

SHOWMANSHIP



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Showmanship is one of the most important parts of display, but the least understood. This article is going to try to bring a little light on the problem.

To bring showmanship closer to what everyone sees every day let's consider art and especially commercial art as seen in advertising and store window displays. True, in these cases they are trying to sell something, but aren't we trying to show off our work to the best advantage so others can enjoy it?

Consider an expensive store with three fur coats in the window. One will probably be on a pedestal to give it height and the other two grouped together. The figures will be turned partially toward each other to hold the interest within the display and there will probably be smaller accessories such as a scarf, gloves, purse, hat, or related articles grouped so as to tie the whole window together. Or take a poster or magazine advertisement. There will be some word, line, or picture to get your attention and then the message flows easily from one thing to the next. In both of the above cases there are plenty of open spaces and margins to give your eyes a rest but holds your attention within the display instead of wandering to something else. Now I will try to bring these principles down to our immediate need for mineral and gem display.

IN GENERAL

The first thing you have to know is what you are going to display. This will start pinning down important factors such as color, texture, light, etc.

Second, if you are going into competition, read all, and I mean ALL, of the rules pertaining to your display. This means general rules as well as specific ones.

Third, work toward a definite idea of movement to carry the eye through your display. Lines should show a smooth flowing rhythm moving from one portion of the case to another. Conflicting lines and angles only lead to spottiness and confusion. A good rule is to work in groups of odd numbers (3, 5, 7) but tie them together with color, the placement of the material or the structural lines of the risers and furniture. These should repeat or flow from the lines of the case.

Fourth, be alert at all times to new materials, new possibilities, but keep in mind at all times that SHOWMANSHIP is showing your material to the best advantage.

THE CASE

The type of case used has a lot to do with showmanship. At the shows you see them all the way from flat cases with no lights up to large upright cases with lights on the outside showing through frosted glass or plastic that diffuses the light. The low slant front cases that so many of the societies use are easy to carry but have poor lighting. One way to beat this is to add a tight box with a handle on the outside which will hold your case or which will convert your case to one that can be easily carried.

So often the Juniors have a flat box with no lights so in an emergency a gooseneck lamp can be used, but some light is always needed.

One of the best cases is an upright with the lights on the outside to keep the heat out and a slant front to keep down reflections. The lights should be hidden by the sides of the case and heat resistant glass between them and the display. All cases should have ventilation, but cover the openings with screen to keep out the insects. The floor of the cases should be at least six inches above the table level which is usually thirty inches. If it is an upright case you should be able to look at it without bending over. Of course you consider the display for the average person of 5' 6" to 6' 2".

In some localities it is possible to rent display cases and have them delivered to the show room and picked up after the show. At Anaheim this proved cheaper for some societies than using their own case. Most displays call for twelve square feet of table space. How you use it is up to you.

THE LIGHTS

The type of light you use is very important and differs with what you are displaying. Faceted material needs spots of light, transparent stones need back lighting, and the majority of displays need good overall lighting to cut down on shadows. Above all use a white light to get true color. The long case lights and ordinarily all incandescent bulbs give a yellow light. Recently I saw a case of faceted stones lit with many of the small clear flame shaped bulbs in the top of the case. It really gave lots of sparkle to the facets.

The Los Angeles County museum, on their mineral cases, uses three long fluorescent bulbs, two white and one pink, to give a more natural color.

Watch your wattage and the heat or many minerals and especially opal can be ruined.

Be sure you have more light inside the case than outside or people will be looking at their own reflections and that isn't what they came to see.

THE CASE LINING

If you use your own case or use a society case where you have measurements the best bet is to cut liner forms of 1/8 inch plywood or cardboard and cover them. Pegboard is handy when hanging things on the back or sides because you can fill the needed holes with balsa wood and have something good to hold the pins, but you have to use plastic or muslin under your cloth to hide the holes.

Fir-tex is easy to pin into but makes a thick liner. You can get finished veneer panels at the building supply stores which is beautiful but is not of fine enough texture to be suitable for most of our minerals and gems.

Corrugated cardboard that you pick up as boxes back of home appliance stores seems to be very good if you get a good smooth piece. At the lumber yards you can also get sheets of a heavy cardboard under various trade names that is good. A new material, *Foam Core*, is good. It is a Styrofoam type of material that is light but covered with a cardboard that prevents denting. It can be bought at display companies.

In covering your liners never use glue on the front surface of your liner, because the heat of the lights will be apt to wrinkle the material. Just the heat in a camper going to San Diego ruined one liner. Another thing to remember is that excessive heat will expand Styrofoam if it is used for risers, so just try to "keep your cool, " and avoid things affected by heat or go prepared.

The best way to hold the cloth on the liner form is by sewing. (Fig. 3) Masking tape to hold it in place works fairly well but many tapes come loose in the heat of the case. White glue can be used on the back with pins to hold it in place until the glue dries.

Plan your liners so as little space shows in the crack as possible. If you look into the crack it is much more prominent so put the back in first, then the bottom and then the sides.

The material to cover the boards with varies greatly due to the specimens to be shown which varies from faceted stones to petrified wood and from howlite to sphalerite or other dark materials. Since you want to show your material to the best advantage you must study what you have and then go shopping.

If you are using a borrowed case and know the size, take a piece of material the length of the case plus twice the height and wide enough for the width and height. Two yards of at least thirty inch material is usually enough.

Find the middle of the material lengthwise and thumbtack to the top of the back. Use thumbtacks that match the material. Then thumbtack the rest of the top back. Bring it down smooth and put tacks at the two lower comers. (Remove them later.) Smooth out the bottom and tack the front comers. Fold the ends back on the bottom and bring up on the end. Tack back corner and cut off or fold under the excess material, and finish tacking the top edge. This will make a good smooth end with no slant lines to detract.

There are basic rules to follow in choosing your materials.

1. Never let the texture of the material overpower your specimens. For jewelry, faceted stones, and miniatures a fine texture is best.
2. Shiny materials pick up too many highlights and detract. For this reason the old technique of folding or bunching satin or velvet is very poor for showmanship.
3. Light colors reflect light and give better vision in the case. Dark colors absorb light and are usually not good except in some cases like howlite which doesn't show up to advantage on white. But avoid strong contrasts of black and white because it takes interest away from your specimens.
4. The color is important. For best results in most cases an off-white is best, such as cream, peach, eggshell, green, blue, or gray. White can be used but is better with a slight texture to cut down on glare. One of the most satisfactory colors is a very light soft pink. It goes with practically everything. Strong colors attract too much attention to themselves. Bright red does nothing for a display, although if you must have a red background for a certain display such as heavy Indian jewelry, try a very dull rusty red or a deep wine red.
5. Remember that your judges are human, and believe it or not, or whether they know it or not, colors do affect people looking at your case. Your warm reds and yellows (soft colors) are more pleasing and the cool colors (blues and greens) while beautiful do not give as good a background. Although I have seen some exhibit halls where a little coolness would have been welcome. Your accents of the dark cool colors of your minerals are more attractive against the warmer background.
6. By texture we refer to the surface finish such as double knits, basket weave, linen, nubby, terrycloth, burlap, carpeting, and even roofing paper which was well used in a case of large sculpture. The coarse texture should be avoided except in very special cases. Straw cloth is quite generally used but in cases of jewelry, faceted stones, and some crystals the highlights do reflect in the display and look like flaws.
7. Keep your liner neutral so it stays in the background and enhances your displayed material.
8. The type of material varies and actual names do not mean much as they change from one year to the next. If you are going to be using irregular shapes in risers and other furniture, the two way stretch material is great, but expensive. Even two way stretch material in a plain pattern has a good texture. Shop the department store yardage departments, special yardage stores, and drapery stores-for the desired texture, color, and weight of material for your case.

BALANCE YOUR CASE

Remember the old teeter-totter? Skinny sat way out at the end of the plank, but the fatter you were the closer you sat to the middle. This holds true in display. Not that you can't use some smaller pieces closer to the center and larger pieces further out, but never pushed into corners.

Make use of open spaces so that the overall is uniform and not spotty. Use grouping of the material and open your display up more.

Use risers and let the edge of the riser tie things together in a symmetrical arrangement. A riser can be used to give height and a line to tie things together.

Avoid a case that is crowded and cluttered because there is no pattern, no open space, and too much in the case. Consider using a curved line in the placing of the specimens and a few placed parallel to the front of the case to keep your eyes from swinging on to the next case.

A symmetrical arrangement of risers in curved tiers is probably the best where you have to have 30 to 50 specimens of about the same size.

Your whole case should be a harmonious picture that stresses the material you are showing. The use of unrelated materials such as plastic flowers, driftwood, sand, figurines, etc. merely detract and clutter up the case. They may be interesting but not for a mineral, fossil, jewelry, or gem display.

LABELS

Your labels are judged twice. The first time for nomenclature and information. With care in spelling and knowledge of your material you should get full points on this. The second is showmanship. Do they improve instead of detract from the case?

The lettering should be simple and easy to read. Old English or other fancy letters have no place on a label that is for information only. Architectural lettering is good and clear but most people do not have the practice to do it well. A typewriter can be used but be sure your type is clean and you have a good ribbon and use even pressure on your keys. If you can get someone to do your labels on an electric IBM Executive machine with Gothic type, it is great. But we don't all have access to this type of equipment. Even manual typewriters with Gothic type are hard to find but a good pica type is very readable. The elite type is a little small. Where small lettering is necessary as in micromounts you can type up your labels and have them reduced in size by a photo press. But don't reduce to where they are hard to read or it is poor showmanship, as they don't fulfill their purpose.

Labels that are too big clutter up the case. Labels should be clean rectangular shapes with neat lettering and of a material heavy enough to stay where placed. There are several different types of press on letters out now used by architects and commercial artists that are easy to use. You can get them at art stores and most college book stores. The three known to me are Prestype, Latraset, and Instantype but there are probably more. They come in many sizes and faces.

The machines like dynatype give a plastic label which curls in the heat of the case and usually has a dark background which stands out as spots throughout your case. The label color should blend with your case material. The engraved plastic labels are good if the color harmonizes, but so often the background is black or dark wood grain with white letters and in looking at the case you are very conscious of spots before your eyes.

All capitals are usually easier to read than upper and lower case letters, but in mineral displays where they call for capitalization of the most important mineral you have a problem. One solution is to use two sizes of capital letters.

Never lean a label against a specimen. Labels that are flat on the bottom make them less conspicuous. Arrange them so they are parallel to the front of the case or follow the edge of the riser. Be consistent in your label as to size, lettering, and placing. No one should have to twist their head to read a label.

FINAL CHECK

After your case is set up, stand back and check.

1. Is the case well lighted?
2. Is the case arrangement simple, well organized, with no over crowding or cluttering?
3. Do the lining, labels, and furniture remain inconspicuous?
4. Is the case and display clean with no fingerprints, lint, or other foreign objects such as keys, thumbtacks, etc. showing? Is the lining pressed?
5. Have you planned where you will put your name plate and ribbon after the judging so you won't have to put it on top of the display? People still want to see what you won on.
6. Does anything cast shadows or hide anything? Glass shelves are particularly bad for this reason.

Be sure to take along a box of necessities when you go to put in a case, such as window cleaner, paper towels, small brush to brush out lint, masking tape, double faced scotch tape to make something stay where you put it, pins, material to make a new label if needed, etc , A good rule is to drop things you use in making up a case into a box and take it with you. Accidents do happen in transit and a tube of 5 minute epoxy has covered many a tragedy.

MY LAST WORD

If you don't believe these principles are basic, the next time you go to a show, stand back and see which cases are most attractive and enjoyed the most. Do people say: "Look at that case! "What a mess! "How cute!" Do they stand and absorb the contents, or pass it by? What do **you** want in a mineral or gem display?

For further reading on the subject see:

Display Techniques by J. Chittenden, Lapidary Journal, March 1971

Showmanship by Paul F. Patchick, Rock and Gem, October 1972 – He also gives a good bibliography.

C. F. M. S. Exhibitors Manual, revised edition 1969.

WHERE TO FIND IT

Since CFMS covers such a wide area it is hard to give names of stores in telling where to find supplies, but here are some of the types of stores. Where store names are used they are in the Los Angeles area and may be in other larger cities. Check your telephone yellow pages.

House of Fabrics, known to be in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas. Carries straw cloth under the name of Loop Knit Cloth.

Cloth Liners: Department Store yardage and drapery departments Yardage Stores, and many novelty stores

Polyurethane: Call your closest Dow Chemical office to see where you can buy it in sheets, which vary in thickness.

Styrofoam: Hobby Shops, Flower Arrangement Supply Stores, Standard Brands, Building Supply Centers

Pressed Cardboard sheets, Fir-tex, etc.: Lumber yards, Building Supply Stores

