

# Collecting and Investing Strategies for U.S Gold Coins

## Review by Wayne Homren

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"So what's a "history and research" guy doing reviewing a "collecting and investing" publication? Well, I rarely come across a numismatic book that doesn't offer something new. And as much as I love collecting and researching my numismatic items, I usually do so with investing in mind. This discipline has proven profitable over the years: proceeds from recent numismatic sales enabled the purchase of my home and the cozy office where I'm writing this review.

There have been many coin-investing guides over the years, although I own only a few and have read even fewer cover to cover. If my experience is any indication, learning just one useful tip from a coin investing book can repay its purchase price many times. The beginning investor should find a few good take-aways from auction cataloger and numismatic expert Jeff Ambio's new book, *Collecting and Investing Strategies for United States Gold Coins* (Zyrus Press, Inc., [www.zyruspress.com](http://www.zyruspress.com)).

Ambio's book is devoted to the regular-issue gold series of 1795-1933, although I also expected to see gold commemoratives, bullion pieces and patterns. The author makes good points as he explains his decisions on the book's scope. He writes, "The commemorative gold coins struck from 1903-1926 have been excluded because the factors that determine their absolute and high-grade rarity are different from those that rule the fate of issues struck for use in circulation or, in the case of proof gold, yearly sale to a select group of advanced numismatists. The same can be said for modern gold commemoratives struck beginning in 1984."

Ambio makes another interesting point in the book's introduction that I hadn't considered as a collector, but one that is obvious to someone in his position as a dealer and auctioneer: given the fact that consignments of gold coins constitute the majority of value embodied within an auction, a sale's financial success often depends on the number of gold coins consigned and their performance on auction day. He adds, "If at all possible, the auctioneer will schedule gold coin lots to sell on a Friday and/or Saturday evening to guarantee maximum exposure among dealers, collectors, investors and, yes, future consignors."

The opening chapter addresses "Popular Collecting and Investing Strategies." These really are just descriptions of the different types of sets one might assemble, such as short type sets, complete type sets and what Ambio calls "advanced type sets." The section on "complete type sets" seems redundant, since it's basically a recitation of the book's chapters.

Chapter 1 includes the book's first genuine investing tip: "The San Francisco Mint, in particular, offers considerable opportunities. Many early S-mint gold coins are similar in rarity to Charlotte, Dahlonega and Carson City Mint issues, yet they often sell for considerably less."

Chapter 2, "Considerations for Buying Rare U.S. Gold Coins," stresses another important tip for investors—studying a large number of coins at numismatic auction-lot viewing sessions. There is no substitute for seeing as many coins as possible with your own eyes.

Ambio states, "there are many possible ways to find a reputable United States coin dealer." Suggested starting places are the ANA and Professional Numismatists Guild websites, but many, many dealers are listed there with no way to rank them or winnow down the list. A cynic might say that all such a listing could indicate about given dealer is "that the bum hasn't been caught and thrown out yet."

The real advice comes next, and it's hardly a revelation: "One of the most underutilized methods of finding a reputable numismatic dealer is simply to ask other collectors and investors for recommendations. Word-of-mouth can be a powerful tool. Honest, knowledgeable dealers will enjoy a good reputation among veteran buyers."

The meat of the book is in the subsequent chapters, which are nicely illustrated with examples of each major coin type, courtesy of Steve Contursi and Rare Coin Wholesalers. This book is part of what Zyrus Press calls its "Strategy Guide Series." In keeping with Chapter 2's theme, each subsequent chapter covers strategies and key insights for assembling the various types of coin sets.

Ambio lists the "Most Desirable Issue(s)" of each type, "Most Desirable Grade(s)" and "Estimated Cost" for circulated and uncirculated coins. These recommendations are neatly highlighted in shaded "strategy boxes," a nice feature for ready reference and readability. Other nice features are the price charts showing recent selling prices for each coin type.

Specific advice and Ambio's reasoning behind it is sprinkled throughout the book, such as this note regarding the \$1 denomination: "I believe that high-grade, attractive New Orleans Mint gold coins are among the more underrated pieces in numismatics. If you also subscribe to this theory, I suggest waiting until a premium quality example becomes available." "Words of caution" also are highlighted and warn readers about certain issues that often are found particularly weakly or strongly struck, impaired by jewelry mounts, etc.

At 343 pages, the 7x10-inch book is not to be devoured in one sitting. However, with its short, but interesting, illustrated summaries of the history and design of each coin, the book is very readable. Ambio comes across as quite authoritative and genuinely helpful.

I would recommend this book to any collector or investor considering assembling sets of U.S. gold, but suggest it in conjunction with reading a book about grading or taking a class on grading, which is not covered in detail here."