

# ATADA NEWS

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Close-ups: Ross Traut, Cindra Kline

Mysteries of Zuni Silver: Part One

ATADA's Valentine to Jay Evetts



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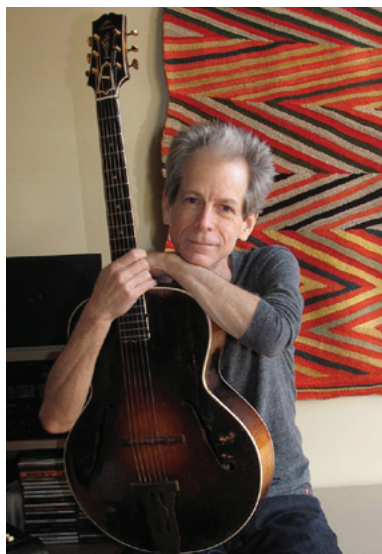
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# MEMBER CLOSE-UP

*Although Ross Traut is known to most dealers and collectors as a specialist in Navajo textiles, he is known in the music world for another reason.*

*Ross Traut*



**O**f the several ATADA members who play the guitar, Ross Traut says he relates most to Bob Caparas: “He is quiet about his music, and keeps it separate from his Indian art business.” The two men also share a love of jazz guitar, which both play. “It was funny to find somebody who does what I do and who likes what I like, something like discovering a parallel universe.”

Ross “became a guitar player when I saw the Beatles on Ed Sullivan in 1964. Playing guitar was what I wanted to do, and I never looked back.” He didn’t have to look far for additional inspiration. “My dad was a musician, and the art form still keeps him alive.” His love for pop music soon grew to include a love for jazz. “I spent a lot of

years studying and playing jazz, and at heart, I am a jazz guitar player. But I love and have made my living playing different styles of pop music.” Ross has recorded with James Taylor, Curtis Mayfield, Brazilian jazz pianist Eliane Elias, to name just three. [www.discogs.com](http://www.discogs.com) describes him as a “top session musician” and Amazon sells two of his own albums (recorded with long-time friend Steve Rodby).

“Most of my adult life was spent pursuing a musical career – music was the only thing I studied, was the only thing that was interesting enough to go to school for. After two years studying at the University of Miami, I felt I was ready to play professionally. Little did I know that there was a great collection of Navajo weaving at the campus museum.”

His love for Navajo weaving was born, Ross believes, when he was a freshman in high school in Wilmette, Illinois. “I have a memory of seeing some Navajo rugs for sale on a table at a garage sale, and thinking ‘if I had some money, I’d buy those.’ I didn’t know what they were, but I knew they were cool. Then, about 12 years ago, I saw some Navajo rugs hanging on a fence at a flea market

on 27th Street and 6th Avenue, near where I live in New York City, and I bought them. I’ve always been interested in things that enrich my life and my home. I thought these rugs were mysteriously beautiful. I started collecting, and after a while, I couldn’t afford to buy any more.” That’s when he found out he could buy and sell enough to “support my collecting.”

Around that same time – circa 2000 – “I had more time. I wasn’t working that much, and when I did work, it was as a recording musician. So collecting grew naturally from an avocation to a vocation. Now the balance has shifted from making my living as a musician to making my living as a dealer.”



navajo fancy manta c.1875

# MEMBERCLOSE-UP .....

How did his wife feel about that? "My wife, Rosa Rodriguez, has always supported my choices, as I have hers, and shares my appreciation of the material. The only area where we differ is whether or not to go out on that next limb as opposed to breathing. Although I met her in New York City while she was studying and working as a modern dancer, she happens to be related to some of the Hispanic weavers in Northern New Mexico. Her family on her dad's side has a long history in Espanola." Ross and Rosa's daughter, Cora, 13, "is much too busy looking at you tube to take notice of my vocation, but she is totally cool and I love my daily one-hour walk to pick her up from school, and the fact that I get to hang around the pad with her and my wife as much as I do."

It was selling to dealers, Ross says, that "made it clear that this was something I could do. I started by working with Josh Baer, and I became a picker for Josh and other dealers, wholesaling. I realized they liked the stuff I liked. I could follow my own interests and love of the material. And I find it is the same with music," Ross continues. "I made my own records, and know what it is to be an artist and make choices as an artist. In art, you have to be true to your own interest or you will be lost. For me, that is the only way to be successful. Being a dealer representing this great material, the same formula applies. Collect for yourself, and other people will come along on your journey." On the other hand, buying material "based on what you think people will like," or worse still, based on the presence of "raveled reds" or other technical properties "can be dangerous. There is no guarantee anyone will like it if you don't."

These days, Ross still buys from and sells to dealers, but as a peer. He expands his list of private customers at shows, and at "venues where the material is being offered," and by word of mouth. A neighbor, Stephen Shadley, is "an amazing interior designer," and will sometimes steer his clients (think Diane Keaton) to Ross. He buys "anywhere and everywhere,

just like any other dealer. You have to keep your eyes open, and be where the material is."

And, increasingly, the material can be found at Ross's own desk. "I'm a homebody and I tend to stare at my computer



My desk (built it myself, mostly)

wouldn't have interested you before. There is a lot of great material in many price ranges, material that is exciting and will enrich your life and you can put in your home and enjoy."

Ross's role models as a young musician were the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and B.B. King. Later, he looked to Wes Montgomery (Bob Caparas is also a fan), Miles Davis and Keith Jarrett.

He admires James Taylor personally and professionally – "I spent time with him and he is an amazing musician."

Ross's list of role models among Indian art dealers starts with Josh Baer. "The things I learned from him really hold up in terms of the kind of material he represented, and having the ability to describe why the material was of great value as art. He was able to communicate that to me."

Josh was one of the first people Ross worked with when he started collecting/buying/selling, but Ross emphasizes

his respect for all the current dealers. "They are all so knowledgeable, and all add something uniquely valuable to the arena. And they have all been very helpful to me. In particular, John Molloy encouraged me early on and has been



The apartment with rugs etc.





Navajo wedgeweave blanket c.1885

consider selling now. It is the journey of the dealer who can't afford to keep everything he finds. The more material that passes through my hands, the less I can afford to keep every piece. I find new things by letting the old things go. I have found that the more mature the dealer, the smaller the private collection."

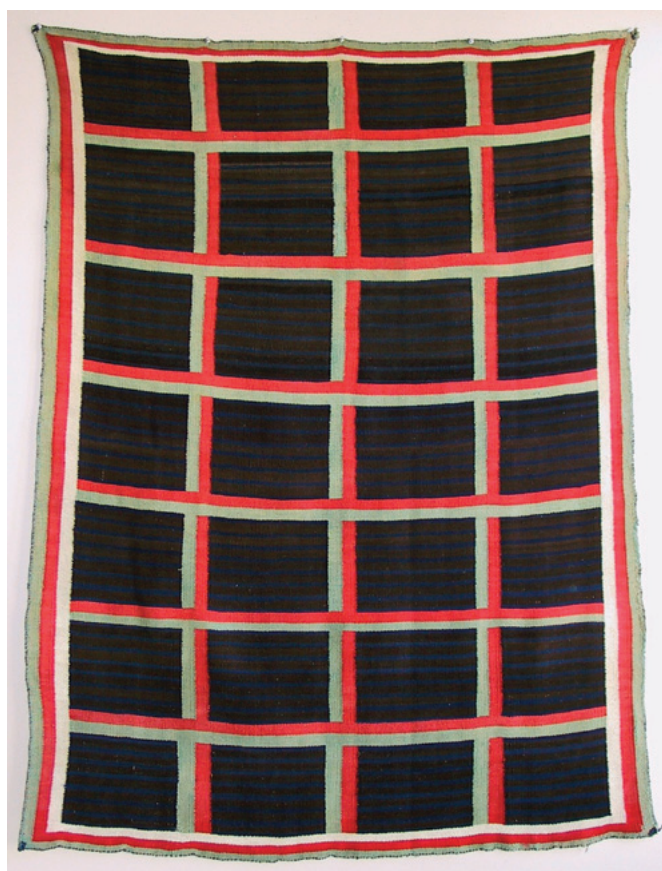
When he thinks about the Navajo weaving collectors who are also involved in music -- Eliot Michael, who sells vintage guitars as well as Navajo weaving, is another example -- Ross says that he feels that looking at old Navajo textiles relates to listening to and playing music. "Not in a corny way," he says, "but because they both 'massage' the same part of the brain. There is a connection between looking at Navajo blankets and listening to music. I play the guitar because of the therapy, almost as if playing were a religion. That same itch is scratched by Navajo textiles."

a good friend.

Ross generously mentions "The Navajo Weaving Tradition," written by Chris Selser and the editor of this magazine, as "the first good book I read on the subject. It helped me to get more interested." And came in handy as well.

"I was at a furniture auction in upstate New York that had what looked like a Navajo textile in the catalog, estimated at \$100/200. I didn't know what it was, but I loved it, and it ended up being the most contested item at the auction. I paid \$1000 (it took forever because the bidding was in increments of \$10). After I bought it, people at the auction were commiserating with me, thinking I had paid much too much. But when I got home, I looked in 'The Navajo Weaving Tradition' and saw a very similar textile. Without knowing what I was bidding on, I'd bought a Navajo 1870s fancy manta. It was one of the great moments of my collecting life. 'I've got one of those!' I thought. I have not been able to repeat that kind of purchase."

Ross estimates there are more than 200 Navajo and Pueblo weavings in his collection, and out of that large group, there is a smaller group of never-sell textiles. "But that group always keeps shifting. Things I never would have sold before, I



Navajo moki blanket c.1875