

SALTY COMMENTS #12
(Facts and Opinion on Open Salt Collecting)

One of the questions most frequently asked about our open salts is, "How do you display them?" This is a problem for most salt dish collectors. The collection starts out small - the first 50 fit into some piece of furniture we already have. Sometimes there is room on a window sill where the sun will shine through the colored glass. The next hundred salts create pressure for buying some standard kind of cabinet. After you pass 500, you will probably want to have something made specially to fit into your room and to show off the dishes to the best advantage.

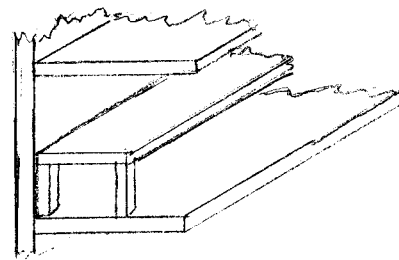
The display problem is so common, and has so many solutions, that Mimi Rudnick, the Salt Lady, maintains a notebook. In it are pictures, from as many collectors as she can persuade, that show ways of displaying open salts. If you visit one of the shows where she is, by all means stop and see it. You will be impressed by how many large collections there are, and by the ways they can be housed.

The things to consider in showing open salts are usually:

Open or closed? - Shelves and window sills leave the dishes handy but prone to gathering dust. Cabinets with doors will solve this problem, but you need room to open them and the dishes are a little less accessible. Children are a specialized situation that may demand some sort of cover. We have a combination - doors on the lower parts of shelves to discourage the grandchildren but the rest open. If you don't disturb the dishes, the dust is not too obvious for many months. When it gets so bad that we can't stand it any more, we wish we had doors full length.

Lighting - We have tried a fluorescent light above the top shelf of a set. It works for the top 3 or 4 shelves - beyond this the light just doesn't get through. We have a spotlight on the opposite wall for one cabinet. This is great for seeing the dishes, but doesn't blend in with the room very well, and it is not at all subtle. The best arrangement we have seen is a console (a cabinet with doors, standing on the floor) which has lights in the base, a milk-glass floor above the lights, one glass shelf, and a glass top. When you put colored glass in it, the light is transmitted through the glass, and the dishes really look beautiful. It's the same effect as putting colored glass in a sunny window, as they do at the Sandwich Museum. Another lighting solution is to install small bulbs in the back corners of each shelf in a standard cabinet. This is quite effective, though it does not put light through the colored salts so well.

Efficient Use of Space - Most cabinets you find in a furniture store are built with rather deep shelves, spaced fairly far apart. Putting salts in them leaves a lot of emptiness. It is also awkward getting at the dishes in the rear without disturbing those in front, especially when (notice I did not say "if") things get crowded. You can also put in step-shelves, like the one shown, to get some use of the empty space. Old glass-front bookcases (the kind that come in layers) are good for this. They are a convenient size in depth and spacing, although you have to get down on your knees to see the bottom layer. The most ingenious display we have seen is in an old Timex watch cabinet whose shelves rotate when you push a button. We have opted for the specially made, narrow-shelf approach - more about ours later.



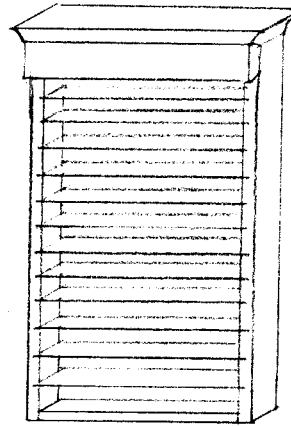
Future Expansion - We know of few collectors who intend to limit the size of their collection, and even fewer who actually follow through with these intentions. Today's roomy display becomes tomorrow's overcrowded one and next week's crisis. It's nice if you can use something that can be duplicated later to have a coherent series of cabinets.

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Our solution to the display problem has been two-fold. A small part of the collection is housed on top of a long sideboard. We have made a frame about 3" deep, as shown at the right, with two pieces of plate glass recessed in as lids. It has no bottom and has finger holes at the ends for lifting the glass. It houses about 150 open salts, and is particularly good for intaglios and for china salts which are painted inside the bowl. These were not that easy to see on shelves, and come into their full glory under the glass top. If you want to try this approach, the frame is easy to make to fit any appropriate top. We stained it to match the particular piece of furniture, and fastened it with short steel straps on the back. The plate glass was readily available from a local firm - it is the same material they use for making glass table covers.



The bulk of our collection sits on narrow glass shelves in cabinets fastened to the wall. These are an original design, and we have made them in a number of different sizes. A typical one is shown at the right. The shelves are strips of window glass from the local hardware store. Behind the shelves are 1/8" thick mirrors, available as wall or door mirrors from Sears or from the hardware store. Shelves are 3-1/2" deep and 18" long, and each one holds 8-12 individual salts. The doors we use are 3/16" Lucite, hinged at the edges. A drawing showing the detail of one of these cabinets is on the next page. The size shown will hold about 100 salts. We also have notes on its construction, and a similar drawing of a 36"x 52" two-bay cabinet holding 300 plus dishes. If you would like this additional information, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope with your request.



We know of several other original displays to hold open salts. A unique one is in the shape of an old square lantern. It hangs from the ceiling and has two shelves. Another collector has fashioned egg-crate style shelves from 1/2" wood, so that each salt has its own niche. This is mounted on the wall in their hall. We intend to try this approach soon - we're overcrowded again, and the niches sound perfect for the master size dishes we have. A third design for the center of a table has a small set of shelves on a lazy susan bearing, so that it can be rotated to see the all the salts. Some people use chair rails around a room, shelves in a sunny window or a shadow box in a picture frame. We're sure there are many other good ways that we haven't mentioned.

These ideas are just starting points, since each home is unique in the type of space available. What is perfect for the 10-foot ceiling in our large 140-year-old dining room would be too much for a modern apartment. You have to pick and choose from the ideas of others, with maybe some original thinking thrown in, to decide on the best layout for your own situation. Whatever way you choose, we're sure you'll agree that it's much more fun to have your salts where they can be seen and easily handled. We hope this discussion will help you get started when you need to expand or improve on what you have now.

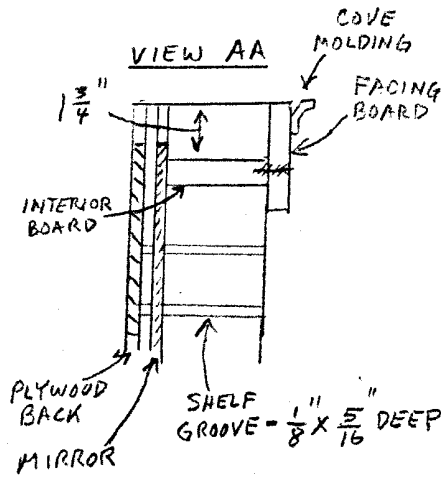
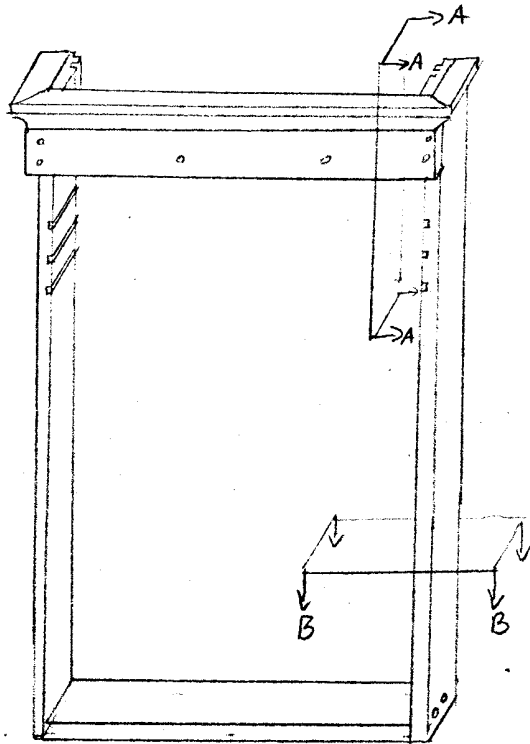
NOTES ON SALT DISPLAY CABINET CONSTRUCTION

1. Shelf spacing is optional - it depends on the size of salts you want to display. We have found that it is better to have the top shelves a little higher so the salts there can be seen better. Spacing does not allow for the thickness of the glass shelves - the real clearance will be a trifle less than the dimension shown. No matter what your design, you will always wind up with at least one salt that is too tall to fit.
2. Doors are optional, but will save dusting. Hold them closed with magnetic catches, or a hasp and padlock if you have small children around.
3. The ideas shown can be extrapolated to other sizes. The basic dimensions we work away from is 18" for mirror width, 48" height for acrylic sheeting for the doors, and 18" span for shelves made from window glass. The shelf width can be less, but we find that the 3-1/2" gives a chance to stagger the salts front and rear, and get up to 12 on a shelf comfortably (in the smaller sizes). Suggest trying the arrangement with your salts on a sheet of paper if you wish to vary the shelf width.
4. To mount the cabinet on the wall, we support it with a 2x2 underneath, held to studs by lag screws. This can be painted or covered with wallpaper to minimize its appearance. The top is held to the wall by angle brackets off the top of the sides. Make sure these brackets are securely fastened to a lath or with moly screw anchors in wallboard. In making the cabinets, the back panel and the mirror should stop about 1-1/2" below the top to leave room for these angle brackets.
5. Assemble pieces with glue and husky screws, countersunk with wood plugs covering them.
6. The plywood back is fastened on with 1/2"x8 screws. This piece gives squareness to the cabinet as well as rigidity, and helps support the center piece in a double cabinet.
7. The most efficient way to cut the shelf grooves is to do it on one side, and then take the measurements from this for the rest. In a double cabinet, remember the center support rests on the bottom and is 3/4" higher up than the side. Forget this and you'll be cutting another center board - I've done it.
8. When staining the piece, remember to stain the inside of the mirror grooves. These will be reflected in the mirror when the cabinet is assembled.

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June 1986

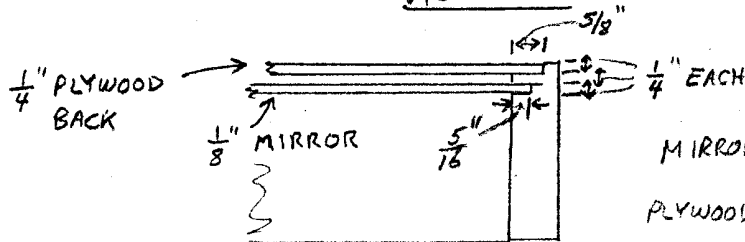
SINGLE CABINET - APPROX. 19" X 34"



TYPICAL SHELF SPACING

| MEASURE FROM TOP OF SIDE BOARD | SHELF HEIGHT |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 6" | 3" |
| 8 1/2" | 2 1/2" |
| 11" | 2 1/2" |
| 13 1/2" | 2 1/2" |
| 15 1/2" | 2" |
| 17 1/2" | 2" |
| 19 1/2" | 2" |
| 21 1/2" | 2" |
| 24" | 2 1/2" |
| 26 1/2" | 2 1/2" |
| 29 1/2" | 3" |
| (BOTTOM) | 3 1/2" |

VIEW BB



MIRROR GROOVE: $\frac{1}{4}$ " X $\frac{5}{16}$ " DEEP
 PLYWOOD RABBET: $\frac{1}{4}$ " X $\frac{5}{8}$ "

SIDES: $\frac{3}{4}$ " X $4\frac{1}{4}$ " X $33\frac{3}{4}$ "

BOTTOM: $\frac{3}{4}$ " X $4\frac{1}{4}$ " X $17\frac{1}{2}$ "

TOP INTERIOR BOARD: $\frac{3}{4}$ " X $3\frac{1}{2}$ " X $17\frac{1}{2}$ "

TOP FACING BOARD: $\frac{3}{4}$ " X 3" X 19"

PLYWOOD BACK: APPROX. $\frac{1}{4}$ " X 19" X 32" - CUT TO FIT WIDTH, HEIGHT $1\frac{1}{2}$ " BELOW TOP

$1\frac{1}{2}$ " COVE MOLDING AROUND TOP

SHELVES: $3\frac{1}{2}$ " X 18" DOUBLE STRENGTH WINDOW GLASS - 11 NEEDED

MIRROR: $\frac{1}{8}$ " GLASS, 18" X $31\frac{1}{2}$ "

DOOR (OPTIONAL): $\frac{3}{16}$ " ACRYLIC SHEET 19" X $30\frac{3}{4}$ " - HINGE TO SIDE