

Classic Posters -Some of the Tools the Experts Use

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By Michael Erlewine

Your most valuable tools are your eyes and your sense of good taste -- what appeals to you.

Other items that may be useful are:

Cotton Gloves -- Not needed for a lot day-to-day handling of posters, you may want them if you are handling very expensive or very old paper, since the transfer of body oils is more detrimental and the harm done more immediately visible. I use gloves for the very rare stuff.



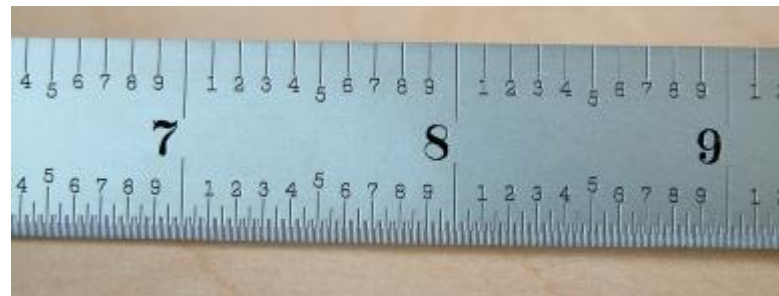
Cotton gloves are useful

Micrometer -- You don't need this device, unless you are discriminating variants for rare posters such as some in the Family Dog and Bill Graham (BG) sets. In these special cases, it can be important to know the thickness of the paper the poster is printed on, and this is what micrometers measure.



Micrometer -- measures thickness

Steel Rule -- You will need some sort of yardstick or measuring tape, to determine the actual size of the poster you are working on. The steel rule shown below is 36" long and measures in increments of 1/64 of an inch. You don't need this kind of accuracy unless you are working with sets with special variants, like some of the Family Dog and Bill Graham (BG) sets, but they are kind of fun to have around.



Steel Rule, in 1/64s of an inch increments

Shipping Posters -- Flat

Packing and shipping posters is crucial to almost all of us, since that is how we receive most, if not all, of the posters we collect. The horror stories of bad poster-packing could fill a small book. There are two main methods of shipping posters, shipping them flat or in tubes. Flat is very much the preferred method and the one invariably used for really expensive pieces,

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unless they are too large.

Flat

The really big dealers have specially made shipping containers, like the one shown below.

Here is a heavy-duty cardboard box that has custom-fitted pieces of foam, with protruding fingers. There is a foam piece above and below the posters. Where the fingers of the foam pieces meet is where you place the posters. The foam fingers press together to hold the posters, kind of suspended between the fingers. This kind of box works well if the number of posters is not too many. Too many posters, and the foam fingers cannot maintain a pressure, causing the posters to slide and bent corners result.



Custom Shipping Container

The most common form of shipping posters flat involves two sheets of heavy cardboard, with the poster placed and held in the center, using various methods. With the poster between the cardboard sheets, the two cardboards are securely taped, making sure all the outer edges are sealed. This is probably the most commonly used and most effective method for shipping

valuable posters.

The only caveats here are the methods used to secure the poster between the cardboard panels. Quite often, the poster is placed in a cheap polyethylene bag, pushed to the bottom of the bag, and the extra plastic bag, squared off, and folded over the poster and taped. The bag is then taped tightly to the cardboard.

The only danger here, and it is VERY common, is that of opening the plastic bag. To get the taped bag off the cardboard, some kind of box-cutting knife is used to cut the pieces of tape holding the bag (and poster) to the sheets of cardboard. This is all very straight forward, except that when the tape is cut, it is VERY easy to lose sight of where all the cut ends are. Since most tape is transparent, it is easy to forget these cut ends, with the result that, as the poster is withdrawn from the plastic bag, one or more of these loose ends 'grab' at the poster, potentially causing damage. Using opaque tape like masking tape helps the receiver see where tape ends are.

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Dangers of tape and plastic

So, be careful when you remove a posters from a taped bag!



Beware the loose transparent tape!



The 'Good Tape' -- You can see it. Another word of warning to those new to collecting. When you first start out, you don't have that many ways to store your posters. It is very tempting to want to somehow salvage these taped plastic bags and to reuse them for storage. This can be a big mistake. Those old tape ends can sneak up on you and grab at your posters. Just throw any bag that has had tape on it in the trash.



The maverick bag

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A Safe Way to Ship

The most common and a very safe way to pack posters is also very inexpensive and simple. You just take a common mailing envelope, and cut off the four corners. These corners are then used to position and hold the poster on the inside of the cardboard sheets. Place four cut corners of the mailing envelope over the four corners of your posters. Place the poster on the inside of one of the cardboard sheets and tape those corners (not the poster) to the board.



Good way to mount poster to board

Using this method, the poster is securely held to the board by the four corners, but no tape touches the poster. Some put the poster in a clear plastic bag and then put the bag to the board, using the four corners method.



Mounting the corner

Finally, with the poster on the board, held by the four corners, place the two cardboard sheets together and completely seal all outer edges with packing tape. This is the least expensive and safest method I have seen to date. However, this does not work for very large posters, where the cardboard can be bent in transit.

Most of the main dealers use 2-3 pieces of heavy cardboard (or foam core) on each side of the poster. The poster is then plastic bagged and fastened to the inside of the sheets with tape or with corners, as described above.

Mailing Tubes: Pros and Cons

Putting posters in tubes should be avoided. Unfortunately it is the most common way to ship posters, since it is cheaper and involves less labor than any other method. Just roll the poster tightly and slip it in the tube. That's it. You are done.

The problem on the receiver's end involves getting the poster out of the tube, and then going through the process of flattening out the poster.

Getting the poster out can be a bit of an art, since the poster usually expands to the limit of the inner diameter of tube. Sometimes, it is very tight. Most times, it will not just slide out, but has to be pulled out.

This is done by pressing your fingers to the inside of the tube, and rolling the poster tighter, so that it can gradually be pulled out. Most times this works out, but the process can also involve damage to the poster, if proper care is not taken.

Many shippers place the poster in the center of the tube and bunch tissue paper into either end, preventing the poster from slipping and moving to either end of the tube. This can be helpful, but the same tissue paper can also damage the edges or the poster, either as it is placed in, or during transit, as the poster slides and presses against it.

Very large posters invariably have to be sent in a tube, since flats of this size are not accepted by UPS or the U.S. Mail. There is also the very-real danger of larger flats being bent in transit. This definitively happens fairly often, so in this regard, the tube could be best.



Tube Diameters

As for the size of the tube, tubes less than 3-4" in diameter should NOT be used. The standard is 1/4' walled tub at least 6" in diameter. The smaller tube in the enclosed picture is just too small, yet a quite-large (and expensive) poster was shipped in it.

Many dealers buy tubes in 4' lengths and cut then once, based on the size of the posters they ship most frequently.

In the best of worlds, tubes of 4-6" are best. They roll the poster much less tightly than the smaller variety.

Flattening

Do not store your posters in rolled form. This is to be avoided. As posters age, their ability to be flattened out from a rolled state becomes less and less, until the poster actually breaks into pieces. I have seen very valuable posters stored in a rolled format. Don't do it. Flatten

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them as soon as possible and keep them that way.

If the poster is somewhat brittle, then the flattening process may take more time, be done more slowly. In general, most collectors place the rolled poster, upside down, in a flat position and put other posters or flat objects on top of it, and leave it there. Sometime later, you will have a well-behaved flat poster.

Matting and Framing

Matting posters is not harmful, provided a few essential guidelines are followed. Here they are:

Matting -- The mat board is not simply cosmetic. It serves an essential function, that of keeping the glass or Plexiglas raised and away from the poster surface. It is important that the mat board be thick enough to serve this purpose. Always use archival mat board, which means the board will not chemically react to the paper/inks of the poster. Also, always make sure the mat is at least 3/4 inches larger than the poster itself, to allow for the natural expansion and contraction of paper with routine temperature changes.



*A Piece of Original Art, Matted and
A Piece of Original Art, Matted and
Framed*

Mounting the Poster -- According the experts I respect, and contrary to what many framing sites declare, it is my understanding that there is NO adhesive whatsoever that is archivally safe. In other words, ALL ADHESIVES are harmful and do damage to the poster. Therefore to not mount your poster to a back board by adhesives of any kind. Instead, use the clear plastic corners as described above. These serve to hold the poster and cause it no long-term damage.

Glass or Plexiglass -- Glass is much cheaper, but runs the risk of, if broken, possibly damaging the poster. Plexiglas is not likely to do that, although Plexiglas has been know to splinter.

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In either case, the real choice is whether to get glass or Plexiglas that is UV protected. The effect of ultraviolet radiation are detrimental to poster color and will cause your poster to fade over time. Just ask for "archival" glass. It will cost more.

If your poster will not be hung where any direct sunlight will ever reach it AND it is not your most prized poster, than you might get away with standard glass.

The same goes for Plexiglas. It is available in both standard and UV protected forms. The UV protected form is more expensive.

It is perhaps sad, but seems to be true, that most (certainly many) collectors don't mat and frame all that many posters. They tend to squirrel their posters away from sun and eyeballs, confined to safe storage of one type or another.



Double Mats raise the glass from the Poster Surface