



## **ANTIQUE CARE & CLEANING TIPS**

Thinking in terms of the “Big Picture,” people never really own the things they collect. Instead, they are simply caretakers for the duration in which the objects are in their possession. A collector’s biggest responsibility is safeguarding the objects in their collection in a way that ensures their survival for the enjoyment of future generations.

The following information can be applied to almost any collection, but our focus is on the care and preservation of firearms.

### **ENVIRONMENT**

Two of the biggest influences on a collection of any kind are temperature and humidity. This is especially true when it comes to firearms. The two have a direct relationship and impact on one another. As such, they must be addressed concurrently.

### **TEMPERATURE**

Ideally, the perfect temperature for firearms storage is about 70 degrees Fahrenheit – give or take a few degrees in either direction. Variations in temperature can cause wood stocks to expand and contract. This expansion and contraction is tolerable in moderation, but too much variation can cause the stocks to crack.

### **HUMIDITY**

Maintaining a relative humidity level of 50% (again, give or take a few percent in either direction) provides the best of both environmental worlds for wood and metal components. Risk of corrosion rises with the humidity, but risk of stock damage increases as the humidity is lowered. This is why a goal of 50% is recommended.

These numbers are far from set in stone. If you cannot achieve those levels, the very least you can do is maintain consistency. Dramatic changes of any kind are what cause damage. Stability is the name of the game when it comes to environmental protection. Depending upon the climate where you live, a dehumidifier or even a humidifier may be helpful in achieving the ideal balance.

### **STORAGE**

Many people store their firearms in soft, carpeted cases or gun sleeves. While these options are perfectly fine for short durations, they are not recommended for long-term storage. The inside of a gun sleeve can create its own microenvironment, even inside of a safe. This microenvironment can hold moisture and other harmful elements that will, over time, cause corrosion and other damage to your guns.



When you're not transporting your collectible firearms, let them breathe. Take the guns out of their cases when you know they will be in storage. You may think that keeping a gun in a sleeve in a safe is providing an extra layer of protection, but it isn't.

### **OILS, ETC**

Shelves at your favorite gun shop are likely well stocked with myriad cleaners, lubes, and oils of all kinds. While they often do a terrific job of cleaning your gun and removing build-up acquired through the shooting process, they often don't provide adequate protection for collectible guns. It's a good start, but more can be done.

### **IF THE GLOVE FITS**

Unfortunately, you are your gun's worst enemy. Corrosive oils on your hands can damage any blued surface, nickel-plating, or case-hardened receiver. Generally speaking, the less a gun is handled, the longer it will last. That said, what's the point in having a collection if you can't touch it? That's where gloves come in handy. You'll often see museum professionals wearing cotton gloves. It's not to be snobby – it's to protect the gun. If you'd rather, latex or nitrile gloves work just as well as cotton. Gloves are an inexpensive way to ensure the longevity of your antique or collectible firearms.

### **WAX ON, WAX OFF**

Oiling your antique gun isn't enough to protect it over a long period of time. For long-lasting protection, use wax. Microcrystalline wax provides excellent protection on firearms and is in use by the Smithsonian Institution, the National Park Service, and the NRA Museums. Wax puts a thin, inert barrier layer between the exterior of your gun and the surrounding atmosphere. Not all waxes are created equal. Be sure to get one that is pH neutral to avoid any adverse environmental reactions.

It's important to remember that wax doesn't last forever. If the gun isn't handled regularly, the surface may be safe for weeks or even months. If you like to show off your guns and handle them frequently, you'll need to reapply the wax sooner rather than later.

### **REGULAR CLEANING**

Just because your guns are antiques or collectibles instead of regular shooters doesn't mean they don't need a good, old-fashioned cleaning. This is especially important if you intend to wax your guns. Now, you don't want your gun to be soaking in oil before you wax it. The goal is to remove any corrosion or surface debris that would inhibit the long-term protection of your gun. Microcrystalline wax will adhere better to a properly cleaned (but not oil-soaked) gun.

While we're on the topic of corrosion and surface debris, there are some key points to remember when removing these unwanted items. First of all, use soft materials. If it



requires a little more elbow grease to remove corrosion, consider using bronze brushes or bronze wool. Your gun is harder than the bronze, so it won't damage the overall composition of the firearm.

Be careful, though, not to over clean. Chances are, your historic guns have developed a patina over time. This is an additional layer of protection that should not be removed from the gun. It may be tempting to completely buff the gun and bring it back to a bright and shiny appearance, but this will leave your gun less protected and can actually hurt the value of your gun. Sometimes, less really is more.

### **HOUSEKEEPING**

Once you've taken your guns out of their transport sleeves, cleaned them, wiped them down, put on a pair of gloves, applied a coat of wax, and ensured the optimum storage environment, there's still work to be done. As with anything, routine maintenance is necessary. No matter where you store your firearms, dust will accumulate. Be sure to dust your guns frequently with a soft, cotton rag. This will remove the accumulation while still offering the best protection for your gun's surface.

### **LONGEVITY**

Following the guidelines listed above will help ensure that your antique and collectible guns are around for quite some time. Remember: we can't prevent the passage of time and its impact on our collections, but we can ensure that time is kind to them.