

Creating space for intimate interaction with a museum's collection



The Challenge

The Pomona College Museum of Art, in Claremont, CA, needed to move their American Indian collection, which included over 5,000 items, to a more safe and secure location on campus. The collection was located in academic buildings that were plagued with flooding and mold issues. It was relocated to the basement of the Bridges Auditorium. As part of the relocation, the collection's team was also interested in designing new space that would allow students to have a more intimate interaction with the collection, for analysis and academic purposes.

Among the 5,000 collection pieces moved, were Pre-Columbian to 20th-century American Indian art and artifacts, including basketry, ceramics, and beadwork. In addition to serving as the basis for exhibitions, the collections, which are always available for individual study and research, are frequently used by classes, which is why it was critical for the new space to also include a learning environment.

Storage Solution

The Pomona College Museum of Art's overriding objectives were two-fold:

- Maintaining preservation and respect for the collection by creating a special place for each piece in the collection, and
- Building a center for study of the objects.

The process first began with an audit by Spacesaver's Area Contractor, McMurray Stern and the museum's team to determine the existing needs of the collection and its users. "We were very careful to make sure that every drawer and shelf on the storage systems were used. This is a collection that will not grow, but we needed to make certain we had room for every item. The previous storage situation for the collection included objects in nested containers, which is never recommended and made it very challenging to locate the items for exhibition and individual study," said Steve Comba, Registrar of the Pomona College Museum of Art.



The final system included five mechanical-assist, high-density storage units, nine Delta cabinets and four stationary open shelving units.



(Above) A Spacesaver high-density storage system offered the ability to store the same size collection in half the space.
(Right) A study room with a camera mounted above a large conference table allows students a close-up view of valuable artifacts.

Storage Solved

The Pomona College Museum of Art chose a high-density storage system, which offered the ability to store the same size collection in half the space. This feature was especially interesting to the museum as the relocation plans included an expanded area for students to research and study the collection. The final system layout used by Pomona and created by McMurray Stern included five mechanical-assist, high-density storage units, nine Delta cabinets and four stationary open shelving units.

Spacesaver's customized storage solution met the museum's highly complex and exacting needs, allowing for the best use of new space while protecting the collection for generations to come. The unique storage needs of the collection as well as the needs of scientists, students and researchers were taken into consideration. The inclusion of drawers, trays, cabinets and shelving within the system ensured that each piece of the collection was appropriately housed and protected. The system also improved accessibility to objects and specimens while leaving adequate room for onsite work. Standard safety features ensured the safety of employees and visiting researchers. While the collection is not expected to grow, the system will accommodate evolving collections and future growth.

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— Steve Comba,
Registrar, Pomona College
Museum of Art

The system features a host of enhancements designed specifically to protect the collection. These include synchronous drive carriage of their system to guard against vibration without compromising efficient use. The customized drives provide balanced movement even under unbalanced loads and reduce gear ratios for more controlled movement. In addition, recessed anti-tip rails provide stability and inert paint finishes inhibit off gassing, which protects the delicate collection artifacts.

Directly adjacent to the collections room the team created a study space, with a camera mounted above a large conference table for magnifying pieces under study by the students. "Students are now able to have intimate interactions with our collections. During the semester we have multiple classes using the space. Anywhere from 10-12 objects are being studied each week. We could not be happier with the outcome and space." Steve Comba, Registrar of the Pomona College Museum of Art.



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