

# Hard Rock's collection of memorabilia brings in a whole new type of visitor

RYAN LOUGHLIN Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Robert Shapiro gazed in awe at a gold outfit worn by the late David Bowie on display at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City.

“Now I have a reason to come here,” said Shapiro, a consultant from New York who has been collecting rock ’n roll memorabilia since he was a teenager.

Shapiro has made two trips to the resort since the casino opened late last month, and neither has been for gambling purposes.

“I can’t believe how much stuff they have. Imagining the sheer volume of it all was enough to make me get in the car and come down here. I had to see it in person,” he said.

Unlike its neighboring casinos, the music memorabilia Hard Rock is known for making its property desirable to folks who simply would not have been interested in spending an evening in a casino otherwise.

“They have stuff I could never get my hands on,” Shapiro said. “I get excited when I find a rare copy of Rolling Stone, meanwhile they’ve got the original, handwritten lyrics to John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ sitting in a case. I can’t imagine how hard it must be to track that stuff down.”

Turns out, acquiring the memorabilia is a fairly complex process.

“We do have such a great rapport with the artists, so a lot of times they will come directly to us with donations for the collection, because they know how much we treasure each item,” says Giovanni Taliaferro, director of design and memorabilia for Hard Rock International. “We treat them as museum pieces. Also a lot of times we will make a donation in their name to a charity in exchange for an artifact.”

The process can also include outside sources, auctions and even fans.

“When a new project pops up, a lot of people will approach us and say, ‘Hey, I have this artifact, would you be potentially interested?’ But no matter what, whether it’s from an auction house, the fans or even an artist themselves, we require proof of authenticity. We pride ourselves on our collection being 100 percent authentic,” Taliaferro said.

Authenticity is not only important to the collectors, it seems to be the main reason fans want to come out and see this stuff in person.

For Shapiro, one piece at Hard Rock Atlantic City stood out — a Les Paul guitar played by Slash of Guns N’ Roses. Shapiro claims to have seen that same guitar when the band first appeared on TV in 1987. Seeing it in person “blew his mind.”

Shapiro is not alone in his thoughts, either. Taliaferro says this memorabilia is “magical” and “can take you back to a certain place and time.”

“I grew up a huge Michael Jackson fan. I can remember when the video would come on TV I would run to the TV, practice the dances. It was a special time,” Taliaferro said. “So when I first started with Hard Rock and I saw the jacket and beaded glove for the first time, my jaw just dropped, and I remembered doing the dances to those videos and that I had a replica version of that jacket — a red one and a black one — and it took me back to that particular time.”

But it’s more than nostalgia, Taliaferro said. The items Hard Rock displays are pieces of history, on par with what you’d see in a Smithsonian museum in Washington. As such, he said, the company puts a lot of effort into making sure each location has the most appropriate pieces in it.

The Hard Rock in Atlantic City has an entire room devoted to Jersey icons, with pieces such as Springsteen’s denim jacket, a guitar from Jon Bon Jovi and a motorcycle owned by the late E Street Band saxophonist Clarence Clemons.

“There are some amazing pieces in Atlantic City. I would say the overall collection here is probably the most iconic display of any property within our brand.”