

The Joy of Collecting and Giving: Frances and Sydney Lewis and the VMFA



Frances and Sydney Lewis in front of their portrait by Ben Schonzeit

Andy Lewis will talk about his parents, Frances and Sydney Lewis, who built internationally renowned collections of painting of the 2nd half of the twentieth century, and art nouveau and art deco furnishings and jewelry. He will discuss their involvement with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and their gifts to the Museum of over 1800 paintings, sculptures and other objects. He will also discuss the series of Best Products stores designed by Jim Wines and SITE, two of which became the world's most photographed buildings in the years they were built.

Andy Lewis graduated with a BS in mathematics from Harvard in 1967 and then enrolled in the Economics department at MIT, but left, intending to finish his thesis while teaching economics at the University of Richmond. When his thesis didn't cohere, he joined his parents at their small catalog retailer, Best Products. From five stores in 1969, they grew the business to over 200 stores. Best was in the top 5% of public companies in the 1970s in both rate of growth and return on investment. Andy resigned from the company to enroll in the graduate math program at the University of California at Berkeley, receiving his PhD in mathematical logic. He began his teaching career at VCU in the winter of 1993. Andy chaired the department from 2001 to 2015 before retiring in 2018.