50 WHO MATTERED IN 2002

BLANKET AUTHORITY
Donald Ellis

At 45, Donald Ellis has been dealing in Native American objects for a quarter of a century. His fascination with the field began when he was a 7-year-old growing up near the Six Nations Reserve in southeastern Canada, where he started collecting pottery shards and arrowheads. Today he runs a booming business from his home outside Toronto, specializing in 18th- and 19th-century sculptured artifacts from the Northwest Coast, Pacific Eskimo and Eastern Woodlands cultures. Ask anyone in the business and they'll tell you Ellis is one of the best. "He has a great eye," says one curator. "He consistently locates high-quality pieces and has advanced the field by the thoroughness of his research." The past year has been a very productive one for Ellis, marked by two major acquisitions: a mid-18th-century Tlingit wooden carved bowl from Alaska, the finest example he says he's ever seen, and an important 18th-century pigment pot from the Northwest Coast. But it was an 1840 Navajo "first phase" chief's blanket discovered while taping an episode of *Antiques Roadshow* in Tucson that put Ellis, pictured below, in the spotlight. After appraising the blanket (believed to have belonged to Kit Carson) at close to $500,000, he later purchased it and exhibited it at New York's Winter Antiques Show. There, the blanket caught the eye of a curator from the Detroit Institute of Arts, and in June a private foundation bought it on behalf of the museum for an undisclosed—but surely significant—price. Notably, almost 70 percent of the objects in Ellis's standout booth at the Winter show sold for a total in excess of $2 million. However, one project close to his heart had to be postponed: He had planned to open a gallery in New York, but the 9/11 attacks put that on hold—temporarily. Ellis is hoping to find a space on the Upper East Side within the next year.

DIAMOND STUD
Laurence Graff

The only reason London-based jewelry retailer and *diamantaire* Laurence Graff steps into a salesroom is to buy the rarest, the biggest or the best. Once that's accomplished, he is virtually unique among his press-shy colleagues in making sure the public knows all about it. Last February, Graff bagged the top lot at Sotheby's St. Moritz jewelry sale, a 5.18-carat, blue heart-shaped diamond, for $1.5 million. Meanwhile, business is flourishing at his retails shops around the world, including the Madison Avenue boutique he opened in April 2001. And at shows like the Palm Beach International Art & Antique Fair, wives can been seen dragging their husbands into Graff's literally dazzling booths, provoking some envious grumbling among nearby art dealers. Clearly, Graff rocks.

FRESH PRINCE OF DENMARK
Frederik Bruun Rasmussen

The 30-year-old scion of Bruun Rasmussen Auctioneers has been busy lately, looking beyond the firm's elegant Copenhagen flagship to his two new thriving middle-market ventures. In 1999 Frederik Bruun Rasmussen opened a branch in a converted warehouse, a Nordic answer to Christie's South Kensington where a lively, youngish crowd bids on 20th-century Danish art and design. He opened another branch in suburban Vejle, where he presides over sales and coaxes stellar Danish modern furnishings out of attics. By reinvigorating the business founded by his grandfather in 1948, he is making it a growing force in the Scandinavian auction market.