

Atari cast-offs could be treasure trove for East Bay man

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Before "Halo," "World of Warcraft" or any "Grand Theft Auto," there was "Pole Position," "Donkey Kong," and yes - everyone's favorite - "Dig Dug."

And Cort Allen has the documents, designs and diagrams to prove it - at least for another day.

On Thursday, his collection of all-things Atari goes up for bid at Sotheby's New York. It is expected to sell for between \$150,000 and \$250,000.

Allen, 60, a Pleasanton resident and semiconductor design consultant, laughs at the estimated sale price. Back in 1985, he just thought it was a lot of cool stuff.

At that time, Allen was looking for used furniture for his new Quest Consulting company and he stopped in Sunnyvale at an office equipment fire sale for Atari which had gone belly up.

"I saw these cabinets and told the guy, 'I want to buy these cabinets,'" Allen remembered. "They were full of all this original artwork for the game cartridges and the original manual writeups.

"The guy said, 'Sure, let me just clean them out for you, and I said, 'No, no I want that stuff,'" Allen recalled.

"He said, 'Why? It's junk,' Allen said. "And I said, 'Yeah, but it's cool junk.'"

Allen paid \$2 for each of the 40 cabinets, each chockful of Atari 2600 pixelated goodness, which included drafts for a manual for the game "Robotron 2084," classic artwork from "Dig Dug" and early images of such characters such as Mario and Donkey Kong, for Atari versions of the Nintendo games.

"I used

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said with a laugh.

Allen, who still owns an original Atari 2600, said if the video game documents get the right bid, he's hoping to use the money to help pay off his kids' college bills.

"It's really great stuff," Allen said. "It's the history of Atari. I used to look at it quite a bit. But I'm OK parting with it now. I'm tired of moving it around my house."

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In Pleasanton, Calif., on Tuesday, June 19, 2007, a preliminary drawing of the... (DOUG DURAN)

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to look at that stuff a lot," Allen said.

Since that time, Allen said he's moved the 350 pounds of video game history around his house, from closet, to shelves to garage - all much to his wife's chagrin.

"My wife's so thrilled" with the auction," Allen said. "She'll probably even be happier Thursday when she knows it's gone for good."

Allen too is looking forward to Thursday. While he loves his collection of Atari artifacts, he also loves the numbers Sotheby's has told him he might get from his auction.

"Honestly, I thought maybe it was worth a couple of thousand dollars," he said. "When I found out how much they were estimating it at, I couldn't believe it.

"It's one of those things where I said I'd never part with it. Then somebody comes along and makes you an offer you can't believe and you say, 'Sold,'" Allen

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