

Basic Elements of **SHOWMANSHIP**

Exhibiting your material to best advantage!

By Jim Brace-Thompson

FROM BLANK SLATE TO FINISHED CASE

Tips and examples to craft a fine exhibit.



SHOWMANSHIP DEFINED

Per the AFMS Uniform Rules, showmanship “*refers to the ability of the exhibitor to use the material exhibited, the **background material, lighting, arrangement, and labeling features** (such as size, neatness, etc.) to create a display which will attract and **hold the interest of the viewer upon the specimens exhibited.**” (Boldface added for emphasis.)*

Let’s tackle these areas one-by-one with examples of what judges focus upon...

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

- Use a liner! Sometimes, the natural wood background of a case works, but a liner is almost always better.
- Use neutral liners. Vibrant colors and/or patterns take the eye away from the specimens and/or bury them.
- Don't get overly clever with background. Always keep in mind: the specimens should pop, not the background.

Why Use Liners?

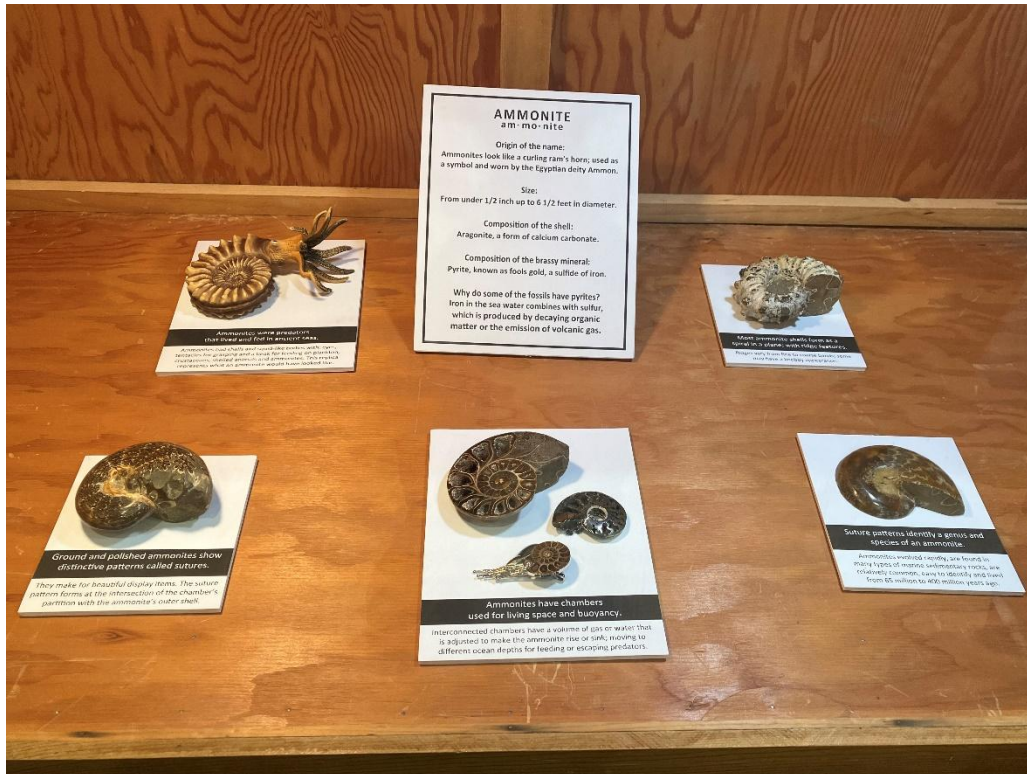
A case with fine wood interior that compliments the specimens can work without a liner sometimes, but most often not, as we'll see next.



Why Use Liners?

Of the examples below, which looks best to you?

A display case without any liners...



...versus a case with a basic floor liner.



Liner Choice

Avoid patterns!

I see plaid, but where are the rocks?



Good theme, but specimens get buried.



Being Perhaps Too Clever

Here's an interesting concept, but does it work?
The specimens should hold viewer interest, not the background.



Clean, Neutral Background Makes Things Pop!



LIGHTING

Invest the effort of installing quality lighting in your case:

- Darkness drains life from specimens.
- Avoid “spotlighting” effect; spread light evenly.
- Avoid bulbs emitting yellow or blue hues.
- Go for bright daylight evenly spread across the exhibit.

Death by Darkness

You invested the time; now let the light shine in!



Spotlighting Effect

Some parts overly bright; other parts left in the dark.



Discoloring Your Display

Neither too yellow nor too blue, but just right!

- Light emitted by bulbs is often measured in the Kelvin [K] Color Temperature Scale.
- Different temperatures result in hues varying along a yellow-blue axis.
- Color temperature of 2700K is very yellow.
- Color temperature of 6500K is very blue.
- A “daylight” LED bulb at 5000K is a good option for crisp, natural white light that allows details of your specimens to pop.

Yellow Lighting?

Good for romance. Bad for rocks.



A Rock with the Blues is a Sad Rock



Go with Goldilocks

Lighting that's just right!



ARRANGEMENT

- Don't crowd or clutter. For showmanship, less is almost always more, so go with the minimum number of specimens allowed.
- Placement of specimens should be balanced and pleasing to the eye, so most often "classic" symmetrical arrangement is used.
- But don't automatically reject asymmetrical layouts!
- Consider the advantages of risers and stands.

Don't Crowd Me!

What are the minimum/maximum allowed? Go with the minimum!



Examples of Classic Symmetrical Layout



When Symmetry Gets Knocked Off Balance

My eye keeps asking, “Why the black necklace stand and haphazard placement of the gemstone specimens?”



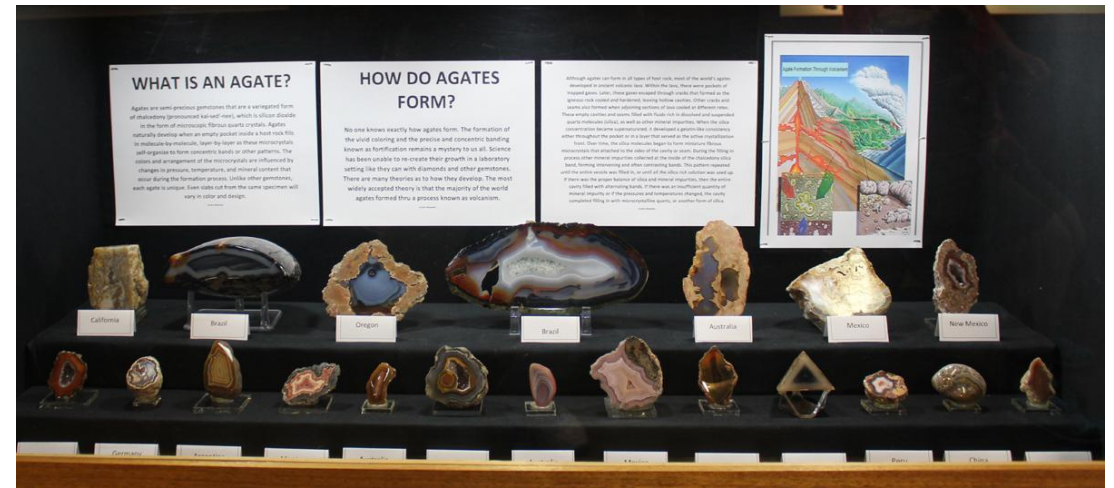
Larger specimens are better placed to the back, not in front blocking others.



When Symmetry Gets Knocked Off Balance, Part 2

Is something missing in the lower right?

A great display thrown off just a bit by one lone vertical panel.



Asymmetrical Arrangement

Not all displays need exhibit perfect “classic” symmetry with everything lined up in a row. Although you seldom see it (perhaps because symmetrical layout is easier), you can build asymmetrical layouts that are well balanced, as illustrated in an article by Susan Robinson: “Some Observations (and Tips) on Exhibiting,” *Rocks & Minerals*, Vol. 74, No. 4, July/August 1999, pp. 263-265.

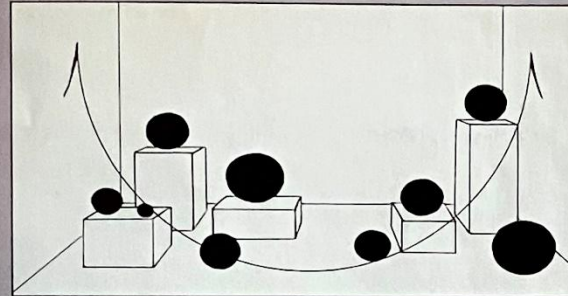


Figure 1. This arrangement of nine objects shows the center portion lower than the edges. Note that the sides are balanced according to size and height, not number of specimens. The viewer's eye travels from the top of one side, across the middle, then upward again to the opposite side.

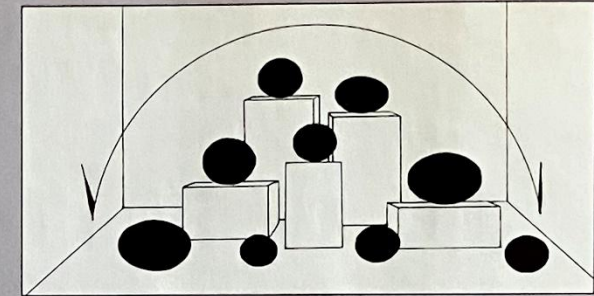


Figure 2. The main focus here is on the central area. The viewer's eye is carried upward to the central apex, then back down again. Note that the larger objects are not centered.

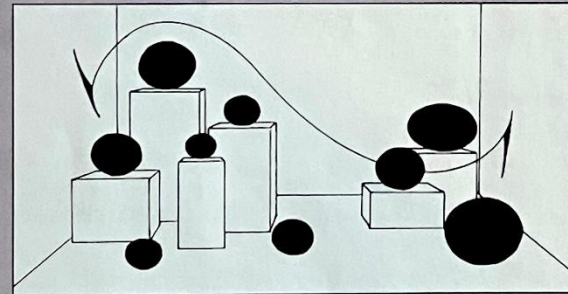


Figure 3. The arrangement here is asymmetrical—the two sides balance, yet the display heights, sizes, and numbers on each side differ. The eye travels up and down from either side in a roller-coaster pattern.

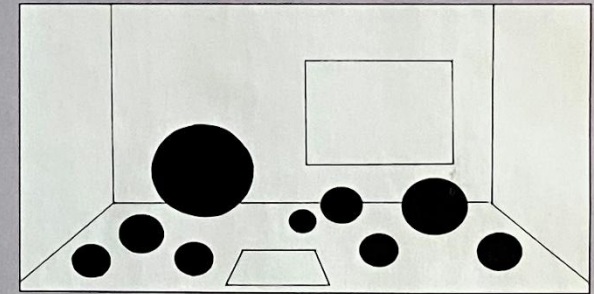
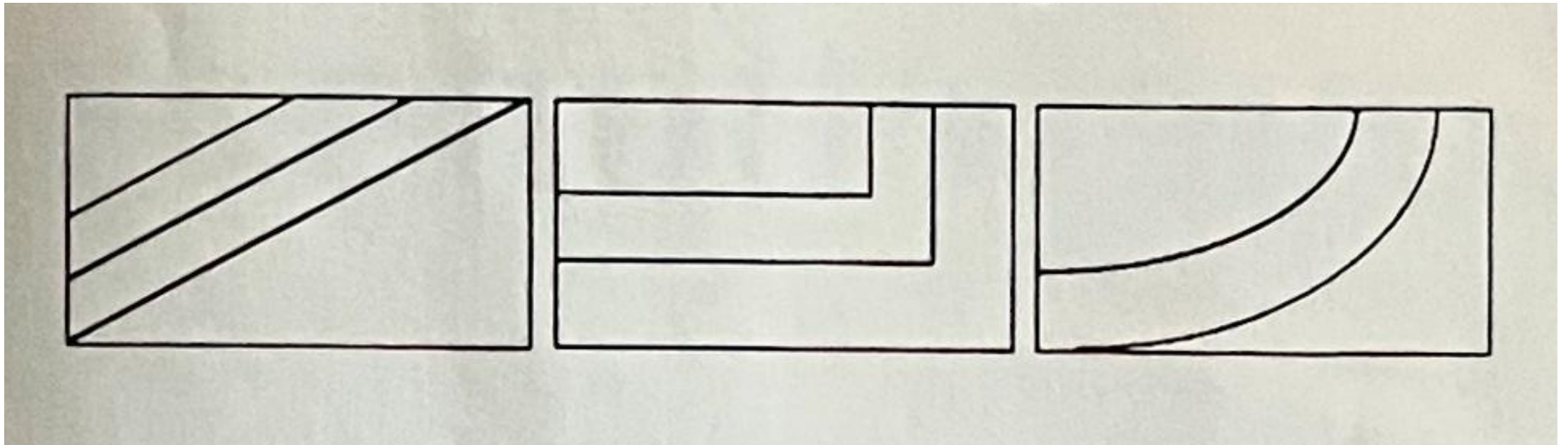


Figure 4. This arrangement deals with a large specimen among smaller ones. Here, the largest object is off-center and near the back of the case. Note that the picture on the case's wall has also been placed on the opposite side.

Asymmetrical Riser Arrangements

Susan Robinson: "Some Observations (and Tips) on Exhibiting," *Rocks & Minerals*, Vol. 74, No., 4, July/August 1999, p. 265



An Asymmetrical Layout That Works



The Advantages of Risers

Providing depth & helping separate & showcase specimens.

Without risers: nice, but a bit flat.

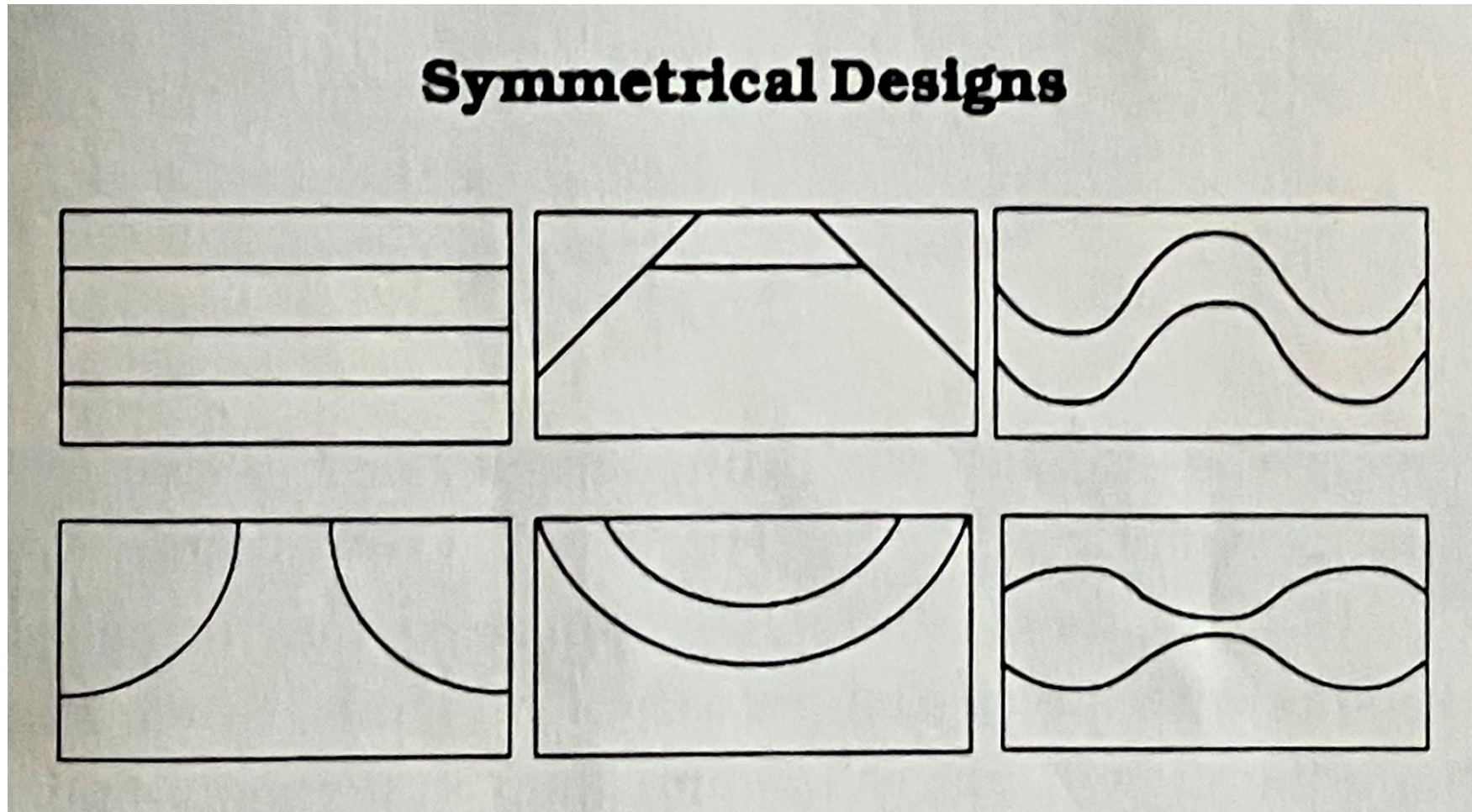


With risers: added dimension.



Risers Can Take Varied Formats

Susan Robinson, "Some Observations (and Tips) on Exhibiting," *Rocks & Minerals*, Vol. 74, No., 4, July/August 1999, p. 265



The Varied Forms of Risers, Part 1

Traditional stair steps.



Still more stairs.



The Varied Forms of Risers, Part 2

Going for angles...



More fun with angles...



The Varied Forms of Risers, Part 3

Going for curves...



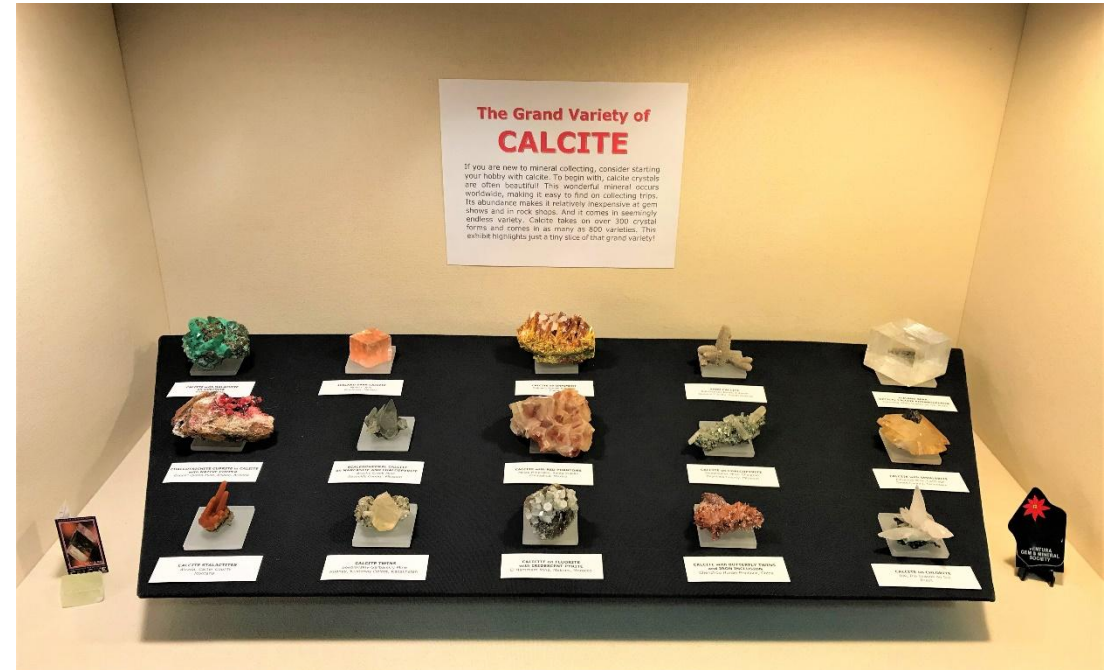
...and more curves!



Angles & Curves Combined



A Slightly Tilted “Floating Shelf” Achieves the Same Effect as Risers



Standing up for Your Minerals!

You don't always need stands, but...

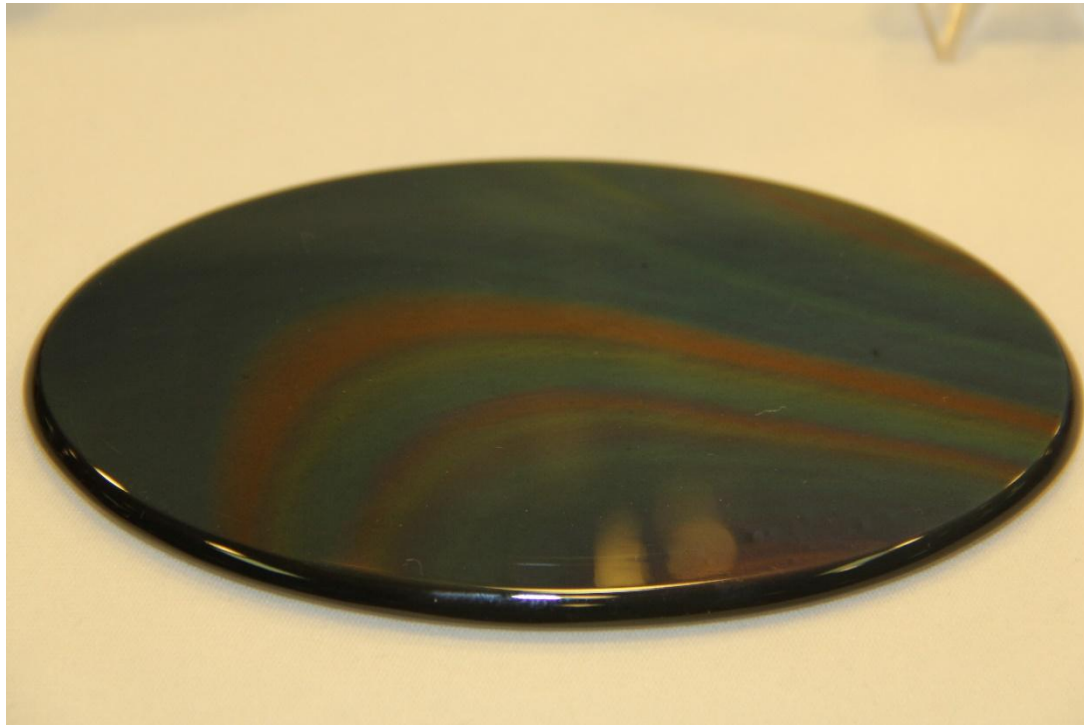


...stands help the minerals stand out.



Using Stands with Cabochons

Flat on the liner...



...versus facing the viewer head-on.



Consider Customizing Your Stands

Specimen attached to a stand with unsightly putty.



Specimen secured in a stand that has been carved out to fit.



Getting Creative with Stands

So long as it's not at the expense of the specimen!



LABELING FEATURES

Specific info to include on labels varies by Division. Here, we consider labeling elements related just to showmanship, not to content.

- Include the minimum required info to keep labels small.
- Labels (printed, not handwritten) should be as small and unobtrusive as possible while remaining legible.
- Labels should be on sturdy cardstock (preferably white), not on paper that will curl.
- Labels should be neatly and consistently trimmed.
- Labels should be laid out neatly, not haphazardly or at odd angles.

Why Labels? They're Required!

And a courtesy for viewers.

A nice process exhibit, but viewers need more than just the corner panel.



Wonderful jewelry work, but what is it? No title label. No specimen labels.



Keep Labels Small While Still Legible

Are you displaying specimens—or labels? Downsize those labels!



Use Crisp Cardstock, Not Paper that Curls

and go for neutral white, not colored paper



Lay Out Labels Uniformly & Neatly

Haphazard sizes and placement diverts attention from the specimens.



Examples of Labels Sized & Placed Just Right



Consider Adding a Title Label

Every good book deserves a good title to tie it all together. Where's yours?



Title labels tell visitors what they're viewing at-a-glance.



Getting Creative

Not every exhibit need be in a 4x2x2 box!



In the end & most of all:
Have Fun!



CREDITS

- American Federation of Mineralogical Societies, *AFMS Uniform Rules, 9th Edition* (David Wayment, Chair, AFMS Publications Committee; edited by Larry Hulstrom and Lee Whitebay).
- Susan Robinson, “Some Observations (and Tips) on Exhibiting,” *Rocks & Minerals*, Vol. 74, No. 4, July/August 1999, pages 263-265.
- “What is Lighting Color Temperature?” TCP Lighting website, ©2023: <https://www.tcpi.com/what-is-lighting-color-temperature/>
- With thanks to all who have entered competitive and noncompetitive displays at local, regional, and national shows affiliated with AFMS.