



RING ROAD ANTIQUE CENTRE CARING FOR YOUR COLLECTABLES

Although most people don't have the time and resources to learn how to care for their heirlooms in the same fashion as a museum would, there are some basic things to consider for all collections, whether made from paper, metal, glass or ceramic materials.

Light can harm most any collectible, especially organic materials like wood, paper and textiles. In addition to fading colors in prints and fabrics, harsh light can dry out many materials and can speed up chemical reactions that occur naturally over time. All collections should be displayed away from direct sunlight. Even things that seem indestructible, like plastics, can melt when stored near a sunny window. Lights in display cabinets should be used sparingly as well. Turning display lights on when the air feels a bit damp helps alleviate humidity, however.

When there's not enough humidity, items like paintings, wood and paper can shrink, crack and become very brittle. When humidity reaches excessive levels, rust can develop on metal items, mold can grow and insects are encouraged to breed. Both light levels and humidity can be tested in the home for those who're really serious about protecting their valuable collections. Light meters can be purchased at photo supply shops and hygrometers for checking humidity are available at most hardware stores. In general, light levels should be fairly low for most collectibles so displaying them in a hallway or specific room with adequate window coverings can help. Humidity should be at about 50% when possible.

Another consideration is temperature. Avoid the extreme temperature fluctuations of storing collectables in attics or garages, especially when considering organic materials. The ideal temperature for preservation hovers around 64 degrees. That's a little cold for most people. And around here you'd spend in excess trying to maintain it during the summer. If you have one room in your home that tends to be a little cooler than the rest of the house year round, that's going to be your best spot for displaying and storing collections. Again, hallways and dimly lit rooms seem to provide a little more coolness so consider those areas for fragile items like paper and textiles.

And if you decide to change the way your storing items, moving from hot to cold and vice versa, do so gradually. Most antiques can be shocked when exposed to temperature extremes too quickly. For example, when exposed to extreme temperature changes the tiny cracks in the glaze of ceramics, called crazing, can appear more rapidly than they would have naturally.

Another way to keep most any item in top shape comes through avoiding excessive handling. The oily residue on skin can remain on items causing deterioration. That's why you often see museum curators wearing white cotton gloves when handling precious commodities. The more fragile items are handled, the more likely they are to be broken as well. For this reason, they should be cleaned only as often as necessary.

To assemble a collectibles cleaning kit, consider rounding up the following items: soft bristled brushes, cans of moisture free compressed air, cotton swabs, distilled water and isopropyl alcohol. Brushes can often be found when you're out foraging for garage sale finds. Artist's brushes, shaving brushes and soft paintbrushes are all great for dusting away loose particles. Canned air can be purchased at office supply stores and works well for cleaning items too delicate to brush.

When an item needs to be wet cleaned, if dry cleaning methods haven't quite done the trick, using distilled water avoids the chemical and minerals in tap water that can stain some materials. Isopropyl alcohol often comes in handy for cleaning many ceramics and porcelain pieces with a glazed finish. Be careful though! Alcohol can take the finish off of wood and remove painting on glass. Also be careful when using detergents, since anything with bleach can be damaging to fragile items such as faux pearls adorning vintage clothing.

Ring Road Antique Centre
Ring Road, New Norfolk, Tasmania
P +61(0)3 6261 5880
www.ringroadantiques.com.au