

## Classic Posters - Poster Archiving, Packaging, and Shipment

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by Michael Erlewine

There are many ways to store your posters. In the old days, many of us stored them on the walls, with a tack in each corner. In the '60s, very few thought to organize their collection. In fact, perhaps the second most common place for your poster collection in those days was in a box shoved under the bed.



*Early poster archival system*

There are some real horror stories about original sets of Family Dog and Bill Graham posters, stored under the bed, being destroyed in one way or another. In one case, the entire collection was eaten by rats, without the owner's knowledge. What a shock! Today, many of these items are too valuable to put under the bed, much less tack to walls, although I think it is healthy to tack one up every once in a while. So how should we store them?

Today, perhaps the favorite methods of storing posters are either in a glorified

version of the box (no longer under the bed) or in a display album of one kind or another. Both have their advantages and disadvantages.

### The Display Album



*Deluxe Display Album 18x24*

Display albums are multi-ring binders that can contain up to 20 (I use 25 without problems) pages. Each page is clear plastic, with a white (or black) heavy-paper insert enclosed by the plastic, allowing for a poster to be inserted on each side.

Display albums come in several sizes, that are capable of holding posters from 8.5 x 11" up to about 18 x 24".

"LightImpressionsDirect.com" has lovely albums with natural-tweed fabric, and leather corners. The larger ones cost around \$200, complete with 25 Melinex (similar to Mylar) pages, so they are not inexpensive.

The advantages of display albums like these is that you can protect your posters from greasy fingers and show them to anyone willing to sit through the

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look-see process. Just a comment: I find very, very few people interested in seeing more than a few posters. I'm sure that does not extend to most of those reading this, but the average friend enjoys maybe seeing ten posters or so, and then they are ready to move on to see something else.



*Album holds about 50 posters*

Display albums are very much used by dealers, and are ubiquitous at almost all posters shows. Again, not all (or even many) of these display albums use archival-friendly plastic in their pages, so be aware that long-term storage of posters in non-archival plastic is not recommended, in particular, if the poster is valuable. Display pages usually come in either white or black. Choose white, since the black pages is much more acidic than is the white.

Pros: Display albums are a handy and easy way to show folks your collection.

People can see them, but oily hands can't touch them.

Cons: Display albums are expensive, and the fully loaded big ones are heavy to move around. These albums are designed to be stored vertically, like a book, and that brings up another problem with display albums: slippage.

Slippage: When posters are placed in a display album, they are held against the page by the clear plastic cover. When you store these books vertically, there is inevitably some slippage. The posters tend to slide to the bottom or (worse) against the rings, where (if you are not careful), they can get chewed up or dog-eared. Even if the albums are stored flat, there can be slippage, as the pages are turned.



*Poster slippage in display album*

In addition, the multi-ring binder pages are tricky to turn, involving occasionally opening and adjusting the page and closing the ring. Better are display albums with permanent, fixed rings. These fixed ring albums do not have the

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turning problem, but do have the slippage problems.

Don't let this sound too negative. Display albums, with their crystal-clear protective pages, are great at shows or if you show your posters often. And there are work-arounds for the problems. Most important is to handle the albums with great care, in storing, lifting, carrying, opening, turning pages, and closing. If you are very careful, you can avoid most pitfalls. However, most of us can't concentrate that well for that long.

A solution to the slippage problem is to use clear corners to position the poster on the page, so that it cannot slip. These work well, but introduce problems of their own.



*Clear corners can eliminate slippage*

The clear corners (available from Light Impressions) have adhesive on one side, so that they can adhere to the paper page. One has to position these corners, while manipulating the posters on the page, so that the four corners

actually fit the particular poster. This works pretty well, but is very time consuming and introduces the added danger of twisting or slipping with a corner and causing the corner to adhere to the poster. The corners are VERY sticky and once on the poster, are hard to remove without some poster paper coming off. Which brings us to boxes.

### Flat Boxes for Permanent Storage

Some of the disadvantages of display albums leads many of us to use flat boxes, sometimes called newspaper storage boxes or flats. These too come in two flavors, boxes that are archivally friendly and those which are not.



*Typical flat storage box*

The typical box if made of .060 board with a pH of 8.5-10.0 or thereabouts. Typically, these boxes are buffered with calcium carbonate, 3% reserve, and are acid-free and lignin-free. In other words, they will not react with the various inks and whatnot on the posters.

These flat boxes typically are held together by metal edge, and the better ones have a drop front in the lower half of the box, making it easier to get at the posters.

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The advantages of using flat storage boxes is that your posters are safe, and if carried carefully, free from slippage and its problems. In addition, these boxes, if ordered from a company like the Hollinger Corporation 1-800-634-0491 are relatively inexpensive and very durable.



*Cards and Handbill Storage*

The disadvantage of this method of storage is that it is hard to show the posters and there is no plastic barrier, meaning they are touched each time you show them to someone. White cotton gloves are helpful, for the really rare posters, and even a glove on one hand makes a difference in how much body oils are transferred to the posters.

Using gloves may sound too hoity-toity for most of you, but just try examining 40-year old underground newspapers or newsprint posters without them and you will learn the value of keeping the hand oils off old paper.

### Interleafing Protects Posters

Posters stored in flat boxes should, at some point, be interleaved with some sort of buffered paper, to prevent the inks on the posters from chemically reacting with the paper from the one above.



*Interleafing handbills*

Many collectors do not interleaf, preferring just to keep a pile of posters in a box. Or, they interleaf the more expensive posters, but not the more common ones. It is up to you how much interleafing you want to do.

It is more important to interleaf silk-screened posters as opposed to offset-printed posters, since the silk-screened inks are less stable and more chemically reactive. If you have a collection of expensive silk-screened posters, you might want to consider using interleafing.

Interleafing is most often done using an archivaly -safe bond paper. A semitransparent paper, called "Glassine" is also used, but should not be used for storing color photographs. It

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can be used for posters, but a good archival bond is preferred.

### Plastic Sheets and Mylar Sleeves

A very common way to store posters is in one sort or another of plastic polyethylene storage bag. These come in all sizes and weights, but most are not archivally safe. Frequently these bags are used only for temporary storage and shipping posters.

Polyethylene bags are commonly used for shipping posters. The poster is put in the plastic bag, the bag is folded to fit the posters, and then taped to a cardboard blank. Polyethylene bags, once taped, are dangerous in that it is easy, when opening the poster bag, to lose sight of the transparent tape tabs, which can catch and tear a poster very quickly. Beware.

### Hard-shell Sleeves

Another handy item are rigid plastic sleeves, into which a poster can be slipped. They are clear, tough, and can't be bent or folded. They are perfect for passing a poster around in a group. However, they are not archivally safe, so use of these for long-term storage is not recommended.



*Hard-shell Plastic Sleeve*

### Mylar-D

Poster experts, like Dennis King of D. King Galleries, recommend that only Mylar (or its equivalent) are archivally safe for postage storage. King writes:

"Plastics, vinyls, and other storage materials slowly oxidize, releasing harmful acids, which slowly EAT YOUR POSTERS ALIVE. Mylar-D is a storage material specifically developed for the long-term storage of historically important documents. It is the same archival material in which the Declaration of Independence and the Magna Carta are stored and is used by leading museums worldwide. While other materials may not begin to noticeably damage your posters for 2, 3, or even 5 years, Mylar-D is considered completely inert for up to 400 years "

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*Mylar-D sleeves -- almost invisible here*

### **Flat File Storage Cabinets by Michael Erlewine**

And last, but not least, are the large flat-file drawer-type storage cabinet. Sooner or later, you have to get one of these. Either that or don't bother to collect oversize posters. These cabinets will accept even the largest posters, or almost all. I have a Derek Hess poster that is larger than the largest cabinet I know of.

!P CA000023 "Flat-file storage cabinets"

These multi-drawer cabinets are wonderful for poster storage. They come in wooden and metal formats, the metal being more desirable, because it is more inert than wood. I have some of both kinds.

The advantages of flat-file cabinets are many. You can put almost anything in it, large or small. You can put piles of little posters next to piles of big ones or devote a whole drawer to huge posters. You can interleave or not, as you need.



*Interleafing in a flat-file drawer*

In fact, shuffling posters around, from drawer to drawer, is almost something of an art, sliding a poster in here, pulling another out over here, and slipping it into another drawer. Those who have flat-file cabinets will know what I refer to here. It is safe to say that these cabinets are the preferred method of storage for most dealers and collectors, which is not to say there are no disadvantages.

The main disadvantage of these cabinets is that the very breadth and depth of these drawers can lead to things sliding around, brushing up against the sides or into an adjacent pile. The worst thing is when placing a new poster into a drawer somehow floats or pushes a poster farther back up against the back wall or even into the back of the cabinet. Posters can easily be damaged or torn, when this happens.

### **Climate Control**

Some attention is required as to the climate for the room where you store your posters. An temperature of around 70 degrees is just about right, with not

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too great a swing above or below that point. As for relative humidity, it should be somewhere around 50%, not too wet or too dry.

As mentioned above, when looking for containers, the preference is for acid-free boxes, which means that the containers will not react chemically with the posters. Cheap storage containers will definitely react with the poster inks, to the detriment of your collection. Another keyword is "Buffered." Materials that have been buffered, means that additional alkaline substances have been added to the containers in advance to soak up excess acid, much like you might take an antacid tablet for excess stomach acid. It is a preventative measure.

Perhaps of equal importance: don't touch your posters with unwashed or oily hands, and don't let anyone else do so either. Wash your hands or use a pair of thin cotton gloves available from most archival supply houses.

### **Storage Summary by Michael Erlewine**

So there you have a quick survey of the more popular methods to store posters. Select one that best fits your needs. There is no reason to have expensive archival storage methods, if your posters are not that valuable. But then again, you never know what a poster may be worth 20 years from today. There is a flyer that I have seen that advertises many of the Grande Ballroom Poster, all you want, for \$1 apiece. If only I had known!

ATTACHMENTS



*Flat-file storage cabinets*

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