

Hi all,

Arrived back in the good old USA, a mob going through immigration then Customs at Washington Dulles Saturday afternoon - as about three planes arrived almost simultaneously, Heathrow, Paris and was at the opposite end of the luggage area getting my stuff out, so didn't see the name at that carousel, but lines kept moving.

Had a grand time! The M/S Harmony, our cruise ship on the Rhine was decorated beautifully for the holidays...and we were delighted that we had the Captain from last year's cruise with us and a couple of other crew members that I recognized from past trips with Grand Circle Cruise Lines. My group was made up of collectors from MD, FL, CA, OK & VA. That first night aboard the ship, we were docked in Amsterdam, so Tine Krijnen, well known maker of books (who also brought along her kits for wrapping mini Xmas presents) was accompanied by her friend, Carla, who had lovely miniature Christmas decorations. They both remained on board and had dinner with us. The next day we went to Cologne Cathedral...incredible stained glass windows that were ablaze in all their glory, with the sun out full blast.

The markets there were great - but we had an appointment with a friend of one of my travelers, who collects and also sells antique miniatures. One large room was filled with about six dollhouses he had found in Spain....and were sold containing all the furnishings! Spread your arms wide and they exceeded that in length. All were front opening with either removable panels or hinged double doors - each one was a treasure. Against another wall he had four high stacks of acrylic cubs connected to each other, each individually locked, filled with gorgeous rooms of furniture: Bedemeier and other antique settings plus accessories - we were all thrilled to have seen such an abundance of truly wonderful pieces. In the entrance hall, a glass front cabinet built into the wall was filled with treasures that were for sale. You can bet, we all took home some treasures!

Our itinerary is still on my web site, I believe, so don't want to bore you with each days findings, but several of us had to buy an extra suitcase....I had sworn I wouldn't need one - but found some great things for our nine grandkids and our five and the in-law spouses, so succumbed! My favorite purchase was a large Santon, called the Mistral...he's about 14" tall, dressed as a shepherd with a sheep-lined cape billowing in the Mistral winds that are indigenous to the Provence region of France....where many Santons are made, terra cotta figures representing all the trades in France and Italy....first sculpted, then fired, then painted, all by hand. I bought a lot of smaller ones, just terra cotta last summer at a factory in Aix en Provence, with Carla Gaustad and Althea Baker in tow! They range from bitso ones that are in my Sue Herber Santon stall....to the large one. Some of you have seen them, while the extremities and faces are beautifully crafted and painted, most are dressed in the iconic fabrics and prints of Provence - and holding representations of their trades....the Lavender Lady is holding a bundle of lavender in her arms, while her husband has a scythe and some just harvested lavender under one arm.....baking, fishing, raising garlic, veggies, fruits, etc. - all are represented, including the clergy. There is at least one Italian company that makes truly exquisite ones, like the Neapolitan creche and Santon figures you would see if you had the good fortune to stop by the Metropolitan Museum of Art/NYC this holiday season. Angels adorn the entire tree from top to bottom. Underneath, the Santons/Saints are marching down a craggy path, bringing their life's work to honor the Newborn King. It's a treat you will never forget!

Two other highlights for me, were visits to the ship by Silvia Leitner, who flew in from Wales, where she and her family have moved from Stuttgart. You quarter inchers would have gone nutsy cuckoo over her wee dolls. Jayne Volpitta and bought some of the teeniest laser cut figures I had ever seen at the Cologne Market... Neuremberg angels, nutcrackers - one dimensional, to hang on a very small Christmas tree or decorate a swag around your C'mas stall. We had a momentary panic when we thought her box had been lost in the trunk of a taxi....and then I couldn't find mine, so figured they were both lost, and we were on a quest to replace them! Then Silvia came and Voila! SHE had made some of the same type at the last moment but had painted hers, perfectly! In the meantime, I had found my lost box but we were still grieving over Jayne's.....and the day we started packing, I found her box of the natural ones in one of my shoes in cabin closet! I never saw such euphoria as the two of us shared!

The Basel toy/doll/teddy bear/dollhouse museum was filled with even more treasures, including the 4th floor gallery of changing exhibits. A display of pottery with fish design - and a couple of cases with fish

suspended at various "depths" from the ceiling...fish don't turn me on, particularly, but the cleverness of the exhibit was worth a look. However, the part that made everyone smile was getting off the elevator, opening the door to the gallery and feeling as though you were walking on water - with fish swimming in it, darting around! It was a projection from somewhere, camera cleverly concealed somewhere - never did see it.

But also in that gallery, along with some fabulous dolls and teddies, there was a panoramic display of a Neopolitan village, filled with the dressed Santons I mentioned earlier. Next time you see me, ask me to show it to you, I captured it as a video on my camera....if one of my grand kids tell me how to send it via the computer, I'll post it on my web site and let you know. when and if I'm successful. But first I have to concentrate on Christmas....we're going to one grandson's basketball tournament tomorrow night then the KenCenter Tuesday night to see The Grinch Who Stole Christmas, the musical....then the family heads out Wednesday for our daughters' investment property lake house in Deep Creek Lake, Western MD Catoctin mtns.....usually have a white Christmas there....and the young ones can ski or go tubing...it's not the Alps but it suffices!

Someone asked me what my favorite Xmas Market was....all were fun, great food, crafts, decorations, Gluhwein, indigenous foods of all kinds: cheeses, meats, cookies, chocolates, all shrink wrapped in lovely boxes or wrappings, mittens and gloves, etc. - but the Market in Baden-Baden in the Black Forest was my personal best in show. I could have stayed there a couple of days - and been broke! In summer, the town is a spa town for those with truly deep pockets! Romans discovered the curative waters....Stacy Moser brought her bathing suit and went to the gorgeous pools, missing the Markets, but about 10 from our group did the same thing and said it was fabulous! The permanent shops in town were top drawer retailers, if you can call Cartier, a retailer!!!

Dealers on the cruise participate in our onboard mini miniatures show.....Linda Boltrek/FL brought some of her merchandise, but included were pieces by Martha Watkins - everyone loves her little dolls, perfectly dressed.....and I had seen a few things at another show where Linda was and told her to bring them to the ship, so I took home some of her work, too. Harva/AZ had some of the lovely silver and turquoise mini necklaces as well as Reutter's Gluwein sets, with Santa on the mugs and urn, naturally! They were snapped up for a few stalls before it was over!

BTW, 2017 Danube Christmas Market cruise, I've reserved cabins for Dec 1 US departure, sailing Nuremburg to Vienna...pre and post cruise extensions in Munich and Vienna. Grand Circle is taking deposits now. This will be my last time on the Danube...it's my favorite of the river cruises - but Jim's health issues are increasing and I want to be with him. This cruise is only a week long, so it fits a lot of those not yet retired. But you can always extend your trip or go in a few days earlier, if there is an area that you don't want to miss. Lots of miniatures on this trip. If you know anyone who wants to go, they need to call GCCL asap with their \$500 deposit: 1 800 597 2452, press 2 and give them my Group's code: G720068, name of cruise and departure date: Dec 1, 2017. Tell your friends, as I plan to turn back any un-reserved cabins by the end of January.

If anyone wants more info, call me 703 200 341.

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah! Love it when they overlap! I just about had a heart attack...couldn't remember if Hanukkah had two "k"s" or one and lost this whole post going to the dictionary....had been writing for an hour...it just magically reappeared, thank God!

Do remember to tell your friends to check out my web site....lots of fun ahead in 2017. There is always a plan B for those who aren't interested into miniatures...they do exist, you know! Like visiting Kensington Palace and Marks and Spencer....all across the street from the Kensington Town Hall...venue for my May trip to England and visit to the Kensington Dolls House Festival.....plus Highclere Palace event and more surprises. Look at the flyer on my web site.

Cheers,

Molly

www.mollycromwell.com

703 200 5341

P.S. Harva Basinger, (OK).....brought me the greatest Santa hat to wear on the Rhine! She and her pals had one too....when you press the button, it plays a Christmas version of "Shout"! And everyone starts laughing and dancing along immediately while watching the hat's gyrations!

PPS: Thanks, Larry Herman(CA) for helping out with the onboard workshop. It was one of Deb Laue's Raggedy kit dollhouse for a dollhouse.....celebrating a landmark anniversary for one of most little girl's favorite doll. He suggested we not cut out the bitso parts that go in to decorating it until we were home and had time to do it properly.....hope all my Chickadees got home safely....Larry, if you are reading this, be sure to tell Betty I loved having you guys along!