

Displaying your vintage equipment

The treasure that you triumphantly brought home has been lovingly repaired, its gleam restored and it is playing again. But *now* what are you going to do with it?

With the first two or three receivers, there is usually no problem. Assuming that the lady of the house is tolerant, a mantel receiver can be put to work in the living room, while a compact set can earn its keep substituting for the 'tranny' in the kitchen or perhaps can be used as the bedside radio.

Similarly a handsome console may be acceptable in the lounge room. But soon there comes a definite limit to the number of vintage radio receivers that the average household can absorb. Even a small number of wooden cabinets can occupy a surprising amount of space...

In spite of all the best intentions to limit the number of acquisitions, the nature of the collecting virus being what it is, most vintage radio enthusiasts eventually come to the stage when they have to take serious stock of where their treasures are to be stored and consider what

they want to do with their collection — just store it, or display the items as well.

Most of us want to show our collections off to their best advantage. After all, why bother to refurbish radios just to hide them away? As they are meant to be seen, admired, discussed and played, they have to be accessible. Furthermore the display area must be secure, clean and dry — and as anyone who has experienced their activities will agree, rodent free! The results of a family of mice living in a chassis are most unpleasant, and some of the damage is irreversible.

Lucky indeed is the collector who has a room dedicated to his hobby; but many do not have this luxury. Older houses often have a generous hallway, which has sufficient width to accommodate a reasonable display without disrupting normal traffic. Fig.2 shows a good example. There may be other locations, such

as a high shelf (as in Fig.4) which can be used to house a few sets without too much domestic discomfort.

An essential requirement for any vintage radio enthusiast is some sort of workshop facility, both woodworking and electronic, and often this has to be integral with the display. Provided that they are dry, basements can be used successfully, but restricted headroom or access can be problems. Similarly, secure outhouses and sheds can often be adapted for displays.

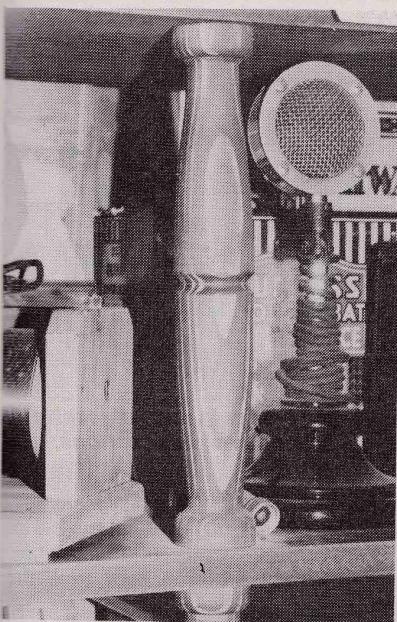
One popular area which often doubles as the workshop is the garage. This has the advantage of flexibility, in that space normally occupied by the car can temporarily provide extra room for workshop activities. Garage walls can be used for display areas, and more than one enthusiast has changed to a smaller car to gain more space!



Fig.1: This is definitely NOT the best way to display a collection, with items simply piled on each other...



Fig.2: A good example of a much better approach. Careful planning of shelf positioning can help in accommodating a comparatively large number of receivers in a small room or building, or even a wide passageway.



Provided there is room on the property, the serious collector can consider a 'kitset' shed. These are widely advertised, in a range of sizes and choice of windows and doors. They can be quickly assembled on a concrete pad and dismantled when no longer needed. Lined and fitted out with shelves, these buildings can be excellent and provide reasonably economic accommodation.

Displaying them

Having decided on the display area, how is it to be furnished? Unfortunately, conditions like that shown in Fig.1 are all too common. The basic rules of displaying are that the exhibits should be readily visible and safe from damage. Obviously, a pile on the floor is a recipe for disaster and hardly attractive.

The best techniques can be seen in major museums, with their well lit and uncluttered displays and plenty of documentation. Amateurs do not often have the space or resources to achieve this sort of excellence, but they can borrow ideas from the professionals.

For example, only console radios should be on the floor, and ideally with their tops clear. Smaller receivers can be on shelves, small stands or tables. Wall-mounted shelving is the most practical method for many situations, and varied spacing makes the most economic use of the available area.

Care is needed, though. Row upon orderly row of receivers can create the impression of a warehouse. This can be avoided to some extent by breaking up lines and staggering sizes and spacings. Posters or a group of components as in

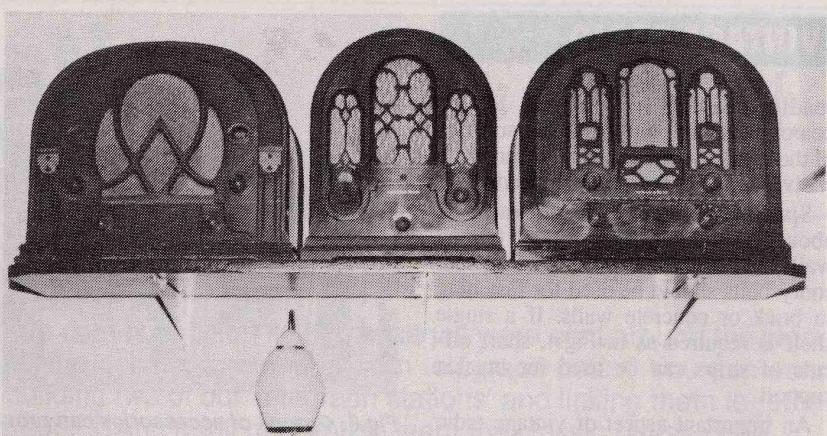


Fig.4 (above): A short high shelf can be used to good effect in an otherwise unused space — in this case featuring a group of 1933 Atwater Kent 'round tops'.

Fig.3 (left): Details of the turned pillars visible in Fig.2, supporting the shelves. Also visible is an elderly microphone.

Fig.5 (right): A closeup of the adjustable display fittings used in the shelf of Fig.4.

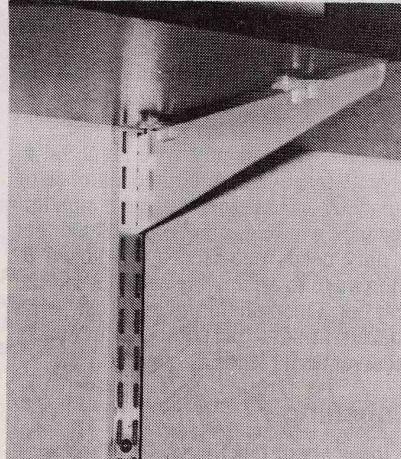
Fig.6 are a very valid part of a display and can be used effectively to provide some variation.

With shelving so important, some care in its selection is essential, but the pre-cut type with fancy finishes can be expensive. Plain dressed timber is an obvious choice, but it must be well seasoned or warping can be a problem. As many older mantel cabinets are quite deep, shelves should be 300mm (12 inches) wide, and obtaining lengths of plain timber of sufficient width may be difficult. Unveneered 15mm particle board can be good value and is reasonably stable. A standard sheet can be cut to provide four shelves, 2.4 metres (8 feet) in length.

Weighty problem

There are several ways of supporting the shelves, but whatever method is used it must be strong and secure, for radios can be surprisingly heavy. A row of five medium sized receivers can weigh 70kg and for this sort of load, simple 'L' brackets as used for a laundry shelf are quite inadequate! Closely-spaced full width partitions such as were once common in bookshelf construction can provide adequate support, but they can have the annoying habit of being in the wrong place.

If you have access to a lathe, the system illustrated in Figs.2 and 3 is worth considering. The shelves are attached at the rear to battens, but at the front, turned pillars provide support. Projections at the



ends of the pillars fit into holes in the shelves, providing a stable and decorative construction.

Adjustable shelving

Both of the methods described are quite effective, but have the disadvantage that the shelf spacing cannot be readily changed. Our requirements have a lot in common with retail stores, which need display shelving that is strong, decorative, adjustable and not too expensive. One of the most satisfactory and popular is the kind of modular system shown in Fig.5.

Components for such systems are competitively priced and obtainable from firms selling shop fittings. (In Australia, many of the larger hardware stores also stock them — Editor) A check in the trade section of the telephone directory will help track down a supplier.

The slotted aluminium supports are spaced vertically along a wall at suitable intervals, and bracket plates with matching lugs are inserted into the slots to provide the shelf positions — which can be

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readily changed as required. Plastic bearer pads clip on to the upper surfaces of the brackets, and for extra security the shelves may be screwed to the pads.

Spacing between strips should be about 500mm, which on wooden framed walls will often suit stud spacing. Masonry bolts should be used for fastening to brick or concrete walls. If a single shelf is required as in Fig.4, short off-cuts of strips can be used for bracket support.

An important aspect of vintage radio displaying is the requirement in most cases for receivers to be operational. This can create some problems in achieving tidy wiring. One advantage of the system just described is the availability of fastenings for holding vertical panels, which can be used for mounting power and aerial distribution boards. These can go a long way towards providing orderly wiring.

Do not permanently wire an aerial to several receivers. A limited number of broadcast band aerial coils with high impedance windings can be paralleled, but it only needs one receiver switched to shortwave to effectively short circuit the rest out. One solution is to install aerial sockets at strategic points, and connect receiver aerial leads as required.

Labelling

Ideas about labelling of exhibits vary. A museum display catering for the public must be adequately labelled, but in general terms. On the other hand, for a small group of receivers likely to be seen only

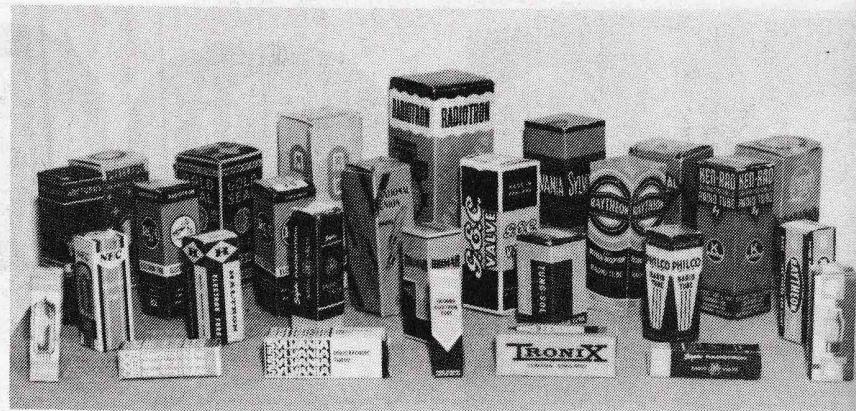


Fig.6: Groups of accessories can provide colourful breaks in rows of receivers. Eight different countries are represented in this collection of valve cartons.

by experts, labels are not essential. Many private collections are in this category, and the owner is on hand if a visitor needs an explanation.

There are times, however, when labels should be used. From time to time, private collectors are called on by various organisations to provide a display for an exhibition associated with a historic event or the like. These opportunities should be taken as a public relations exercise whenever possible, and they can be a valuable source of radios. Often people have an old set to give away, but are looking for a responsible recipient who is not going to immediately turn round and sell it.

Clear and concise labels should be used, and should answer the two questions most often asked by the public: 'How old is it?' and 'How many valves?'. Neat legible printing is of course essential, and computer graphics programs can be used for professional

looking labels that will enhance any display. The author has made good use of the letterhead facility of the popular computer program 'Printshop'. Paste the printed paper on to a piece of cardboard fitted with a triangular rear strut to provide a free-standing mounting.

Finally, a point of etiquette. An important part of the fun of vintage radio is visiting other collections. Most collectors welcome the fellowship and are pleased to host visitors, but please, give warning of your visit. Murphy's Law says that an unexpected visitation will always be at the worst possible time with the collection in disarray and the owner/collector up to the elbows in another restoration project!

Clubs & Societies

HISTORICAL RADIO SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA: The Melbourne Branch meets at the South Camberwell Tennis Club, cnr Burke Road and Bickleigh Street, Glen Iris. The next meeting will be on February 18, at 7.30pm. Further details from J.R. Wales, PO Box 283 Mount Waverley 3149.

The HRSA's Sydney Branch will be meeting at the home of John & Janette McIlwaine, at Bateau Bay, on Saturday February 6. Further details from Branch Secretary Ron Langhans, phone (02) 674 2846 (AH).

AUSTRALASIAN TELEPHONE COLLECTORS SOCIETY: Meetings are held at 7.30pm on the third Friday of January, March, May, July, September and November, at the Pole Depot Neighbourhood Centre, 23 St Georges Road, Penshurst NSW. Membership enquiries should be directed to ATCS, PO Box 572, Baulkham Hills 2153.

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