

**EXTENSIVE:** A closer look at one of Marie Prideaux's dolls.

year-old and it is very precious.

"But it wasn't until the birth of my own daughter, Lexie, when I started looking at kid's stuff that I came across the collector Barbies.

"So I blame it on her, my addiction for Barbies.

"My first one was a Bob Mackie Madame Du Barbie, which even now sells for \$1500 on the net so we are talking serious dolls.

"I would have maybe 250 collector Barbies and I have built them all a big mirrored glass case.

"But I'm not alone. Sharon Stone and Demi Moore also collect these Barbies.

"The ones Dior, Givenchy or Chanel have been commissioned to do are magnificent creations and a lot of those I use as inspiration for some of my own stagewear.

"But, any really serious collectors would be horrified that I take them out of the box.

"You are supposed to leave them all in tact with their hair nets and their wiring, but I figure if I have them I really want to look at them and enjoy them."

Both Jason and Rhonda will be among those heading to Bendigo Art Gallery in December for *Hello Dolly*, an exhibition of dolls drawn from the extraordinary collection of the late Marie Prideaux.

Tansy Curtin, who curated the exhibition, admits she found it difficult to cull 300 dolls from a cast of 10,000 Marie collected over 60 years.

"The way I approached it was to break the exhibition down into key areas of the collection," Tansy reveals.

One part of the exhibition will focus on the celebrity dolls including the beautiful Princess Diana collector dolls, Michael Jackson dolls, Kiss dolls, The Beatles and

Spice Girls dolls, which were some of the highest-selling dolls on record.

Another section of the exhibit will be devoted to the Barbies.

These range from the early 1960s Barbies with mod fashions and beehive hair to contemporary and collectible box sets.

Then, there is a selection of important historical dolls including fragile wax and porcelain dolls dating from the 1850s.

One of Tansy's favourites is the Lenci doll — a beautiful example of the dolls made by the Turin company founded by Enrico and Elana Scavini in 1920.

These beautiful steamed felt hand-painted dolls have always been highly prized and were collected by the likes of Marlene Dietrich who always had a Lenci doll propped up on her dressingroom table as a good luck talisman whenever she was on a film set.

Little is known of the particular doll from the Marie Prideaux collection — a child in Swiss-Italian dress — other than that it was given to her by a manager of Numurkah's ANZ bank and dates from between 1920 and 1940.

"She was just given all these dolls, she was deemed as the person who looked after them," Tansy reveals.

"One of the things she loved doing was dressing up her dolls. She would find a doll that looked like Bert Newton and Patti and would make outfits for them based on what she had seen them wearing.

"There are lots of really quirky dolls and a collection of international dolls.

"Marie never left Australia, but travelled through her dolls. She wrote to all these different people, including the Prime Minister

**RARE:** Growing hair dolls 'Cinnamon' and 'Crissy'.

of Israel and Princess Grace of Monaco, and they sent her dolls.

"She was in lots of ways quite arbitrary in what she collected.

"She took everything, she never said 'no' and I think that is quite lovely because she gave these unwanted dolls a home.

"She looked after them and she loved each and every one of them."

For Marie's daughter, Betty Higgs, the exhibition is an enormous tribute.

"It is fantastic some of them are on show again. When mum was alive the house was always open to the public, but not a lot of people would go and see them in Numurkah," Betty reveals.

Betty, who is senior piano teacher at Girton, recalls the last two dolls she and her husband, John, gave Marie for her 90th birthday.

"They were antique celluloid dolls from Germany. The year before we had given her two girls and we happened to find the boys as pairs," Betty recalls.

But though these dolls were clearly valuable it did not mean Marie singled them out in anyway.

"It didn't matter to her what the value was. She loved anything that had a bit of life in it no matter how silly the doll.

"She had peg dolls, a wishbone doll, corn cob dolls. She even had a dried apple Dame Edna Everage.

"People would literally arrive at the door and just give her dolls.

"We would get home and there would be a bag of dolls leaning against the door.

"She was a tailoress and loved dressing them.

"She would be up and at her machine at 5am and at night she would do her

**PRIZED:** The 1920s Lenci doll have always been popular.**IDOL:** Melbourne-based entertainer Rhonda Burchmore is a huge Barbie doll fan.

smocking. The clothes and styles were faithful to the period so her collection became not only about the dolls, but the era.

"There is a scout doll in the old-style uniform, there is a Herman Munster doll in a suit she made.

"This is the fun of it — it is

the social history that makes it so special to different ages."

And what would Marie herself make of the exhibition?

"She would be absolutely delighted," Betty says.

"That is why it is not sad. She would love this — it is

like a dream come true.

"She loved her dolls so much and it was her wish that people should see this amazing collection, and love them as she did."

■ *Hello Dolly: The Marie Prideaux Collection* opens at Bendigo Art Gallery on December 5 and runs until January 31.