These included Mount Whitney via the East Face ("My most challenging climb—I get goosebumps thinking about it."), Mount Sill via the Swiss Arete, and culminating with Mount Williamson, the second highest of the group. He is a Life Fellow

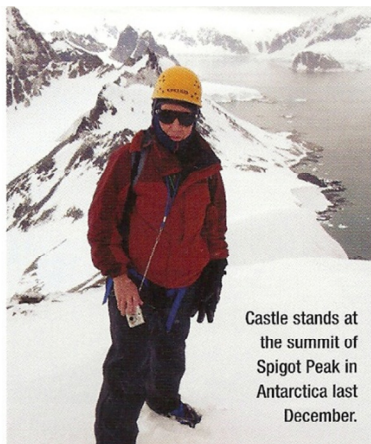
of the Royal Geographical Society and the Explorers Club.

After leaving the Foreign Service, Castle worked for a couple of American companies in Asia (including a five-year stint at Boarts International, a subsidiary of Playboy), continuing to collect Japanese prints as a hobby. He was married and living in Okinawa in 1975 when he decided that he wanted to try opening his own business. So he and his wife moved to Hong Kong and he established the Asian Collector Gallery, dealing in Japanese woodblock prints, China Trade paintings (early paintings that depicted Hong Kong and Shanghai), and antique maps.

"I basically bootstrapped it," Castle says. "I didn't have a business background, but I knew the product that I was selling. And there was a niche for it." He spent 15 years in Hong Kong, holding two shows a year of Japanese prints. "The ex-pat market was really a good one for fine art," he says.

Castle credits his speech and communication classes at Oxy for much of his business success. "I'd like to think that one of my stronger suits is that not only do I know my material—and I guarantee everything I sell—but people can pick up the phone and call me, and I'll walk them through things. I'll explain everything, whether they're buying a \$250 print or a \$10,000 piece."

But in 1990, the situation in Hong Kong was changing. It was going to be reverted to China, and nobody really knew what might



Castle stands at the summit of Spigot Peak in Antarctica last December.

happen. So Castle decided to bring his family (including sons Frank Jr., now 34, and Richard, 32) back to the United States. They settled in Alameda, near his ailing mother, and Castle took over an art gallery that had been run by a Japanese firm in San Francisco. He ran the gallery for six years, until the commute got to be tiring. Realizing that most of his clients were from outside the state or overseas, Castle decided to take his business online and run it from home. Five years ago, he and Castle Fine Arts Inc. relocated to Del Mar.

"Now I've got a really good core of up-market, important collectors," says Castle, who counts private, corporate, and museum clients on five continents. "More and more I'm trying to find the really top-quality pieces. It makes my job a bit easier." Castle travels to Japan two or three times a year

searching for merchandise. He goes with things in mind for certain clients. "I know exactly what I'm looking for," he says. The world of Japanese woodblock collecting is so small, however, that "Unfortunately the dealers know what I'm looking for, too."

In 1999, Peter Montgomery, a friend and fellow art dealer, approached Castle about appearing on the then-new PBS appraisal series "Antiques Roadshow." "Roadshow" travels to cities around the United States, and people in those cities can bring in art, antiques, jewelry, toys and other objects to be appraised by experts for free. The most interesting appraisals are taped for broadcast. "Roadshow" appraisers aren't paid for their appearances—they even pay their own airfare. But if they get an appraisal on the air, it is good publicity for their business.

"One of the rules of 'Roadshow' is we're not allowed to solicit any business at the table," explains Castle, who participates in two to three shows a year. "All we can say, and only if they ask, is 'My card is on the table by the exit door.' And not only are we not allowed to solicit at that time, we have to give it 24 hours. Even if they want to sell their piece, you have to wait 'til the following day."

"Frank brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Asian arts table at the 'Antique Roadshow' venues," says Lark Mason, a "Roadshow" appraiser who has known Castle for 25 years. "There are always situations where we are surprised by something brought to the table."

Mason recalls one instance when Castle was brought a Japanese Imari porcelain coffee or teapot dating to the 17th century. "This particular example was both unusual in the design and fairly rare, and Frank and the rest of us at the table were torn between who would do the appraisal," he says. "The design was Western, the porcelain was Japanese, and the decoration based on Chinese prototypes. We conferred and decided that overall, it was more in the line of Frank's area of expertise, and Frank taped a very informative segment explaining the interrelationships and complexity of the piece."

Castle ended up valuing the piece at \$10,000-\$15,000. The owner, who had flown up to Seattle from San Diego for the show with no idea of the object's value, bought a separate airline seat for the teapot for the flight home. ■



Talking Woodblock

Woodblock printing was adopted in Japan during the Edo period (1603-1867) as a way of printing books. The technique is essentially the same as that which is called woodcut in Western printmaking. The medium quickly gained popularity among artists, and was used to produce small, cheap, art prints as well as books. Some of the prints are of people engaged in everyday activities; others are landscapes that portray the natural world as a source of spiritual insight and an instructive mirror of human emotion.

Ukiyo-e is a genre of woodblock prints produced between the 17th and 20th centuries featuring motifs of landscapes, tales from history, theater, and pleasure quarters. Ukiyo-e were affordable because they could be mass-produced. They were mainly meant for townsmen, who were generally not rich enough to afford original paintings. Among the most popular woodblock artists are Hokusai, who created the hugely popular print series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* in the 1820-30s, and Hiroshige, who crafted the landscape-travelogue series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*. Other major artists include Utamaro, Ito Shinsui, Hiroshi Yoshida, and Hasui Kawase. The depiction of famous views allowed for their idealization and also for experiments with composition that were later adopted by the French Impressionists.

Nineteenth-century European artists "were just blown away" by Japanese woodblock prints, says Castle, a member of the Ukiyo-e Dealers Association of Japan. "Monet, Manet, and Degas were all very much impressed and influenced." Artists still make woodblock prints today of varying quality.