

## Seven Keys To Building a Great Mineral Collection – Part 2 of 2

### 3. Become Super Knowledgeable! Part 1 – Essential Criteria for Fine Mineral Specimens

I could have started with knowledge as Key #1, as your own knowledge is what will make the difference as to the mineral collection you are able to build.

If you've already read the articles I cite at the end of this post, you'll know that each of them contains a full discussion of various criteria and factors that should be considered by all collectors of fine minerals when buying minerals for a collection, and in particular a display collection. If you haven't read the articles, they are thoughts from some of the top people in mineral collecting, so it's really worth tracking them down! Since they already more than do the topic justice, I'm not going to write about the different criteria at any length.

However, in case you have yet to read any of them, here is a list of some essential criteria that everyone in mineral collecting would agree are important in determining the desirability of a mineral specimen, to at least some degree (and depending on the context of a particular specimen) and they will typically impact a specimen's price:

- overall aesthetics (yes, this is both objective and highly subjective at times)
- condition/quality
- excellent crystal development
- physical attributes including colour, transparency and lustre
- rarity
- matrix
- size
- provenance (history as to the find and former collections in which the specimen has been included), and
- balanced proportion (size of crystal(s) on matrix).

Very few mineral specimens hit on all of these – they are just each factors to consider. Many will not apply to a given specimen – for example, if a mineral is black, colour won't matter, but crystal form will, likely; some minerals from a find never have matrix; many specimens have no important provenance, and so on (and we could discuss provenance as a factor some other time... some people rank it highly and others do not). My purpose here is simply to highlight that these are fundamentals, and they are discussed in good thought-provoking writings. Whether or not you ultimately agree with the points made in these writings (you will at least rank the criteria in your own order and may discard a few of them as less important to you), they would be considered

generally to be the most commonly applied criteria in discerning differences among – and pricing of – fine mineral specimens.

Once you've spent time thinking about these essentials and applying them to the specimens you see (in your collection, online, at shows, in museums and collections) you will have developed this body of knowledge and will be able to refine your thoughts.

#### **4. Become Super Knowledgeable! Part 2 – Minerals and Localities**

Part 1 was the easier one. If you're going to build a great collection, it's all in the facts you know about minerals and localities. The more you know, the better your acquisition decisions will be. Many people in Mineral World love sharing and helping others to add to their knowledge – I know I do, and hope that will be obvious from the website.

No matter what help you obtain, the challenge offered by this Key #4 will take you the rest of your life and you still won't know them all – there is always more we can learn (I love that!). Don't be daunted – just absorb as you go and you'll pick things up quickly.

Knowledge of minerals can include: for a mineral, its attributes, how it occurs, what other minerals are often associated with it, how common or rare have fine specimens been over the long term, how many fine specimens have been found, how frequently are specimens available on the market, what are the best specimens that have ever been found and which are the finest in collections.

Knowledge of localities can include all of the factual details (location, history, production), and specifically how many fine mineral specimens has the locality produced, and of what minerals; how often has the locality produced; is the locality still producing fine mineral specimens; how likely is it that the locality will continue to produce specimens, or, if not producing, produce specimens again in the future...

The good news is we really do live in a Golden Age when it comes to fine mineral publications and information (I know I've said this in other posts too – it's true though – this is an amazing time for excellent publications!). There are many high quality enjoyable sources of information on minerals and localities in print and online.

#### **5. Understand Pricing**

Mineral specimen pricing can be all over the map, and if you are going to build a great collection it is essential that you develop a feel for how minerals are priced, how different dealers price minerals, and ultimately a good sense about good mineral prices. I feel strongly enough about this issue that I have written a separate post on it – **Wild West Economics? Mineral Buying and Mineral Pricing.**

## 6. Golden Rule: Buy the Best You Can Afford

A golden rule of mineral buying, we've all learned this one along the way. Buy the best mineral specimen you can afford at the time. When you are building a mineral collection, there is always the temptation to buy many specimens of all sorts of different minerals – they are all so cool – can't resist! Just one more small one! Be as disciplined as you can. Life is long: you will have lots of time to buy more, and lots of time to rue truly lesser purchases. Buy the highest quality, finest specimens you can. (Of course if we took this one to the extreme we'd all just save indefinitely and never purchase specimens for our collections, so obviously there is moderation and balance required in applying this!)

## 7. Don't Let Anyone Shake Your Confidence

Depending on where you are in your mineral collecting, it may be some time before you have developed enough knowledge to have confidence, but if you haven't, you will. Of course it's always key to keep your mind open to learning new things, no matter how much you've read and experienced, since one of the great things about mineral collecting is that you simply can't learn it all – there is always more we can learn. But once you have confidence in your knowledge, this last key will become relevant. As with many other things in life, you will likely come across people out there who will voice their opinions about your specimens or your collection. There will be other collectors with their own views, and you may well come across dealers who try to steer you in particular directions. If you've read and absorbed what the top writers and collectors in specimen mineralogy have written, and you've learned well from trusted dealers, you know your stuff. Once you know the essentials, the mineral collection you build will reflect you personally – your taste, and your own understanding of why you collect minerals. Listen politely and then stay the course, building the great collection you have happily chosen to build.

### Articles – Recommended Reading:

Currier, Rock H. ***About Mineral Collecting*** (2009) Series of essays by the author published in ***The Mineralogical Record***, compiled into a single inexpensive soft-cover publication. Impossible not to become engaged by the writing style. I think this is one of the best reads ever put together for mineral collectors! (I can't recommend this highly enough.)

Halpern, Jack. ***“Criteria for Selecting Crystallized Mineral Specimens for a Display Collection”*** published in the March-April 2005 issue of ***The Mineralogical Record***. Perhaps my favourite article on the criteria that make a fine mineral specimen.

Smale, Steve. ***The Smale Collection: Beauty in Natural Crystals***. In the “Introduction”, the author describes his perspectives on the criteria that make a great mineral specimen. (Edited by Gloria Staebler and Gunther Neumeier, Published by Lithographie LLC). Beautiful Jeff Scovil photographs of a remarkable collection, and in particular the author’s insight into the concept of “horizons” in viewing mineral specimens is great.

Thompson, Wayne A. ***Ikons: Classics and Contemporary Masterpieces*** (2007) Supplement to ***The Mineralogical Record***. In particular, the chapter entitled “Desirability Factors in Mineral Specimens.” Amazing publication with many insights and lots of photographs of world-class mineral specimens.

Wilson, Wendell E. ***“The Discerning Eye”***, an essay published in Bartsch, Joel A. and Wilson, Wendell E., ***Masterpieces of the Mineral World – Treasures from the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences*** (2004) (Published by The Houston Museum of Natural Sciences and The Mineralogical Record.) Remarkable publication with photographs of wonderful specimens from the museum’s collection.

Wilson, Wendell E. ***“Connoisseurship in Mineral Collecting”***, an essay in the January-February 1990 issue of ***The Mineralogical Record***. A great early article on the issue, which preceded many subsequent writings by others in the field.

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Links to additional articles mentioned in Part 2 of **Seven Keys To Building a Great Mineral Collection**:

Wild West Economics? Mineral Buying and Mineral Pricing – <http://www.mcdougallminerals.com/blog/wild-west-economics-mineral-buying-and-mineral-pricing/>

Editor’s Note: Part 1 of **Seven Key To Building a Great Mineral Collection** appeared in the March 2016 issue of the *Rockhounds Herald*.