

The Essentials of Collecting

Or, Why You Need a Really, Really Big Hobby Room

As a collector, you notice, over the years, that you tend to accumulate various ‘tools’ of the trade that invariably fill up whatever space you have for your hobby endeavors. Little things, big things, seldom-used and often-used things--but they’re all critical at those moments when you need them, so whether you’re a hardened hobby veteran or a newbie, take a look at the items discussed here and, if you don’t already have them, give them some serious consideration.

I’m looking around my own hobby rooms to see what there is, but, putting myself in the shoes of someone just coming into the hobby, I’ll try to prioritize everything in some logical order. So, you’re a new collector, and you’ve just gotten in your first substantial number of matchbooks. What to do? What to do?

You’ve already decided that you’re going to collect covers rather than full-books, so you need to strip the matches out of what you have. You’ll need a **small pen knife**, or some such to get the staple out (I use a letter opener; it’s not sharp, so there’s less chance of cause accidental damage). Eventually, you end up with a pile of matches. Be sure to soak them in water before discarding in order to avoid unpleasant surprises later on.

With older covers, the next step would be flattening. Some type of **small vise** is ideal for this, but you can improvise with anything from a stack of heavy books to putting the covers under the foot of an end table (!) for a few days.

What luck! You’ve decided that all the covers are keepers! (That’s the beauty of being a new collector--You can use everything!) Now what? Assuming you’re going to house your treasures in albums, you’ll need **pages** (plastic or slotted paper) and **3-ring binders**.

By this point, you’ve noticed that you seem to need various **desk-related items: pens, pencils, markers, paper, labeling tags, etc.** You also need a nice big **desk**, or at least a **work table** (ideally, both). But, even with a table, you’ll need all these little everyday desk items, plus **ruler, rubber bands** (although I use strips of paper), **scissors, and stapler**.

A note on paper: aside from correspondence, memos (I write memos to myself all the time!), etc., you should get into the habit of using paper bands for holding your stacks of covers together, rather than rubber bands...which corrode and can damage covers in other ways over the long term. I cut scratch paper into strips that I always have on hand. They’re also ideal for efficiently bundling your covers being sent out for trade (and that also allows you to save on postage, rather than just dumping the covers into an envelope).

Now, you have your first few albums started, but you find it’s very inconvenient just putting the albums on the floor. You need **shelving** (book cases, wall shelves, whatever).

Oh, boy! Uncle Barney just brought over some more covers! You find, though, that these covers aren’t in the categories you’re collecting in and won’t go in your albums. You definitely don’t want to just throw them out. You might be able to use them for trading later on. But where are you going to put them? You’ll always find that you have use for a variety of **small boxes and trays** (caddy boxes, shoeboxes, soda case trays, etc.).

OK! Things are beginning to take shape! But you've hit a lull; you seem to have done everything you can with what you have. The problem now is that you need more covers! You could jump in the car and drive around town, looking for new issues, but, given the current situation, your chances of coming back with anything more than a few are slim. Hmmmm...Where else could you get the covers you want?....Other collectors! Time to spread our wings!

Luckily, you've already gotten **club memberships** in both a nearby local club and that big national organization...What was it called?..Oh, yes! RMS! And that means you have two membership rosters to work from. And...look at *that!* They have the members who are looking to trade specially marked. All you have to do is contact them. They send you covers; you send them covers. Here's where you need **envelopes, postage stamps, and a small scale**. Later on, it's advantageous to become a member of other clubs, as well. Such will give you access to more information, more collectors, club auctions, club store offerings, and more

Now you're cookin! But, as time goes on, you want more! After all, you're a *collector!* Here's where you're new **computer** really starts paying off (a **scanner** also comes in handy) Having a computer, as far as the hobby goes, is not an essential, but, for practical purposes, it might as well be. E-mail puts you in contact with collectors around the country and around the world, and that alone brings you help, information, more covers, and a lifetime of lasting friendships. But, that's certainly not all!

In matchcover collecting, you're normally working with large numbers--thousands, tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands--of covers. You *have* to be organized, and it's not practical or reasonable to try and do that by hand. The computer allows you to keep track of what you're doing, keep records, generate lists, and so forth. It also can handle all of your hobby correspondence. And, of course, if you end up being a hobby editor, the computer is a must for desktop publishing.

That computer is also an invaluable research tool. Want info on one of your categories? A business or location on one of your covers? A list of all Rt. 66 locations? You name it; you can probably find it on the internet. And (another way of acquiring those covers you're always after), you'll have access to on-line auctions, rosters, bulletins, etc. (for those clubs that post such on their web sites).

And, speaking of research and information, as you continue to collect, you'll also notice that you're starting to build up the beginnings of your own personal **research library**--printed lists, past bulletins, saved articles of interest, hobby publications, and so forth. It's my own belief that in order for a collect to be really successful, he or she must be *really* knowledgeable. Such knowledge comes to you in two ways: **experience and information**.

The experience will come to you as you continue to work with your covers, although that can certainly be enhanced by purposely putting yourself into experience-rich situations, such as club meetings, swapfests, conventions, and such. More information can also come to you in the same ways, but you can only remember so much. You'll need to retain 'hard copies' of various useful items. And, thus, you build your reference library, which might include, depending on your interests, such things as a glossary of terms, lists you've obtained, club rosters, books dealing with one or more of your particular categories, historical references, and so on.

Now, the *ideal* hobby room needs other things, as well--large, flat screen TV; small refrigerator always stocked with ice cold beer and snacks; complete sound system--but I suggest you leave those items for later...perhaps a day when the wife is out visiting the relatives.