

BUYER'S GUIDE: HOLSTERS ★ CLEANING GEAR ★ AMMO ★ MORE!

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ANTIQUE CARE & CLEANING



Everything you didn't know about maintaining vintage firearms

BY T. LOGAN METESH

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 his or her 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 here is on the care and preservation of firearms.

Ideal Conditions

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.

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.

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

These numbers are far from being 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.

Smart 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 cause corrosion and other damage to your guns over time.

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 & Cleaners

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, nickel-plated or case-hardened surface. 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.



(Above) Not just for museum use, gloves can protect your guns from the oils on your hands. (Left & Right) There are plenty of gun cleaners on the market that can be incorporated into your cleaning routine. (Below) Long-term storage in gun socks can create moisture issues.



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.

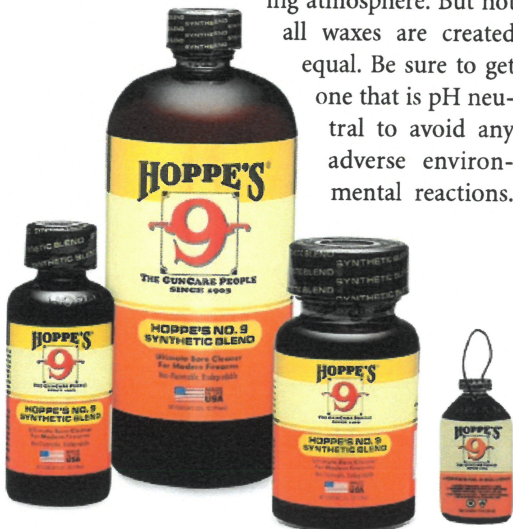
Wax On, Wax Off

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



Wax puts a thin, inert barrier between the exterior of your gun and the surrounding atmosphere.

protection on firearms and is in use by the Smithsonian Institute, the National Park Service and the NRA Museums. Wax puts a thin, inert barrier between the exterior of your gun and the surrounding atmosphere. But not all waxes are created equal. Be sure to get one that is pH neutral to avoid any adverse environmental reactions.



It's also 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 soak 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 the firearm. 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.

Bronze is softer than gun metal, so it can be used to remove surface rust without risk of damage to 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 its value. Sometimes less really is more.

Parting Tips

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



A temperature and humidity monitor is a good way to keep an eye on the environment in your safe.

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.

Following the guidelines listed here 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. ☼