



Kite collector George Paisiovich flies one of his custom-made treasures.

ASHLEY PAISIOVICH/COURTESY OF GEORGE PAISIOVICH

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This continues our series called [The Splurge](#), where we take a look at how entrepreneurs have spent their money on indulgences – purchases that may be interesting, fun, satisfying or enjoyable, but not necessary.

For years, conflict-resolution consultant George Paisiovich has ended his e-mails with a breezy two-word sign-off: "Good winds."

For the principal of London, Ont.-based [StakeholderRelations.com](#), the sign-off has meaning. Since 1977, when he bought his first kite, Mr. Paisiovich has amassed one of the largest private collections in the world: nearly 3,800 kites from more than 30 countries that he estimates are worth about \$150,000.

So large is his collection – which he says also includes another \$30,000 worth of books, posters and paintings on kites – that the ones that don't fit into Mr. Paisiovich's home and a nearby rental storage unit are kept in a rented house in Burlington, Ont., where he used to live. Nor does it include the hundreds of kites he's given away over the years.

No wonder he chooses to end his salutations with the kite world's equivalent of "have a great day," a wish for perfect flying conditions.

Mr. Paisiovich, 56, who had a long career as an assistant on Parliament Hill and at Queens Park, including acting as chief of staff for former national revenue minister Garth Turner, before starting his own consulting firm in 1993, says his passion for kites is part intellectual and part emotional.

"The 'I'm so happy, I could fly,' is inherent in all of us. This is the next best thing," he says.

"People are always happy around kites. It can incorporate sport, art, crafts, mathematics, weather, science, geography, competition, a oneness with nature ... and so much more. But mostly, it is about joy. Three letters, but so much meaning" says Mr. Paisiovich, who has organized dozens of kite fairs, exhibits and other events, and was the driving force behind getting Canada's only kite museum, on Pelee Island, off the ground in 2008.

Not just diamond-shaped framed pieces of cloth with a long string attached, kites come in a huge variety of materials, shapes, types, wing spans, construction, function and "there are different kites for different weather, different winds, different occasions," Mr. Paisiovich says.

The more common models are made from textiles, such as nylon, cotton and paper, but creative craftspeople have experimented with materials as varied as animal skins, wood and plant leaves, Mr. Paisiovich explains.

Although he says that choosing his favourite kite would be as difficult as choosing a favourite child, he lists one of his most prized possession as a "praying mantis" kite made by Chinese kitemaster Chen Zhao Ji.

Mr. Chen's animal-themed kites are famous for their complex mechanics. The artist attaches a wind turbine made out of bamboo to a gear wheel fashioned out of copper wire, so that the limbs of the animals move back and forth in the wind. Mr. Paisiovich purchased it several years ago from a fellow U.S. collector who had bought it directly from Mr. Chen's studio in China. With an estimated worth of \$5,000, Mr. Paisiovich says it's the single most valuable kite in his collection.

Among his other notable treasures, he cites a "mint-condition" 1909 L'Aigloplan kite – a type of French military kite popular in that country around the turn of the 20th century – for which he paid \$1,000.

He also singles out his 1880s-era walking stick kite, valued at \$1,500, which hunters used to help shoot birds.

"It's a lead tube with a wood cap on it and you would walk to where you thought there was some grouse or partridge," Mr. Paisiovich explains. "The hunter would open this 'walking stick,' and pull out a silk kite in the very basic shape of a predatory bird from inside the tube. He would fly it up in the air to spook partridges and grouse and be ready with his gun and his dog to shoot them when they drew up to fly away. Then he'd fold up his kite much like you'd do an umbrella and he'd go home."

Other kites of note include a Steiff Roloplan 150,2, a rare kite manufactured by German plush toy maker Steiff before the First World War that he values at more than \$2,000 because of its age and condition; an \$800 kite from Nantong, China, that was built with 77 whistles so that it creates an enormous racket when fliers loosen the lines of the kite and pull it back in; and, a \$2,500 "Day of the Dead" kite from Guatemala, where an annual ceremony honouring dead relatives includes the construction and flying of enormous kites.

There can be great differences between kites that the casual observer would not pick up.

What separates the kite lover from the serious collector is the ability to spot minute detail and appreciate what makes a kite valuable. Mr. Paisiovich looks for rarity, state of preservation, an interesting history and documentation to verify authenticity, he says. More subjectively, he seeks unique characteristics that capture his attention, such as shape, colour and design pattern. He mentions one diamond-shaped kite he snapped up because he loved two clear plastic panels in the fabric body made to resemble windows. "Whatever sets it apart from the mainstream," he says.

Pricing is a challenge as there's "no retail sticker to go by," Mr. Paisiovich says, so he tends to evaluate on factors that also include currency rates, the medium through which sales occur, his own well-honed sense of pricing – and how badly he wants a particular item.

It was a serendipitous purchase when he bought his first kite in a Chatham, Ont., shop as a 21-year-old House of Commons staffer while seeking "a little escapism" from the world of politics during summer adjournment. He was so captivated that he returned to the store, ordered hundreds of other kites wholesale from the owner and opened a small kite shop in his hometown of Erieau, Ont.

As a business, it was short-lived, lasting only that summer when he discovered he didn't have the heart to charge for his wares. It became "just a place where we operated from to go fly kites at the beach across the street. It was tremendous, one of the best summers of my life."

He returned to government work for the next 15 years, but the freedom he enjoyed during that kite-shop summer spurred him to eventually "collect his last pay cheque from someone else" and branch out on his own in 1993. Capitalizing on his years of public-policy experience, he opened StakeholderRelations, a private consulting firm that specializes in mediating professional relationships that have turned contentious. He runs it with his wife, Sara Zlabis.

It was through his consulting that he ended up owning Canada's only kite museum, where he created a curated exhibit of more than a hundred of his prized kites.

In 2005, the Township of Pelee Island contracted Mr. Paisiovich's company to help resolve a number of municipal problems. In addition, he was asked to help find environmentally sustainable ways to attract tourists to the island. Mr. Paisiovich offered to set up a curated kite museum in the island's cultural centre, a project that quickly became a labour of love: The municipal government lent him the space for free, Mr. Paisiovich paid out of pocket to set up the exhibits and visitor admission fees went back into staffing and maintaining the one-room museum.

Well-known in the Canadian kite community, Mr. Paisiovich managed to persuade a few of his high-profile friends, such as Vancouverite kite-flying champion Ray Bethell, who holds the world record for having the most kites in the air by one person at one time, to lend some of their famous fabrics to the project.

Additional celebrity heft has come from Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*, who Mr. Paisiovich convinced to provide two signed promotional kites – one in English and the other in Farsi – to the museum.