

Your Guide to the Ultimate Home Game Room

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The Arcades of Japan

**Pachinko! Pachislo!
Pandemonium!**

Why Japan's Arcade Scene is Still Thriving

New Pinball Column!

Rob Craig's *Tales of the Silverball*

Game Room Candies

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Rob Craig's

Tales of the Silverball



First, An Introduction

Welcome to the first ever Tales of the Silverball column. My name is Rob Craig, pinball fanatic. As “firsts” often debut with a short history from the author, I should follow suit.

As my age finally accumulated into two digits, I found myself becoming an avid pinball player. It was the early 80's and I was falling hard for this live action flipper smashing machine. As other forms of recreation competed for my attention (girls included!), I fell in and out of love with pinball in the teenage years.

At 20, I started my first degree in Electrical Maintenance, later Electronics Tech., and finally a Bachelors in Electrical Engineering Technology at Murray State University. With the sheepskin came the end of all the schematic study and physical analysis.

My post-graduate career had taken me into the information technology field. A broken pinball machine saved my quickly depleting memory of circuit study (Anyone owning a dead Gottlieb system 80 can relate!)

In just a few years my collection of restored pinball machines amassed. Before ipdb.org was offering manuals and ROM images, I created Popbumper.com as a side project to host my own collection of pinball information. That emerged into a place to review various pinball products and write soapbox articles and

finally to showcase video projects such as Pinball Expo material and the popular *Life After Death* pinball series. As of late I've been graciously allowed to dawn the pages of GameRoom Magazine with an array of articles on pinball.

Expect with this column that just about anything Silverball-related is fair game. From technical repair to reviews with pinball designers, I intend to keep you entertained and informed. With this motive in mind, let's kick off this first entry with a juicy topic that will get the butterflies moving in any collector.

Warehouse Finds: The Game Collector's “Jewel of the Nile”

As I look back upon the past 9 years of collecting, I recall a lot of leg work that produced very little in terms of volume purchases. That certainly doesn't mean that I didn't obtain some fine single machines. But overall, I can recall only 4 large warehouse finds that manifested into an actual bulk purchase. Most people want to know how I found the warehouse to begin with and, most importantly, how I sealed the deal.

Finding a warehouse could be as simple as searching the Amusement Devices section in your regional yellow pages or searching online engines like Yahoo and Google. Your goal here is to locate those who have purchased and operated machines for years. Those are the ones who *potentially* have equipment.

I'm emphasizing the word *potential* here since amusement auctions account for a lot of empty inventory these days. Don't be surprised if an operator only has a few broken pieces in their workshop and no major storage facility. While there are few bulk buys in this scenario, you can still land some great deals on one or two machines that have been problematic for their technicians.

But there *are* some operators with large storage buildings packed tight with machines on top of machines and a thick layer of dust coating them all. Getting a tour or even getting the business to let you see the warehouse will normally re-





This is a collector's dream come true

quire a process of time, discussion, and trust. More on that later.

Another option in your equipment exploration is looking for the ex-operator. Consider putting yourself back in time 10 or 20 years ago and researching which operators were in business then. In my case, one of the large “finds” that materialized into a “buy” was from an ex-operator who had equipment stored away in a building for years. But to find him I looked up previous owners of large arcades in the area.

I started by looking at old newspaper headlines on film at the local library about arcade grand openings. If I couldn't find the source of the equipment, I called on the original owners of the old arcades by just looking them up in the phonebook. Again, time, discussion, and trust are all part of getting these folks to talk about their experience “back in the day.”

I have to mention luck here too. Sometimes these things just fall into your lap. Without any networking or referrals at all, I found 27 pieces that were being operated at a fast food restaurant. I was in this small town on business with a local that knew about my arcade equipment obsession. He mentioned that this place had a full-sized arcade inside, so I had to check it out.

Once there, I noticed that all the machines were token driven. This is usually a sign that there is no operator involved, no dedicated technical staff (good for cheaper sales on broken machines), machines that haven't been rotated (machines with little cabinet wear). In short, the restaurant owner had tried his hand as owner/operator for 10 years and was ready to sell out his inventory, but only in bulk. Three visits, a fat cashier's check, and many burgers later, we sealed this deal. The equipment was in top condition requiring very little in terms of restoration.

So far, I've talked about finding these places but the key to actually buying in



bulk has everything to do with flexibility and tactfulness. In every case in bulk buying, I've had to develop a relationship with the business owner. They have to believe you are genuine, cool headed, and trustworthy.

I've found that I have to spend time listening to them share their stories (which I enjoy), and let them know that I'm more interested in restoring and preserving these pieces than spinning them on one leg and making a quick buck. Few have understood the passion behind the collector's drive to obtain, but all understand the color and smell of cash.

For me it has required a scouting visit, a social visit, a business visit where I drop a proposed price in writing for a specific list of machines, and then hopefully their acceptance of the offer. And 90% of the time, they want cold hard cash. In the absolute best bulk buys, thorough game inspection or even powering on the equipment wasn't allowed. But the price was very right!

There are so many things that are left unsaid on this topic. Like, your knowledge of the market in order to put a value on the machines you want, and your ability to repair electronic circuit boards or pinball mechanical devices. You need a network of coin-op contacts which in my case includes small opera-



The excitement of the find goes to Rob's head

tors that I have bought a few machines from in the past.

You obviously need a cool head and a bit of business sense. You must be willing to spend time with them and above all, be patient. When they're ready to sell, you be ready to buy and move.

I'll cap this off with one more short story. It had been 2 years since I had made the first contact and proposal to buy a large bulk of pinball machines. Since then, I kept up my contact and actually bought three pinball machines from this specific operator.

On a Thursday, I was called and told that the storage building where the bulk of their old equipment remained was being torn down. Everything had to be moved. If I could show up in the morning, I could buy as many pinball as I could afford at rock bottom prices. All machines that I bought had to be moved that very day. What was there? What did I buy? Found out soon in the Popbumper.com video "Warehouse Raid", coming this Fall! **GR**

HUGE SALE!

We are scaling down and having a huge inventory reduction sale!

Included:

- Pinballs – Electronmechanical and Newer
- Videos – Many Classics!
- Slots – 1930's to Present
- Gumball / Peanut – 1920's and up
- Advertising Clocks
- Arcade Games
- Parts, and much more!

Sale will be held in Mt. Clemens, MI
Sept. 8, 9, and 10

Check our website after Sept. 1st for full list of sale items and details of sale

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