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AMISTAD
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Yale's New Rock Stars

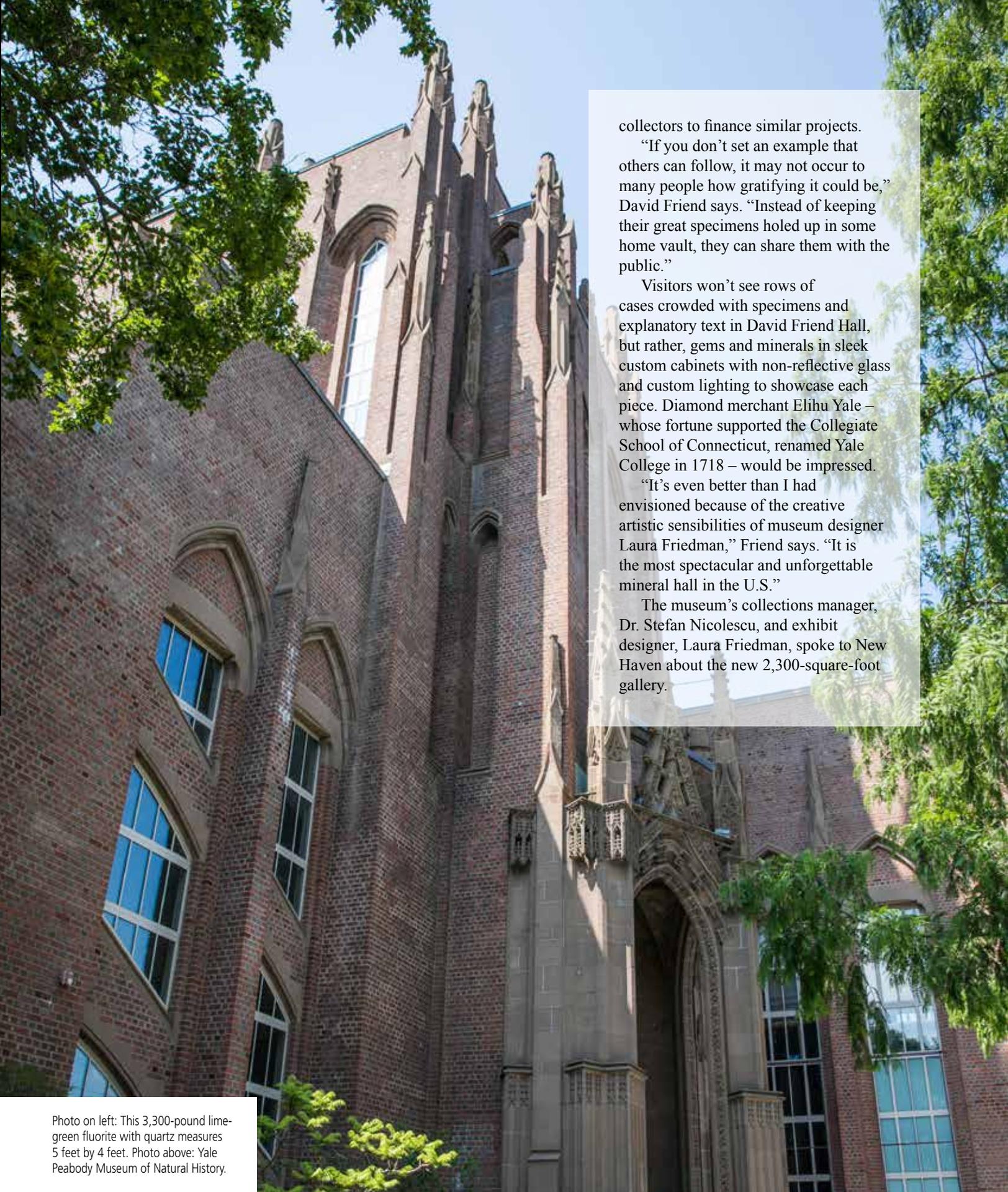
**Gems and minerals sparkle in David Friend Hall
in the Peabody Museum.**

by **VALERIE A. RUSSO** / *photography by* **AMBER JONES PHOTOGRAPHY**

Imagine Ali Baba -- a character in the folk tale, "One Thousand and One Arabian Nights," entering a cave filled with glittering gems and sparkling minerals illuminated by magical beams of light. Today, visitors to David Friend Hall, the new permanent gem and mineral gallery at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, can have a similar experience without uttering, "Open, Sesame."

Ride the elevator to the museum's third floor, turn left and walk toward the 1,900-pound quartz crystal, which glows (due to backlighting) at the gallery entrance. Go ahead and touch one of the largest single quartz crystals in the world.

David Friend Hall, which opened last October to mark the museum's 150th anniversary, contains more than 150 specimens on loan from private collections, some never before seen by the public. It also includes pieces from the museum's collection -- dazzling multi-carat gemstone jewelry and seven large-scale mineral specimens that were purchased specifically for the gallery, thanks to a \$4 million gift from David Friend, who underwrote the project. Friend, who lives in Boston, received his bachelor of science degree in engineering and music from Yale in 1969 and is the co-founder of Carbonite, a data storage company. He likes having the hall named for him because it may inspire other



collectors to finance similar projects.

“If you don’t set an example that others can follow, it may not occur to many people how gratifying it could be,” David Friend says. “Instead of keeping their great specimens holed up in some home vault, they can share them with the public.”

Visitors won’t see rows of cases crowded with specimens and explanatory text in David Friend Hall, but rather, gems and minerals in sleek custom cabinets with non-reflective glass and custom lighting to showcase each piece. Diamond merchant Elihu Yale – whose fortune supported the Collegiate School of Connecticut, renamed Yale College in 1718 – would be impressed.

“It’s even better than I had envisioned because of the creative artistic sensibilities of museum designer Laura Friedman,” Friend says. “It is the most spectacular and unforgettable mineral hall in the U.S.”

The museum’s collections manager, Dr. Stefan Nicolescu, and exhibit designer, Laura Friedman, spoke to New Haven about the new 2,300-square-foot gallery.

Photo on left: This 3,300-pound lime-green fluorite with quartz measures 5 feet by 4 feet. Photo above: Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History.



David Friend’s exclusive interview about his passion for rock collecting at NewHavenmag.com

“David Friend, the major donor for the hall, had a vision to create a very dramatic setting,” Laura Friedman says. “My role was to design the space and to work with Stefan Nicolescu, our collections manager, to choose the objects for the exhibits.”

Friend, a long-time mineral collector, introduced Friedman and Nicolescu to other collectors. Together, the threesome traveled across the country to see extensive private collections and to ask the collectors to lend their specimens to the David Friend Hall exhibition.

Besides Friend, who lent two large-scale pieces to the exhibition – a 460-pound amethyst geode and an 800-pound sandstone concretion – the lenders are C.R. “Cap” Beesley, Robert Lavinsky, Eugene Meieran, Josh Mendelsohn, Mark Pospisil, Precious Gem Resources, Inc., Gail and Jim Spann, James Zigras and one anonymous lender. The collectors graciously allowed the Peabody to borrow almost every specimen requested, except for a few pieces that were too delicate to travel or too reactive to light.

“We were looking through some of the greatest mineral collections in the world -- a spectacular array of color, form and texture,” Friedman says. “It was overwhelming – the incredible beauty of these objects and the fact that they just formed out of the Earth in these shapes. It makes you think of the Earth in a different way.”

After taking photos and measurements of pieces that caught her eye, Friedman made her choices and determined the best placement in the gallery. Nicolescu made only one suggestion.

“The one I picked is about five inches tall of gray metallic minerals that are interlocked. It’s one of the best bournonites I ever saw,” Nicolescu says.

Friedman placed the dull-looking bournonite, which excites the mineral connoisseur, next to some eye-candy for the rest of us – green fluorite sprinkled with gold-colored pyrite. “There were certain pieces that just felt like they wanted to be together,” she says.

All specimens were reviewed and approved by Jay Ague, curator-in-charge of Mineralogy & Meteoritics, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History.

One of the challenges was transforming an outdated auditorium into a gallery that would serve two purposes

– showcasing the specimens and accommodating special events. “We wanted to put in as many minerals as possible and create a space where people could walk around some of them and see them from all sides, but still leave a big space in the middle to accommodate a specific number of chairs and tables,” she says.

Friedman included cases to hold a range of sizes – from thumbnail specimens to larger pieces. “I just wanted to create a space that was very simple, very clean and pure that would



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Museum designer Laura Friedman stands by a sandstone concretion from Fontainebleau, France, one of several large-scale specimens on display.

be elegant, but disappear and let the specimens shine," she says.

But getting that look required the expertise of architects (Christopher Williams Architects), lighting specialists (Christensen Lighting), custom case fabricators (Caseworks, a German company) and museum staff to make the specimen mounts and put everything in place. The team included an advisory board of private collectors (no dealers, to avoid conflicts of interest), who came up with a list of 20

specimens for possible purchase – some in the United States and some in China. The criteria for selection were beauty, size, rarity and trustworthy sources. Board member C.R. "Cap" Beesley traveled to China to examine the Chinese specimens.

"We didn't want something that was illegally exported or something we couldn't get information about how it was acquired," Nicolescu explains.

The museum purchased seven large pieces – the 1,900-pound quartz crystal; a quartz with spiky clear and translucent crystals; a large limestone panel embedded with fossils of fish and a palm frond that lived 50 million years ago; two aragonite specimens from China; a green fluorite specimen that's the weight of a small car; and a desert rose gypsum specimen with "petals" of soft stone.

Seeing the specimens was a jaw-dropping experience for Friedman and Nicolescu.

"I had no idea a desert rose could be so big," Nicolescu admits. "They're usually two feet across, at most. This one is five feet by five feet."

The most stressful part of the project was the delivery and installation. Some collectors even delivered and installed their own specimens.

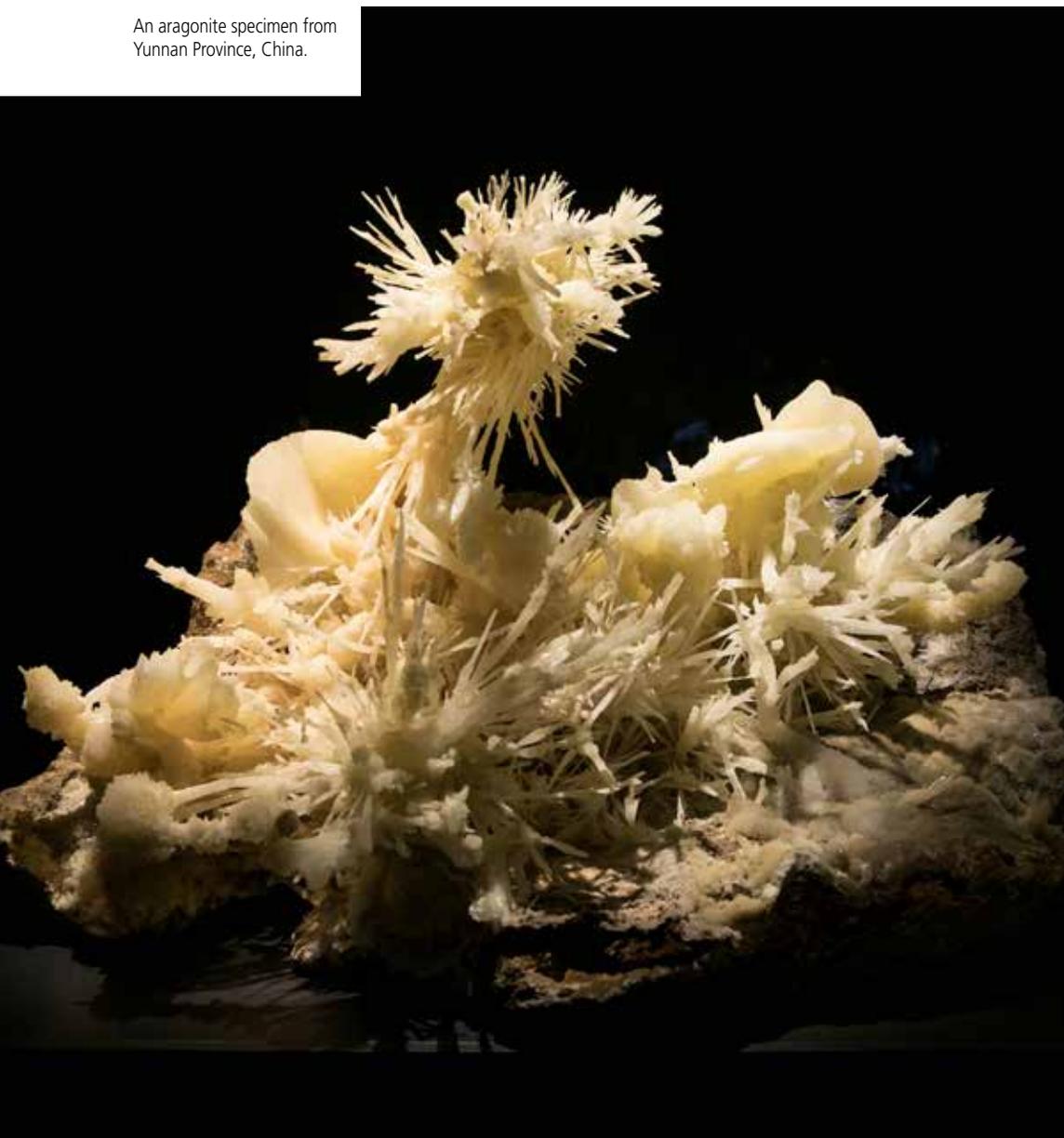
"Gail Spann and her friend Karen Jenkins drove straight through from Dallas," Friedman says. "They didn't stay overnight [along the way] because these pieces are very valuable and they didn't want to leave them in the SUV overnight."

The desert rose, a purchase delivered by a professional art shipper, came with the dealer's instruction video on how to unpack and install – necessary because gypsum is so soft, a scratch could ruin it. Due to careful handling and oversight, no specimens were damaged.

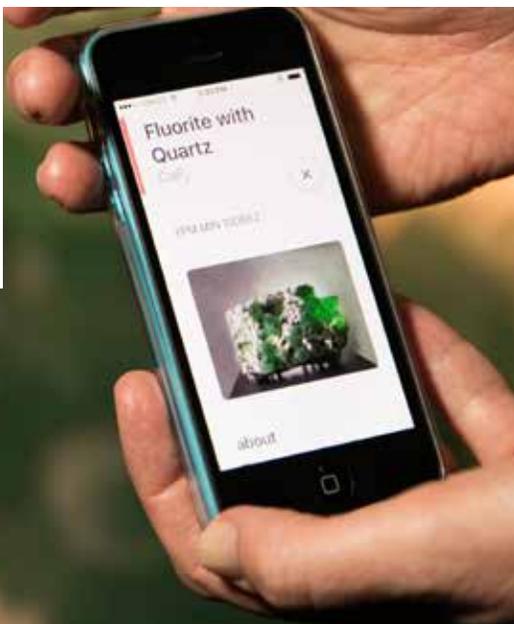
"At no moment was anybody handling lighting in the cases without me being present and keeping an eye out so that a tool doesn't fall [on a specimen]. I'm the only person at the museum that has clearance from the lenders to handle the specimens," Nicolescu says.

But one incident almost ruined the ribbon-cutting ceremony last fall. The custom oval case for the sandstone concretion arrived very late, and the accompanying steel plate (to place beneath the specimen) was a quarter-inch too

An aragonite specimen from Yunnan Province, China.



For more information about the signature pieces in David Friend Hall, visit the App Store and search Peabody Museum to download free cloud-based software to your smartphone or tablet.





large. Fortunately, two members of the Museum staff saved the day by grinding down the excess, so the plate fit perfectly in the case.

“We all breathed a sigh of relief,” Nicolescu says.

The large-scale mineral specimens purchased for David Friend Hall, each spotlighted in its own case, will remain on permanent display. The specimens on loan to the exhibition will remain for another year and then be replaced with other pieces from private collections and possibly, other museums.

For more information about the signature pieces in David Friend Hall, visit the App Store and search Peabody Museum to download free cloud-based software, an application developed by Yale students, to smart phone or tablet.

IF YOU GO

The Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, 170 Whitney Ave., New Haven, is open year-round. For hours and admission fees, visit: peabody.yale.edu. 

An amethyst specimen with calcite from Uruguay is from the collection of David Friend.