

To Restore or Not to Restore



When the Swamp Ghost arrived at the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum, it did so in exactly the condition in which it appears today. Its battle scars, crash landing damage, as well as natural aging are on full display. Many visitors who come to see the exhibit ask if the museum will “restore” the aircraft. However, there are many ways in which we can interpret this word in the museum world. It can essentially be broken down into three options: **protect, stabilize, and fully restore**. We will take a look at the definition of each in order to determine which approach you would take as the curator of the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum. Remember to keep in mind that many other circumstances may affect your ability to carry out your plans such as funding, time, skills needed, and staff members.

Protect: Keep the object in the same condition as it was when it arrived at the museum, including all damage, decay, or alterations.

Example: Tarnished pocket watch with a violently cracked glass. Object hands do not rotate and cogs do not spin. Donor says that the object saved a WWII soldier's life by preventing a bullet from hitting him. Museum displays as is.

Stabilize: Actively prevent the object from further damage or decay, often enlisting the help of specialized conservationists and manual intervention.

Example: 19th century diary of an American Civil War soldier, written during the war. Many pages have come loose, have holes in them, and pages are very brittle. Museum sends book to conservator to rebind, reinforce pages, and chemically clean.

Full-Restoration: Bring the object back to its original appearance and function using any professional means necessary.

Example: Firetruck built in 1937 with original engine, tires, and upholstery, but does not start. Leather on seating is completely cracked and flaking. Body retains minor rusting and holes. Museum hires historical auto-mechanic engineers, auto-body specialists, and an upholsterer to completely restore to working and display condition.

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Each option has drawbacks and opportunities. The Curator and their staff must first consider how the object's story relates to the overall message of the museum. When they have decided that narrative, they must then evaluate each object individually to decide how they will care for and display them, as well as if the object can be displayed at all. Some objects are in too fragile a state to be under bright lights or handled, but are nonetheless significant to the museum and its visitors.

PROTECT	<p>Pro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No extra cost• Put on display immediately• Retains physical history/damage/aging that may be critical to telling its story	<p>Con</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not display well depending on condition• Continues to decay• May need more explaining to visitors or possibly cannot be put on display
STABILIZE	<p>Pro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slows down deterioration• Gets cleaned up for a better display• May have prevented an object from being lost to history	<p>Con</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires a specialist• Costly• Facility may be far from museum• Takes a lot of time• Loses historic aging/damage
FULL-RESTORATION	<p>Pro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevents deterioration and damage• Will receive consistent upkeep• Displays well• Collaborate with other specialists and experts	<p>Con</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very expensive• Extensive work and time• Requires specialists and experts• Must permanently select a particular point in history

