

Baby Steps

Interested in growing your collection? Take a peek at the cuddly and collectible offerings of Dolls by Berenguer.

by Stephanie Finnegan

Babies have a way of taking over any room in which they are placed. The same holds true for dolls. Lately it seems as if babies have been making their way into collectors' hearts in leaps and bounds. They are crawling into our curio cabinets and dozing on our desktops. Babies are napping in our niches and disarming us in our armoires. Go to any large doll show these days and you're likely to see collectors pushing strollers, sporting baby pouches, or cradling dainty blanket-clad bundles of joy as they proudly parade their baby doll treasures. Yes, indeed, greet the new kids in town because they're here to stay.

Dolls by Berenguer, a division of Miami-

Salvador Berenguer, are state-of-the-art when it comes to lifelike, heart-grabbing babies. When you study a Doll by Berenguer, you are tempted to play pat-a-cake or peek-a-boo. It's downright disappointing when the smiling girl or sleepy boy doesn't respond with a mouthful of dribble.

"Our dolls simply brighten your day," agrees Richard Cerda, president of Dolls by Berenguer. "I think it comes from the sweetness and the gentleness of the dolls' expressions. It is difficult not to fall in love with our dolls. Truthfully, the hardest thing is deciding which doll you like best."

Cerda, who is married but presently childless, does plan to start a family. And he admits he is fortunate to be in a child-pleasing business. "If any of my children are girls, they certainly will have enough dolls," he notes with a chuckle. "In the meantime, my babies are the dolls we design and produce. We are extremely happy to be able to produce dolls for children of all ethnicities and her-

itages. Ours are truly authentic sculpts and not just 'generic' dolls that come in assorted colors. Our philosophy has always been to design and produce dolls that can be cherished by everyone."

Aimee Sheaffer, of Aimee & Daria's Shop, located outside



The design team at Berenguer was on the right track with this handsome boy. Dressed for a day of play and make-believe, the aspiring engineer is priced at \$99.99. He's part of the La Baby line of fine, soft-bodied collectibles.



Above left: "Bundle of Joy," 22 inches in length, features one of Berenguer's most beloved facial sculpts. Here, the exhausted babe sleeps a deep and dream-filled sleep. La Baby Special Edition dolls are priced at \$99.99 and are soft-bodied. Right: Tastefully accessorized, "Mint & Cream" is another sure-fire crowd pleaser from Dolls By Berenguer. Part of the La Baby Special Edition line, the doll is radiant with honey brown hair and green eyes. Priced at under \$100, the doll cries out to be taken home.

based JC Toys Group, is banking on the lasting power of baby dolls' appeal. A leader in realistic, and therefore irresistible, baby dolls, the family-owned company has been providing children with hours of playtime for more than 20 years. Their dolls, designed and sculpted by master craftsman

of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, can attest to the egalitarian pull of a Berenguer doll. "We have offered the dolls as prizes or charitable giveaways at car shows," she remarks. "You'll have these big, macho, muscle guys at an auto show and they melt when they see these dolls. There have been motorcycle and bike shows in



1. Part of the La Baby Special Edition collection, “Anchors Away” is a cherubic blond sailor. This nautical boy is attractively priced at \$99.99. Like all other La Baby dolls, he is soft-bodied. **2.** Bunnies are known to multiply, and here the bunnies add up to an enormously adorable tot. “La Baby Bunnykins” is heartwarming. **3.** This Christening baby is part of the La Baby Special Edition line. The soft-bodied babe comes in both blond and brunette versions. Berenguer is proud of its craftsmanship in regard to the costuming and the sculpting. The Christening set is priced at \$149.99. **4.** Dressed in a pink-and-white ensemble, “Little Darling Berenguer” never ventures out without her stuffed rabbit and embroidered blanket. Part of La Baby Special Edition, she is sure to impress grandmas and granddaughters alike. **5.** Dressed in pleasing pastels, “La Baby Pretty in Pink” is a realistic depiction of a contemporary infant. Her outfit is the epitome of the stylish toddler-on-the-go. The La Baby dolls from Berenguer are priced at \$99.99. **6.** Clad in a one-piece blue outfit, “La Baby Sleepy Berenguer” garnered raves and awards from the doll industry. Priced at \$99.99, the drowsy boy helped bring the Berenguer artist to a new realistic level.

this area, and I’ve seen motorcycle men and women, in full leather outfits, come into my shop and pick up the babies. They are absolutely drawn to the Berenguer dolls. They can’t help themselves. The dolls are so vibrant and inviting. They ask you, silently, to pick them up. How can you refuse?”

Designer Salvador Berenguer, who lives and works in Spain, is humbled and touched when he is told of his transatlantic success. “It is a great joy for me to be able to design dolls. I believe that whether it is a grown woman or a little girl, a person looks for realism in baby dolls. It is the mother instinct that draws them in. But why stop at little girls or women? When a baby doll has a realistic expression, it can remind anyone of someone in the family. My dolls, happily, may make you want to collect a memory.”

It is absolutely accurate. Visiting the company’s web site (www.dollsbyberenguer.com) is akin to leafing through a prized family album. There are photos of baby dolls laughing, learning, and just lazing. It’s a celebration of the world’s most popular hood-babyhood.

“Sweetness is being eliminated from the toy business,” observes Cynthia Stevens, of Silly Prilly Gifts, an on-line web business. “Systematically, it seems that old-fashioned gentleness is being removed. We have beautiful dolls and we have very modern fashionable dolls. But sweetness? I think Dolls by Berenguer are one of the last places to find that innocence of a young infant face. Mr. Berenguer is able to capture the confused, shy look of a baby and the purity of untainted love. I think he is such a good man himself that he is able to draw upon his own values when he sculpts.”

Stevens is on to something, indeed. Berenguer does look within himself and his ever-growing family to fashion his baby faces and baby poses. “What helps me in my work is my love as a father and as a grandfather. That love has always helped me to capture the mannerisms of each child and use it in my art. Sometimes an expression in an eye or the shape of a mouth may call to me, and then an idea for a doll forms in my head.”

The 65-year-old designer is the proud papa of four grown children and grandpa

to eight children, the youngest being a granddaughter aged two. “Believe me, she still gives me a lot of inspiration,” he declares.

Valerie Freiberg, of The Doll Market, a Greensboro, North Carolina, shop, credits Salvador Berenguer’s continual connection with children for keeping his talent forever young. “He’s been a name in the industry for four decades, and his dolls are still sought after. Dolls by Berenguer are very smart because they have his dolls, his designs, in dolls for all ages. There are the Specialty Play Doll collections that are easier-to-hold. These are the play dolls for the very young children, frankly no older than babies themselves. Then there is the next level of dolls for the little girls who want to play at being mommies. And finally, they have the Special Edition Collection. These are ideal for the women who want to remember what it was like when they would sit with their babies and rock and think about the future. By buying these dolls, you are revisiting the happiest moments in your life. And when you give one of these play dolls to a young child, you might be creating a collector for life, too.” ■