

Photographs, from left, courtesy of www.parisposters.com; courtesy of www.posterclassics.com; courtesy of www.parisposters.com

Peter Goldmacher's flirtation with poster art began in a Paris flea market while on vacation in 2001. There, the 37-year-old San Francisco research analyst first discovered the bold, cartoonish images of mid-century advertisements. But it wasn't until he saw his first Air France poster that he truly fell in love.

"The unbelievable detail...the elegance....They remind me of a simpler time when travel was luxurious," he says.

Six years and dozens of posters later, Goldmacher's collection has spilled into the homes of five family members willing to lend him wall space. He has 50 French travel posters in all, and hopes to double his inventory in the next few years.

For Donna De Coursey, the addiction began 30 years ago on a routine walk home from work. A poster hanging in the window of the Chisholm Gallery, then in downtown Manhattan, caught her eye: a grand château in France's Loire Valley, a perfect sky, vibrant flowers. It made her stop in her tracks and stare.

"These posters look like photographs from far away,"

Wishing Vous Were Here

Even after 100 years,
French poster art still has
the power to seduce.



Eye candy: A. Schindeler's "Autour du Monde" could fetch \$25,000 at auction in May.

De Coursey, 56, says. "The colors are so striking. As you get closer you can see the azaleas, the three different colors of pink, the variations in the lines."

De Coursey and Goldmacher aren't the only ones who've fallen for the sand-washed beaches of Monaco, ladies lounging on the Côte d'Azur or the promise of a luxury journey to another part of the world. French travel posters are enjoying a surge of popularity as Francophiles, past vacationers and those just looking to bring a touch of joie de vivre into their living rooms scoop them up for far less than they would pay for most other forms of art.

"You can't go in and get a really great oil painting at an auction or in a gallery for \$5,000," said Gail Chisholm, owner of the Chisholm Gallery. "But you can with posters."

While a few hundred dollars can still buy a good-quality French travel poster, you'll need tens of thousands to grab the

most coveted. Jack Rennert, founder of International Poster Auctions in New York, which held the first poster auction in the U.S. in 1979, will run an auction this May in which the four top French travel

stone lithography technique pioneered by Jules Cheret at the end of the 19th century enabled advertisers to produce vibrantly colored posters aimed at reaching everyone from cigarette smokers to Champagne

Poster collectors bring a touch of joie de vivre into their living rooms.

posters are expected to sell for \$3,000 to \$25,000. At Christie's, rare ones have gone for close to \$40,000.

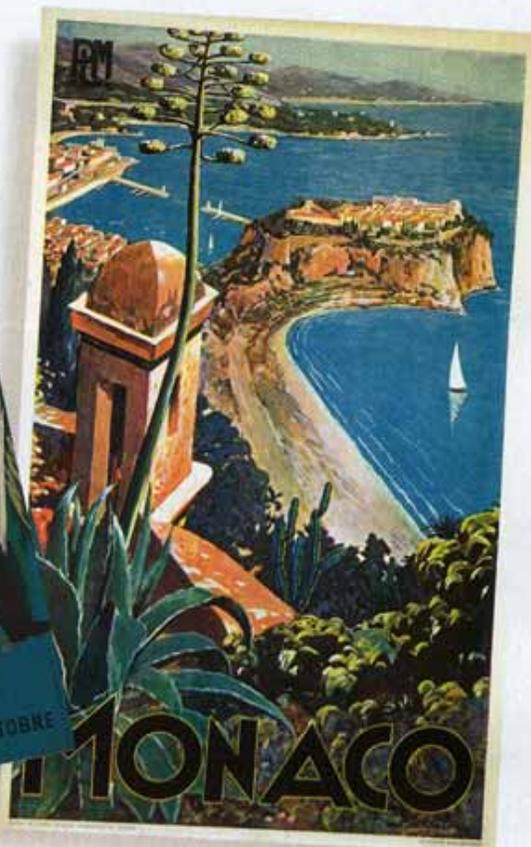
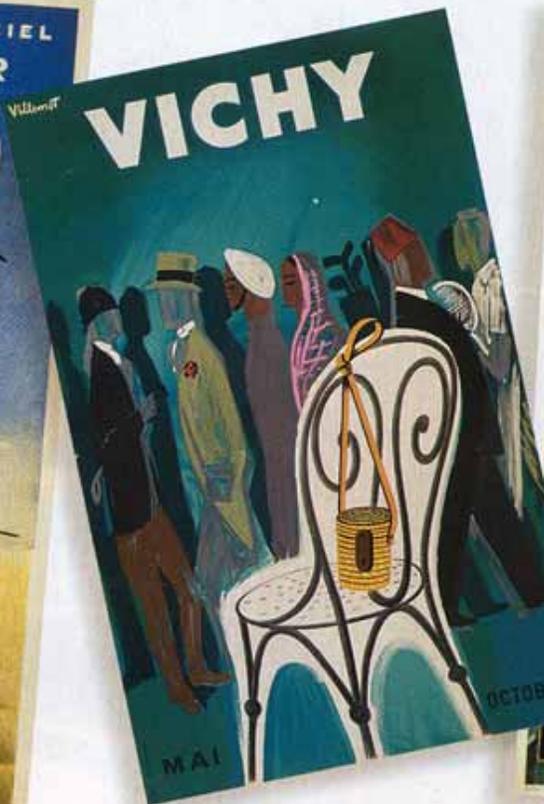
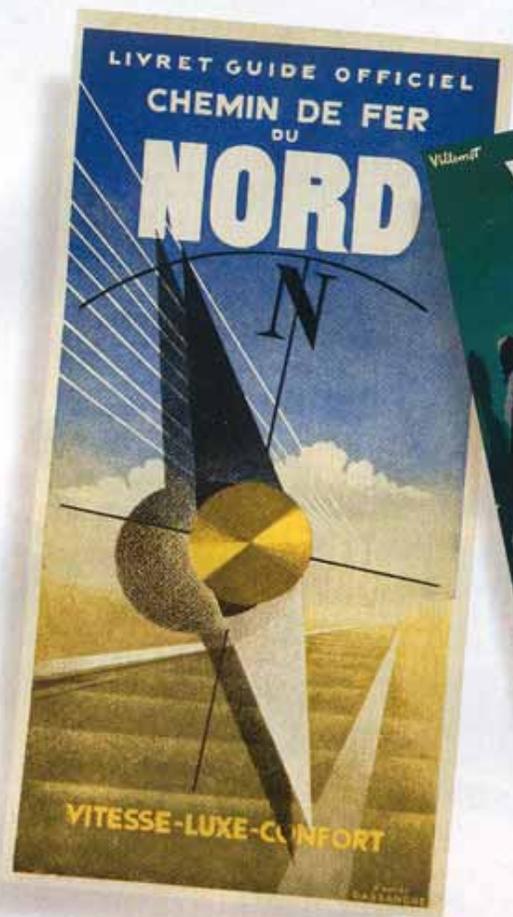
Chisholm has been in the business for more than 30 years and has seen demand increase dramatically.

"When I first started out I could go to Paris and come home with a hundred posters," she said. "Now for the same price, I'd only come back with half of one."

A major reason for such high demand is limited supply. These posters weren't meant to last forever. The multi-color

drinkers. By the 1890s, France's multiple railway companies began plastering their stations to entice travelers with scenes of beautiful people in beautiful places throughout the country.

People began collecting them immediately. But after two world wars, most posters survived in large caches found in travel agents' back rooms or in the basements of avid collectors. Bruce Skilbeck, who runs PosterClassics.com from Annecy, France, remembers one particular story about a great poster find in the 1970s:



Au voyage: a change of scene beckons.

"Two little old ladies had been collecting since the 1890s. When they died, 50,000 beautiful stone lithograph posters were uncovered. Someone bought the whole lot and set up shop," he says.

Collectors who aren't as lucky still have access to a wide range of resources, including galleries, auction houses and online vendors. According to Rennert, a poster's value is based on four things: artist, subject, rarity and condition.

Familiar artists from the early 1900s such as Constant Duval, Georges Dorival and Julien Lacaze and the later Art Deco

masters A.M. Cassandre and Roger Broders can fetch hefty sums: But buyers should beware of buying solely on name. Some of the most highly prized works are jaw-dropping one-offs by artists whose names rarely appear again (such as A. Schindeler's "Autour du Monde," page 72). Nicholas Lowry, president of New York's Swann Galleries, which holds a travel poster auction once a year, advises buyers to consider each poster on its own merits: "The market is absolutely increasing," he says. "But not all ships rise with the tide."

The destination depicted must also be considered. Anything in the South of France fetches a premium—Monaco, Monte Carlo and Nice are all highly sought after. Add people on the beach under those palm trees, and it becomes even more desirable. Make them beautiful women, and the poster gets another bump. If it's an extremely rare poster—meaning only a few dozen are in existence—well, be prepared to add a few zeros to that check.

The IVPDA, or International Vintage Poster Dealers Association, was created in 1996 to ensure across-the-board quality

and now has 80 members. Posters are rated on a letter scale, but few sold at auction dip below "B" quality. Small tears or pinholes are common, but the color always reveals the quality of an original lithograph. The artist's signature should be crisp and clear, even on a poster a century old.

There are other ways to spot a reproduction. For example, the history of the Chemin de Fer posters echoes the history of the French railroad itself. When the lines were incorporated in the mid-1930s, a standard poster size was issued. If it's not 62 by 100 centimeters, it didn't hang in a Paris, Lyon, Mediterranean rail station.

Will the bubble burst? Not anytime soon, according to Rennert's *Poster Prices VIII*—a chronicle of every poster he's ever sold at auction. The aforementioned "Autour du Monde," which features the flags of many countries around the earth, sold for \$2,200 in 1985. It's expected to grab between \$20,000 and \$25,000 in May.

Collectors will probably be itching to get their fix for years to come. Albert Dery, co-owner of ParisPosters.com, knows why: "These posters are more than just advertising. They make people dream." •

UPCOMING AUCTIONS: International Poster Auctions | May 6, 2007 | New York, NY | www.posterauctions.com • Swann Galleries | November 2007 | New York, NY | (212) 254-4710 | www.swannalleries.com

UPCOMING SHOWS: IVPDA | October 19-21, 2007 | Metropolitan Pavilion, New York City | October 26-28, 2007 | Fort Mason Center, San Francisco • A.M. Cassandre Exhibition | Chisholm Gallery | May 2007 | (212) 243-8834 | www.vintagepostersnyc.com

WEBSITES: www.posterclassics.com | www.parisposters.com | www.ivpda.com