

The Finest Chess Collection in the World

by New In Chess, Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam

The finest copies of the rarest books, countless classics signed by the authors, a 15th century Lucena manuscript, score-sheets ranging from Fischer's Game of the Century against Donald Byrne to all the games of the 1927 New York tournament, eight letters by Morphy, over 70 Lasker manuscripts, Capablanca's golden pocket watch, a contract of the 1886 Steinitz-Zukertort world chess championship match... There is no end to the treasures in David De Lucia's chess library, arguably the finest chess collection in the world. An exquisite collection and a very private place, the inner sanctum of the collector, where he looks for peace and quiet and barely allows visitors. Thanks to his catalogue and two lavish photo books his fellow collectors know the magnificence of the De Lucia library, but only a few have actually seen it. Family members and a few close friends apart, so far only five (!) people had the privilege. Small wonder that Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam couldn't believe his good fortune when he was received as the 6th visitor.

When you walk into David De Lucia's library, you enter a haven of order and clarity. No matter where you look, you will not see the stacks of books or random piles of paper that seem to be the fate of any grand-scale collector. All books are neatly lined up on shelves, protected against dust behind glass. For their further well-being, the temperature and humidity in the L-shaped 1000-square-foot room are controlled. Thousands of chess books, from a first edition of Damiano (1512) to the personal (and signed) copy of Bobby Fischer's, "My 60 Memorable Games", form the core of the library. However, the fame of the collection is in no small part due to a tremendous number of manuscripts, autographs, and what De Lucia calls 'ephemera': memorabilia of the great champions, such as Paul Morphy's chess board, Capablanca's top hat or Fischer's childhood accordion. The letters, manuscripts and score sheets are kept in folders, which in turn are kept in custom-made archive boxes that fill many a shelf in the cupboards next to his desk. The ephemera sit mostly next to or between books that are exhibited with their special or decorative covers turned to the viewer. Some of the exhibits sit on top of the bookcases amid items that have nothing to do with chess, such as family photos or etchings by Rembrandt or Dürer.

Amid the non-chess items, a framed one-dollar note catches the eye. David De Lucia tells me that his father gave it to him when he was a young man and wrote on it: May you never be broke. 'We came from a poor family, so he probably wanted to say, I hope you'll be successful. My father was a gambler and unfortunately, as it goes with gamblers, they never seem to have any money and are always looking forward to the next big win, which never comes. He was a hard-working man, a fisherman and a beautician, a hairdresser, kind of a strange combination. Unfortunately, a lot of the money that he made was just squandered.'

David De Lucia spent his working life on Wall Street, never forgetting his childhood years. Although he worked with money, he didn't feel like a gambler. 'In the position I was in, I was much more the casino than the gambler. There's a huge difference between the guy on that side of the table and the gambler. Even though it's gambling, when you have the odds in your favor it's a little bit different. My business was investing in securities. My responsibility was investing firm capital for three firms, spanning roughly 25 years.' In those years, he worked for Salomon Brothers, which he joined in 1976, Goldman Sachs and Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette. In 2000, when the latter firm was taken over by rival Credit Suisse First Boston for \$11.5bn, he left and retired. His father need not have worried, he was never broke. According to the financial press, De Lucia 'made a serious fortune on Wall Street'.

His passion for collecting was ignited when he was working for Salomon Brothers in London and a colleague sitting next to him gave him a piece of advice. 'I guess you couldn't have two more opposite people. One a refined blueblood, the other a kid that grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, with no money. He was a very wealthy and well-bred guy. This was a guy who used to spend his summers at Blenheim Palace (the birthplace of Winston Churchill in Oxfordshire, UK – DJtG) and the Churchills would come over here. He went to school with Harry Oppenheimer's son, the diamond guy, and married Henry Ford's niece. It always annoyed him that his mother had given a Gutenberg Bible to Yale University and not to him! He had a magnificent home. Your home should be your castle and that's where it should be shown. Nowhere else. I loved that philosophy. I still drive my Toyota Camry, I still dress down, that's what I like. This guy was an avid fine arts collector, and he said, you should start collecting something. I was pretty green, before I went to London, I had never been abroad. He said, what do you like doing? I said, I like playing chess. Chess was always a part of my life, although I was never that good at it. I think the highest my rating ever got was 2220. And he said, well, start collecting chess.'

The start was modest. In 1985, De Lucia bought eight books at the Ford chess auction at Phillip's and one year later he acquired 'some good books' at the Michael Macdonald-Ross sale. But all in all, he found that rare books were indeed rare. After his return to the U.S. he visited the New York Antiquarian Book Fair in the spring of 1988, asking dealers if they had any chess books. The golden tip came from a dealer from California, who told him that there was a big collection on the market, the Hennessey collection. Reginald Hennessey had died some years earlier and his widow was looking to sell it. Several collectors, including Lothar Schmid, had already been in touch with her, trying to buy certain items but her husband Reg, as everyone called him, had given her the instruction not to sell it piecemeal. He had also told her to ask \$100,000 for the collection, a price she herself was to lower to \$85,000.

After De Lucia had found her telephone number, she kindly invited him to come to the West Coast and allowed him to inspect the collection for three days. Comparing Hennessey's library to his catalogues and price lists he soon came to the conclusion that 600 of the books alone were worth \$85,000 if he would have to buy them individually from dealers. As the total number of books was about three thousand, there was no reason to hesitate. 'It just turned out to be a remarkable collection. He had a first edition Ruy Lopez, 1561, a Gianutio, 1597, and a beautiful Carrera, 1617. He loved Philidor and was very proud that he had over a hundred editions. Of course, he had the French 1749 first edition, the German 1754 first edition, the first Dutch and first English editions. He had a Cozio, 1766, he had a number of manuscripts, maybe 10 or 20 of them, some of them done by pretty good people. A whole set of periodicals. An almost complete run of Deutsche Schachzeitung, a complete run of BCM, Steinitz's, "International Chess Magazine". It didn't suit most collectors because they would already have had a lot. For me it was a perfect fit, as I had virtually nothing of that kind. I was also fortunate that she was in the art book publishing business and she wrapped them all up and sent them to me. I lived in a small two-bedroom in New York City and the whole living room was filled with boxes, floor to ceiling. Every night I'd take a box and go to the other room and open it. It was like Christmas for six months. That was the start of it.'

The Hennessey collection was the first, but certainly not the last library he bought. For an ambitious collector there simply is no other route. At auctions you may fill gaps in your collection by bidding on individual books, but if you want to pick up speed and really expand in certain areas, the best strategy is to buy the complete collection of someone who has specialized in such an area. Sometimes these acquisitions come about in unexpected, even -hilarious ways. 'One day there was a guy in Massachusetts at an auction, he had a number of Morphy items, among them Morphy's cane, and the first edition of Fischer's, "My 60 Memorable Games", signed. And every time I am bidding on a good item, there's someone else bidding against me. And I am only winning about half of them. I'm thinking, who can this guy be? Two or three days

later, I get a call from Sam Ennis from Madison, Wisconsin. Fred Wilson, the book dealer in New York, always thought that Sam had the finest 19th century Americana chess collection in the world. Sam was an avid collector, but he was always between collecting and not having any money. He was proud to say that about 80 per cent of his disposable income went to buying chess books. So he calls me to ask if I was the other guy at the auction and tells me that after buying all this stuff he is broke. I said, you bid all this stuff up and now you're broke?! Then he said, I'd like you to do me a favor. What? I'd like to see it for about a week and then would you buy it from me? And I said OK, although it now cost me several thousand dollars extra. He had it for a week and then I bought the lot. He lived in a trailer in Madison, Wisconsin. I'll never forget the day I visited him. It was like going into the heart of darkness in the middle of Africa. It must have been 100 degrees, if not 120 in the trailer, 99 per cent humidity and I am allergic to cats and he had all these cats. And then he smoked. I think it took about 10 years for his stuff to lose its smell. I aired it out and gave it a lot of space to breathe. It was probably the only collection that I had grossly overpaid for, but I didn't mind. Sam was a good man, one of those guys that if he gave you his word on something you could take it to the bank. He had some great stuff, like a bound copy of Steinitz's, "International Chess Magazine" inscribed by Steinitz, which is rare.'

At first, he mainly collected books, until Jeff Kramer, the chess book dealer from Whitehall, Pennsylvania, convinced him that he should focus on autographs, too. Kramer loved autographs and thanks to his connections in American chess circles he had amassed an imposing collection. In the end, De Lucia bought his Lasker collection, which consisted of 100 manuscripts, 1,000 letters, 75 postcards and numerous signed books and honorary diplomas presented to Lasker. Many more autographs of a multitude of players were acquired when De Lucia bought what he calls 'a beautiful collection' from Hanon Russell.

What he does pride himself on is that he was ahead of his time in looking for what he calls 'ephemera'. Few if any collectors were interested in personal belongings of the great players, whereas he always loved them. But then he is talking about Fischer's chess clock or Capablanca's chess board, not just anything. 'You shouldn't get obsessed with it. I had the opportunity to buy a lot of Capablanca's and Fischer's clothes. I wanted none of that.

The only thing I would have bought of Fischer's, if it had been there, was one of those flannel shirts he had as a boy, I loved those. But you have to draw a line somewhere.'

Jeff Kramer also receives credit for pushing him into a clear direction. 'One day he said to me, you should really, if nothing else, collect the champions. And I started thinking about it and thought, I always liked Morphy, going over his games. I liked Lasker. I loved Capablanca and Alekhine. And Fischer.' Once he knew that this was the right course, he proceeded with determination, although he does not stop stressing that being lucky and being in the right place at the right moment are essential components of a collector's success. He knew that Dale Brandreth had many Morphy items, as he had bought the collection of David Lawson, the author of the definitive Morphy biography. Now De Lucia doesn't only have the manuscript and typescript of Paul Morphy, "The Pride and Sorrow of Chess", he also has (among many other things) an inscribed photo of Morphy from 1859 by Civil War photographer Mathew Brady and the first chess board of the American legend. 'I vividly -remember driving down to Dale's home to buy it. He was always afraid to offer it because it was in glass and he thought if he had to ship it, it might be damaged.'

He also owns a great variety of Capablanca items. Roman Dzindzichashvili, who once was his chess teacher, introduced him to Olga Capablanca. She sold him various things and after her death he remained in touch with her live-in male companion, who sold him a last batch three months ago, which included the original portrait of Capablanca by the Cuban artist Valderrama, records of his lectures from NBC, his initialed alligator wallet, a lot of signed books and more. A lot of his Fischeriana he obtained through Pal Benko, who

was a close friend of Fischer's. 'I always was a huge Fischer fan and have collected his stuff for the past 25 years. When things come up for auction, I try to buy them.'

Still, he didn't buy anything at the auction at Bonham's last year where St. Louis chess benefactor Rex Siquefield bought a collection of Fischer books for a steep price. De Lucia says he didn't do so for two reasons. 'I went to the New York auction and I spent more time than anybody looking at that stuff. I can tell you there were probably half a dozen or a dozen signed books, and hundreds of unsigned ones. Well, I mean, if I was a dishonest person, I could take 12 of my books up here signed by Bobby, and especially with what I have up there, take a thousand books that have nothing to do with Bobby, put them all together and say listen this was Bobby's. And that's what's happened here.' Apart from that, he thinks the amount that was fetched was ridiculous. 'This is exactly what I don't like about collecting, when a guy can make a big splash, spend \$50,000, \$64,000 after commission, and buy virtually nothing of any provenance of Bobby Fischer.' [This lot had been offered on eBay, years earlier, for \$15,000, with no takers. However, I do believe that this lot was part of Fischer's collection that came via the Bekins sale in California.]

It's something he stresses more than once in the two days that I visit him. He is in the position to buy virtually everything, but whenever a book is offered, he wants to follow his own rules, which are dictated by reason and a sense of reality.

Still, he happily admits that sometimes he regrets this 'realistic' attitude. 'I love dust jackets, fine dust jackets. I still kick myself for what I did a couple of years ago at the New York Antiquarian Book Fair. There was a guy that had Réti's, "Masters of the Chess Board" and a Marshall book, maybe "Comparative Chess", both with exquisite dust jackets in perfect condition. The guy wanted 300 dollars apiece for them. And I'm thinking, these are 50-75 dollar books, the guy is out of his mind! And I don't buy them. Then afterwards I fault myself and say, what are you thinking about? They are probably the only two copies in the world that pristine and you walked away from them? What kind of a collector are you? (Laughs)'

Although money played, and plays, a pivotal role both in his work on Wall Street and in collecting, he denies that the experience gained in the world of finance has been of help to him while assembling his collection. He learned more from the people he met and the praxis of collecting as he went along. The only real connection he sees between Wall Street and -collecting is the relativity of value. 'I was just starting to figure out chess books, and in the Richard John Ford sale, Victor Keats (author of the authoritative Chessmen for Collectors – DJtG) bought a Rowbothum, an English translation of Damiano, 1562. He paid 2,500 pounds for it, which in those days was an enormous amount of money. I was intrigued by the book, but I couldn't find anything about it. Then after he bought it, I stumbled on a Quaritch catalogue from 1909. I was going through it and I saw that a Ruy Lopez, 1561, was about 11 pounds, a Gianutio was maybe 10 pounds, the highest rare chess book was 15 pounds. And I get to the Rowbothum - 180 pounds! And I said, holy mackerel, look how rare! Quaritch at that time was viewed as the world's best antiquarian book dealer. So I thought I've got to try and buy this book from Victor. He was into sets, but he knew nothing about books. About three weeks later, he tried to sell everything (only the books) that he bought. Everything at double the price. Now I had a dilemma. Am I going to allow the guy to make 2,500 pounds? I thought, you know it is really rare and why is it that nobody else knows it's really rare? So I bought the book from him. And wouldn't you know it that last year I saw another copy of it and it was now offered for \$30,000! I found a guy that would buy it, but by the time I caught the dealer to tell him to call this guy they had sold it. This year at the Antiquarian Book Fair, I was talking to the dealer. He said, yes, I know who you are. I assumed you had that book. I said, I did and asked him, did you know? And I gave him that story of 1909. He said, gee, I didn't know that. I have to tell you this, if we had known that, we would have probably doubled the price! That book has tremendous significance, because it is the first real chess book done in English. It's a translation, but it still is. In that

regard Wall Street helped me. I always think of Sam Ennis. I say, now David, you want to play the game fairly regarding price, but think of Sam who spent 80 per cent of his disposable income on chess books. If there's something that you really want, that's going to add to your collection, just buy it.'

These valuable additions are not necessarily expensive. With relish, he remembers how he found the earliest chess book printed in the United States. 'What I did for many years was every three to six months, on a slow day at the office, I would call every dealer I knew and ask them if they had anything on chess. One time I call this place in Madrid, Spain, and I ask the guy if he has any chess books. He says, I only have three. The first two were nothing special and then he said I have this beginner's book, "Chess Made Easy". My heart started to pound a bit as I was hoping he was going to say, Philadelphia 1802. And I ask, what date is it? He says, Philadelphia 1802. Then the last hurdle was, what's the price? He says, 90 dollars.'

He paid considerably more for the first published treatise on chess written by an Englishman (and not based on a previous work), Arthur Saul's, "The Famous Game of Chesse-play", London, 1614. The booklet, consisting of 30 unnumbered leaves, was previously owned by the world-renowned book collector, Bradley Martin, whose collection was auctioned in 1990 for a staggering 50 million dollars. For the Saul, De Lucia paid \$22,000. It was the only chess book in Martin's library and he was aware of its great rarity. To protect it from fire, Martin had a special asbestos case made for it, covered with leather.

De Lucia tells with visible pride that the Saul in the asbestos case is his son John David's favorite book in his library. With a broad smile he adds that his son is also represented in the collection with a book he made in school and that this book is as dear to him as all the other books. His family is also represented by numerous photographs that stress the private character of the room. He often calls the library his inner sanctum, but sometimes he also speaks of his memory room. Here he likes to withdraw and read or catalogue his books while listening to music or a ball game. Or just to think while looking at photos. He sat here for hours last week after his sister Cheryl had died after a long battle with an incurable disease. Cheryl and he were very close and her name pops-up regularly in our conversations, mostly when he is talking about the goodness of people. He fondly remembers how she started sending homemade cookies and postcards to a correspondence chess friend of his [Rudy]. She never met him and never would, but believed he could use some attention from the stories her brother told her. [When Rudy died, he left Cheryl \$10,000 for her kindness.]

It's because the privacy of the room is sacrosanct to him that he is very reluctant to have visitors. His family members have been here, and some of his closest friends. But even guests to parties at his house who showed an interest to go up to his chess collection were told, often to their incomprehension, that this was impossible. One of the first things he told me when he came to pick me up at the railway station 50 minutes north of New York's Grand Central Station, was why, in the footsteps of a handful of collectors, I am the sixth person outside his most intimate circle that is welcome. Some years ago, during a trip abroad, when apart from the one television channel in his hotel there was no entertainment whatsoever in the evenings, he had thoroughly enjoyed the company of my first interview collection, "Finding Bobby Fischer". Interestingly, it was Fischer's personal copy of the book that he was reading, with his name stamped on page 39. That's what the American started doing somewhere in the 1990s, he'd stamp all his books with his name on either page 39 (March 9, his birthday) or 43 (1943, his year of birth).

De Lucia's library may be a highly private room, but this does not mean that he wants to keep his treasures to himself. It's always been his conviction that you should share the collection that you've got the luck and privilege to own with others. Last year, he allowed his friend Jeff Kramer to publish a simply produced catalogue in two volumes of part of his collection. The two spiral bindings are a feast to leaf through for any chess lover, but unavoidably they are incomplete and don't contain his latest acquisitions,

such as the manuscript of Reuben Fine's, "Basic Chess Endings" or the guest book of the Saint Louis Chess Club containing countless autographs of well-known players from past and present.

However, the best introduction to the David De Lucia library are the beautifully produced books that he has published himself in limited editions. The first book, called "A Few Old Friends", was published in 2003 and shows highlights of his collection in hundreds of color and black-and-white photographs. Of that book, he made 150 copies. Four years later, the second edition contained more than 750 photographs and appeared in a limited edition of 225 signed copies that soon found their way to fellow-collectors. In these marvelous books, he not only accompanied the photos of the highlights by fascinating bits of historical information, but with estimated prices of the works presented. Not all his collector friends could appreciate this. Some of them preferred to leave aspiring newcomers in the dark, but this was an objection he didn't agree with at all.

Last year, assisted by his daughter Alessandra, he published "Bobby Fischer - Uncensored", a photographic impression of his vast Fischer collection, from early childhood books via authentic scoresheets and rare photos to Fischer's personal copy of Hitler's, "Mein Kampf". As the title indicates, the book contains numerous items and documents that express Fischer's pathological anti-Semitism. For understandable reasons their inclusion raised some eyebrows, but they are compensated for by an endless number of less controversial items, such as the typescript of "My 60 Memorable Games" when the title still was "My Memorable Games", 52 Tournament Games selected and annotated by Bobby Fischer, and many fascinating letters. Here's a quote from an early handwritten note by Fischer on Botvinnik: 'Botvinnik was never a great chess player even at his 'peak'. There were always some ten chess players who would have beaten him in a match. He has a plus against but one player in matches – Ragozin. So where does Botvinnik's superiority lie? Why was he, as he put it, 'first among equals'? The truth is that Botvinnik's superiority lay in his maneuvers – not with the chess pieces but off the chess board. Botvinnik wasted his time playing chess. With a mind like his he could have become a top government official – maybe even Premier.' De Lucia comments: 'Years later, Bobby had a good opinion of Botvinnik as a player but thought he was evil because of his arranging games and prearranged draws.' [Told to me by Pal Benko.]

The book also contains a vehement letter, written on 25 February 1999, from Fischer's lawyer Joseph Choate who roundly condemns his behaviour ('You ought to be ashamed of yourself !') and calls him an 'unmitigated ingrate'. Indeed, an ultra-rare example of criticism from someone around Fischer.

Not all items that are listed in the book appear as illustrations. Examples from a small photo album with photos of a naked female dancer taken by Fischer at a Budapest night club are understandably absent. De Lucia has them carefully wrapped up at the back of one of the Fischer cupboards in his library, as he doesn't want his children to stumble upon them. I didn't get to see them either, but he revealed an interesting detail. In one of the photos, one of Fischer's hands is also visible. When Pal Benko asked him why that was, Fischer answered that this was to have proof that he indeed took the pictures.

The third book with highlights that he is planning to make should surpass the others in all aspects. It will be bigger in size, even more lavishly illustrated, and it will be dedicated to his sisters Cheryl and Candice. Because of her natural generosity ('I think Cheryl would have said, I want everybody to enjoy it') the book will also contain the famous unrecorded Capablanca game that attracted a lot of publicity when Olga Capablanca offered it for sale for \$10,000 in Edward Winter's Chess Notes in 1987. Olga Capablanca witnessed the off-hand game between Capablanca and Tartakower in a Paris hotel room [I believe Olga told me that she was in the hospital when they played this game] in or around 1938. She was in bed with a bad cold, while they played a game that her husband won. He wrote the game down on hotel stationery and gave it to her saying: 'Take it and hide it well. Some day in years to come it will buy you a beautiful bijou.' De Lucia bought it many years later together with a number of other unrecorded Capablanca games. He certainly didn't pay the

amount she had asked, but nevertheless he had been reluctant to publish it so far, as this would have reduced its value. He didn't mind showing it to me, but I didn't get time to play through it. I probably didn't miss too much, as the rather uneventful game was balanced for a long time until Tartakower made a mistake in a rook ending.

For most chess book collectors size matters. Roughly speaking you join the elite circle of big collectors when you can boast between 5,000 and 10,000 or more books. The biggest private collection in the world is that of German grandmaster and arbiter Lothar Schmid, who at the age of 82 boasts to have amassed 50,000 chess books, an amount that defeats the imagination. In De Lucia's philosophy, a craving for quality is miles ahead of a yearning for quantity. 'Lothar is one of those guys who want to have everything. As a certain collector said, there comes a point in time when having an enormous amount of books becomes more of a negative than a positive. It really does. I am trying to collect the right way. If I wanted to buy everything, I could, but I don't want to do it that way. I don't want to be viewed as the guy who doesn't know what he is doing but wants to have everything. I want to be associated more with a thoughtful collector that understood what he wanted the collection to be. That's why I do an awful lot of research. For me, it is special to put your imprimatur on your collection. A great collection should be what you really love. Some time ago I had three or four decorators here in the house. But with all of them I got into a fight. I didn't understand why that was until I realized what they wanted to do was not me. And the library is me.'

When I urge him to give an estimate of the size of his collection, he's not enthusiastic. In fact, he would like to downsize it, reiterating that the numbers are irrelevant to him. When I insist, using the readers' curiosity as a pretext, he says that he has some seven to eight thousand books, a similar number of autographs (letters, score-sheets, manuscripts) and about one thousand items of 'ephemera'. He confesses that for himself he has already made a selection of items he would keep if for some reason he had to reduce his collection. This selection consists of 1,500 items. This may sound modest, but he quickly explains that, for instance, the 120 score-sheets of the 1927 New York tournament or all the Lasker letters are only one item.

He has met Lothar Schmid on various occasions, but the German collector has not been in his library. When I ask him directly if he would allow Schmid to see it, he smiles and hesitates. 'That's a good question. I don't know. He's always welcome in my home. The collection, I don't know.' In the past years, many stories have been doing the rounds about Schmid wanting or having to sell his collection. One collector told me that he wanted to sell it for six million euro. To De Lucia, he offered it for 20 million euro some five years ago. The Schmid collection contains numerous items that De Lucia would love to have, such as the three (out of eight) Damiano editions that he doesn't have, or the Lucena, but he readily agrees that both 6 and 20 million euro are totally unrealistic figures.

Even though De Lucia is not interested in collecting everything, he and Schmid were rivals on various occasions. One memorable occasion was the auction of the library of André Muffang in Paris on June 6th 1991. Here De Lucia acquired both a Lucena manuscript and a first edition Damiano. Schmid had asked him not to bid on the Damiano and also tried to obtain the Lucena manuscript, but in both cases he was unsuccessful. For De Lucia, the Muffang auction was a strange mix of highs and lows, as his father-in-law had passed away a day earlier. He could not attend the auction, but found the Paris book dealer Chamonal ready to do the bidding for him. The Lucena manuscript was surrounded by strange stories. Till the auction, it had been in Schmid's house for 10 years. After Muffang's death, Schmid claimed that the French collector had given it to him. Only when the Muffang heirs threatened to take him to court did he admit that he only had it on loan and returned it. When you speak to collectors it usually doesn't take long before they tell you a story or anecdote about Lothar Schmid's notorious collecting practices and his tricks to obtain books at all cost. De Lucia didn't mention any of them, but when I prodded him, he agreed that he also had his 'Lothar trade' as

he calls it. 'I got taken once by him, very small. I had an original print of Alekhine-Euwe. He said, I have it but this one is better, I'd like to trade it. I have two very rare books. And I said, what are they? Till this day, I don't like looking at them. They are chess tournaments from Uruguay 1959 and 1961, which I've subsequently seen sold on eBay for 12 dollars. But it was short-sighted and a mistake on his part. If you want to cheat me you can cheat me, but you will do it only once. I'll never forget.'

De Lucia knows from experience that investing in your relations and connections is a much wiser and more rewarding way of life. The best example he can give is his relationship with the Manhattan Chess Club. In the years before it was closed, the club had serious financial problems and at some point they decided to sell part of their collection, including the Capablanca memorabilia that Olga Capablanca had given to the club through the years. De Lucia contacted the president of the club, Jeff Kossak, and told him that he'd better be the best bid they'd get. The best bid was \$18,000 by Laszlo Polgar and instead of \$18,001, De Lucia wrote them a cheque for \$25,000. Apart from making annual financial donations, he again showed his love for the club where he'd played so many games when he presented them with a large number of books and manuscripts that he felt didn't fit into his collection. When the club closed its doors in 2002, his friendship with Kossak brought him several new highlights in his collection. 'Jeff would come out here and play chess. One day he said, listen, it's over, nobody wants the club. We had a long discussion. I said, Jeff, the Internet is telling you something. I'm happy to be a free market guy but if you have to give the club 25,000 to 50,000 dollars every year of your own money, isn't that telling you that the people don't want it? And he said, you know David, you're one-hundred per cent right. After it closed its doors, three or four years went by. And I asked him, Jeff, are you ever going to do something with the archives and all the other things? Is there some way I can buy it from the club? He told me, David, there is no one left. A lot of the older guys that were on the board, they're all dead. He said, I'll think about it. Jeff was well to-do and that was his way of saying, I don't want to deal with it. Then four or five months later he says, I've been thinking about what we were talking about lately. It's crazy for you not to have it, you were so generous with the club. He could have sold it to me, but where was the money going to go?'

When he was called to come and pick up the archives there was one item he was particularly looking forward to. 'I knew that in the last year, a number of things had been stolen. And as Jeff started bringing out the boxes I was praying and hoping that the contract for the Zukertort - Steinitz World Chess Championship match was there. I kept putting the stuff in the car and finally some boxes came that looked like it might be in there. I remember opening up the book and on page 21, as I turned it, there was the contract. I remember till this day, all the cars are going by, the horns are beeping, and I am looking at it in the back of the trunk of the car.'

When you have such a rich collection and have been able to acquire such a number of unique collectibles, the question inevitably arises how to continue when there is less and less on the market that you'd like to add. He regrets that Kurt Landsberger, the biographer of William Steinitz, has decided to donate his Steinitz collection to a small museum in New Jersey. He would have loved to buy it, but now it's out of circulation for good. He also regrets that he no longer has that indomitable drive that he used to have. To me, this regret seems exaggerated, as on my arrival he told me about three books he had been bidding on that same morning, and only a week ago had he acquired the album of Vladimir Nabokov's chess problems (for his 1969 book, "Poems and Problems"), with most problems signed by the author. But he insists that he no longer has the fervour he had in his working days. When he would get up at 3.30 a.m. to work out for an hour and then drive to work. He wishes he had Lothar Schmid's addiction to chase books that he still wants to have and laughing out loud he imitates the accent of a French collector that occasionally calls him. 'He is in his nineties, but hasn't lost any of his passion. He will call and say, Mr. De Lucia, can I buy your collection? And I tell him that it's not for sale. I know, he says, but I'd still like to buy it.'

A related question is what he hopes will happen to his collection after he has finished enjoying it. He is 57 now and normally speaking it will be his for many years to come, but the moment will arrive when they will go their separate ways. 'I fantasize that my son would someday like to do it, I'd love to see two generations have a go at it, but that's probably not going to happen. It's just like Lothar's collection, his kids don't care about it.' He says that he's given this question a lot of thought, possibly too much. He agonizes about it. To begin with, there is the question whether his collection should go to one or more private collectors or to a public institution. The latter option doesn't seem very likely after a recent experience. 'I won't mention names, but the father of my piano teacher was a well-known composer for the big band era - Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller. His dad and another man, worked together when they were alive. The other guy died about 20 years ago and left his body of work to an institution in Connecticut, a world-famous institution. And Jamie's dad died two years ago and he now wants to leave his dad's body of work to this institution, too. So they're all working to donate it. In the meantime, the Hartford Symphonic wants to do a special event of their music. So they go to this institution to look at the stuff. The institution can't find it (laughs). And I say, Jamie, why would you give your dad's work to an institution that can't even find the other half? That's why I'd rather see my collection go to a collector, who could take it to the next level.'

And then, not for the first time in our conversations, he says, 'I can't tell you how often I've thanked God and my lucky stars that I've been blessed to have all these things.'

At the end of our second interview session, I ask David De Lucia if his former colleague at Salomon Brothers, who spurred his collecting, ever saw the fruit of his emphatic suggestion. The answer is almost abrupt. 'No. You know, it's funny with people like that. Guys that grow up with silver spoons in their mouths don't want to be associated with guys that grew up in New Haven. That's just the way it is. That's why to this day, the people that I am much warmer to are blue-collar people. He was very kind to me, I think, because he felt it was the right thing for him to do in his career. As I became more senior on Wall Street, he liked talking to me for information, because I was plugged in with many of the heads on Wall Street. But I also knew that as soon as I left Wall Street he would never call me again. And that's what happened.'