

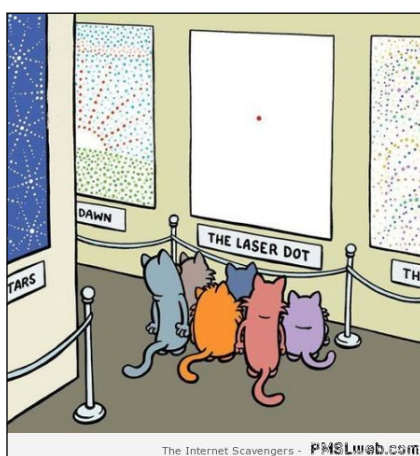


Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum, *in association with the Smithsonian Institution*

Issue #82 Winter 2019

Newsletter

Museums & Museum Exhibits - the Whys & Wherefores



Why Museums?

Museums today “tell the story of man the world over and how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. It houses things created by nature and by man, and in our modern society it houses the cultural soul of the nation. It holds the cultural wealth of the nation in trust for all generations and by its function and unique position, it has become the cultural conscience of the nation.” (Arinze, 1999).

Museums are informal educational institutions and education is one of our fundamental objectives. “It is only our museums that has the capacity and the ability to impart cultural education effectively as we house the tools and materials for doing so in our collections. Education that is devoid of the cultures of the people in the society is empty and incomplete.” (Arinze, 1999)

In modern society, museums enrich the educational process by exposing the public to our shared history in a positive way. We assist our future generations to understand and appreciate our shared history and culture and take pride in the achievements of those who have gone before us. That’s why museums.

Why Museum Exhibits?

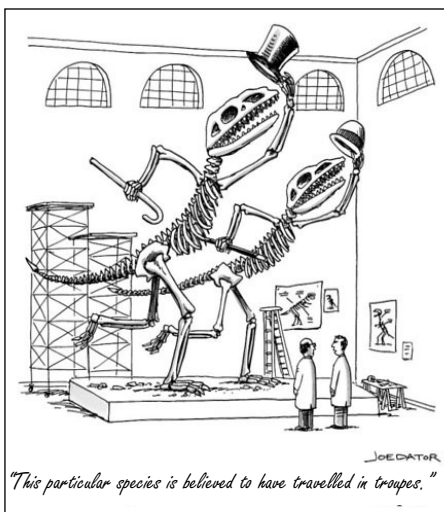
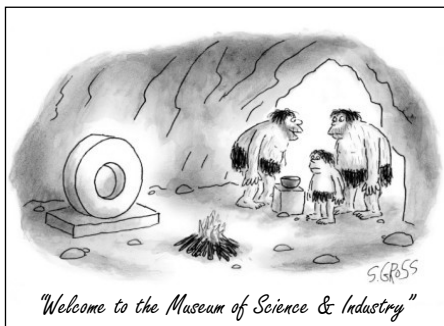
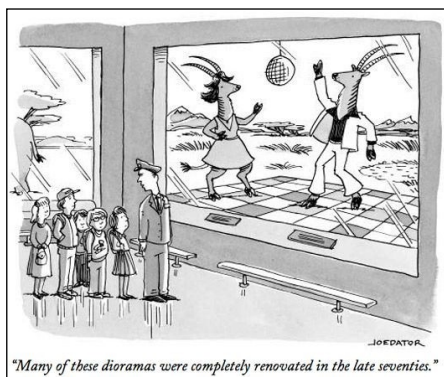
One of the primary strategies in a museum’s educational toolkit are exhibits. According to *Exhibition Concept Models* by the Smithsonian Institution, in contemporary exhibit-making practice there are four different approaches with respect to the way exhibits function with respect to their visitors:

- Exhibit as artifact display
- Exhibit as communicator of ideas
- Exhibit as visitor activity
- Exhibit as environment

Most exhibits have artifacts, include ideas on texts and labels, presume the visitor will do something, and create an environment, but not all concept models will appear equally in all exhibits. History museums, such as ours, use all four concept models, but we usually favor

the idea of the exhibit as a communicator of ideas about the past.

“All exhibits have a central theme or topic that defines them. When an exhibit functions strongly as a communicator of ideas (including thoughts, theories, information, discoveries, etc.), it seeks to convey additional messages that elaborate on that theme and



provide new information or perspectives. In an idea-exhibit, the heart of the exhibit is the set of messages, narratives, or facts that the exhibit-makers wish to deliver. Idea-exhibits necessarily make extensive use of language, whether in texts, audio or video. Artifacts are typically surrounded by ‘contexts’ provided by words and images. The artifacts are chosen for their ability to support and help carry the message.” (*Exhibition Concept Models*, Smithsonian Institution, 2002). This is exactly what we have done in both our permanent exhibits—*Bisbee: Urban Outpost on the Frontier* and *Digging In: Bisbee’s Mineral Heritage* (discussed under exhibit design).

Urban Outpost is a wonderful example of these combined approaches as it weaves the story of Bisbee’s first 40 years, intermingling didactic text panels, artifacts, interactives (things that you can touch and play with!), audio and video with elements of the built environment that houses the story. Our telephone and lamp poles, the brick road, and the recreated underground drift (my learned mining language for an tunnel!) provide visual highlights of our shared history. The box car sets the stage for the story of the 1917 Deportation. The porch invites you into the everyday world of our early homes, with the accompanying hand-powered washing machine and coaster offering a tactile glimpse into their domestic work and play. The toy box offers our young visitors a different version of play that isn’t the button-based, plugged in, and often screeching or squawking toys so popular today.

Exhibit Design

Exhibit design is the process of developing an exhibit, from a concept through to a physical, three-dimensional exhibit, that tells a story in a three-dimensional space.

In researching exhibit design as outlined by professional exhibit designers, I found *A Guide to Exhibit Design* by Smithsonian Exhibits and was absolutely delighted with my find! This Smithsonian guide, published in 2018, could have been written with our *Digging In: Bisbee’s Mineral Heritage* exhibit as it’s inspiration! The guide divides the exhibit design development process into five phases.

The first, the Interpretive Master Plan phase, identifies the exhibit’s stakeholders and target audiences, outlines key goals and objectives, establishes an interpretive hierarchy, and provides a road map forward for launching a new exhibit. ***We did that!***

The next phase, Concept Design, develops a single conceptual framework for content and design. The concept design includes an overview of the exhibit and its main messages and identifies potential themes, subthemes, and interpretive strategies, such as interactives and media elements. ***We did that!***

The Schematic Design phase creates a framework for the exhibit’s content. The schematic design includes the outline, which breaks content into sections and subsections, and identifies key objects, images, quotes, and other elements to be included. ***We did that!***

The Design Development phase transforms content from an outline to a final script and articulates the design. This developmental phase includes the exhibit script, which weaves content into a narrative form, incorporating object labels, image captions, and credits. Depending on the exhibit, there may be multiple rounds of drafts and edits (this is so true and I don’t think there is any “may be” about it!). ***We did that!***

The Final Design phase finalizes the script, design details, and graphic layouts into a production-ready, biddable package that includes the final copyedited and proofread design files (graphic layouts) ready for production. ***We did that!***

So claiming that we had done that... what did we do? *Digging In* tells the story of copper mining, from a uniquely Bisbee perspective. We began with a mission statement, in essence, our concept:

*Mining is an integral part of our society—past, present, and future.
The story of Bisbee’s mines and mineralogy will be told in the voice
of the miner, set in the context of the miner’s work environment,
mineralogical environment, and market demand.*

One of the challenges this concept brought with it was having a primary artifact component of inanimate but really pretty rocks that we wanted to place into a chapter of American industrial history—western copper mining. We had to humanize rocks!

In terms of design, itself, another challenge was telling the story of copper mining in 2,000 ft². We parsed the copper story into four themes and worked the design off these:

1. labor and technology (the miner's voice and work of our exhibit's mission statement);
2. ore (humanizing, somewhat, rock through its economic definition);
3. the role of the consumer (market demand); and
4. although a late comer to Bisbee's copper mining story, environmental stewardship, which was really coming into play as the Bisbee mines were closing.

You can track these themes through the schematics on the right. Set in Bisbee's mining work environments, *Digging In* combines all the principal exhibit elements of text panels telling stories and sub-stories and sub-sub-stories, an artifact component using minerals, archival and contemporary photographs, and mining equipment, interactives, audio and visual modules, and graphic design. All these elements were brought together in Bisbee's underground stope (the work area where the actual ore was extracted—again my learned mining vocabulary, the result of several decades as the director of a mining and historical museum!) and open-pit (or "sunshine stope!") work environments.

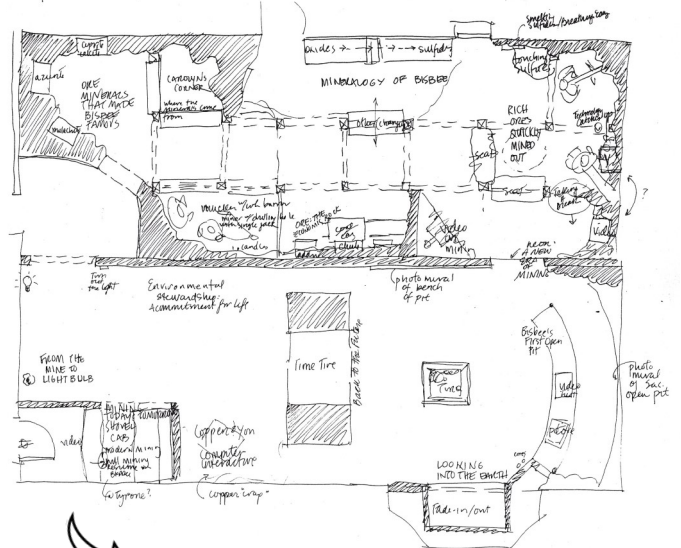
Hindsight is a wonderful perspective. Again in researching exhibit design, I stumbled across a blog offering *10 Tips for Museum Exhibit Design Success*, and this also made me VERY happy!

1. Have "Visitor Personas" and a clear audience in mind. ☒
2. Tell a story (and stories within the story). ☒
3. Create a linear flow through the exhibit. ☒
4. Use graphic design to create interest, flow, and focus. ☒
5. Incorporate interactive learning. ☒
6. Embrace technology in exhibit design (we did to the best of our ability to both afford and maintain our audio-visuals). ☒
7. Present artifacts in interesting ways. ☒
8. Divide larger exhibits into sections. ☒
9. Use consumer-centric marketing to create a Buzz (we did do this in the beginning!... and continue to market our Smithsonian Affiliation!) ☒
10. Design with clearly defined goals as your road map. ☒

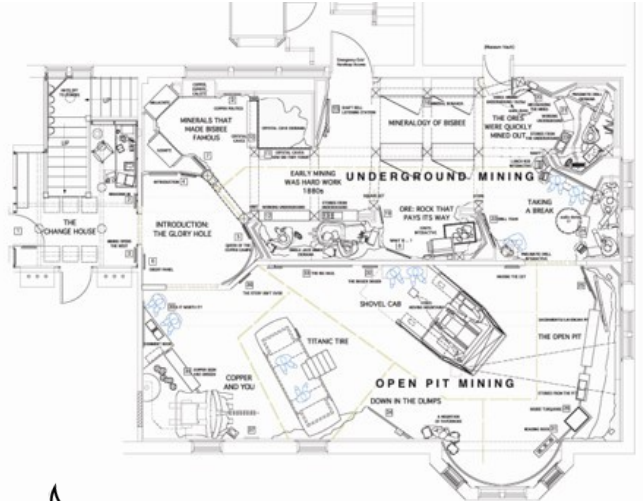
Crafting exhibits is a lot of fun and a LOT of work! Exhibits are the creative heart of museums. With our exhibits, we hope to fulfill our vision by preserving and sharing Bisbee's culture and heritage – past, present, and future; by encouraging visitors to recognize the similarities and differences to their own lives and to tie our shared past to their present; by providing visitors with quality learning experiences in a fun and enjoyable setting; and by inspiring visitors to reflect upon the importance of Bisbee's mining heritage in shaping our nation's story!

Carrie Gustavson

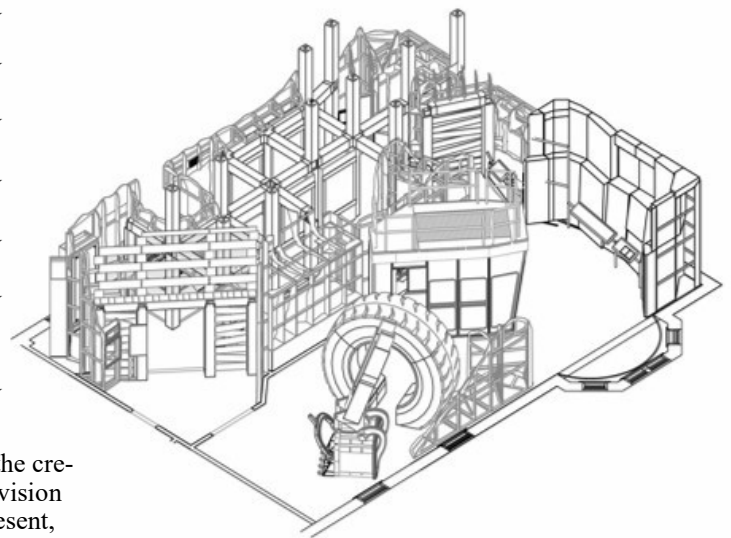
The first sketch of *Digging In: Bisbee's Mineral Heritage*



The working blueprint of *Digging In*



The final layout of *Digging In*



This summary of museum exhibit design was enhanced by excerpts from the following: *The Role of Museums in Society* by Emmanuel Arinze, 1999; *Exhibition Concept Models*, Smithsonian Institution, 2002; *A Guide to Exhibit Design* by Smithsonian Exhibits, Smithsonian Institution, 2018; and) - *10 Tips for Museum Exhibit Design Success*, DesignShop, 2014

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**Remember us in your will & in your estate planning.
A bequest can perpetuate your annual gift!**

Let's say your annual gift to the Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum is \$500, the entry level into our Heritage Keeper membership status. A bequest to us of just \$10,000 can be endowed so that it distributes approximately \$500 each year (5% of the principal) to support our work. Even a small bequest, when endowed, can have a significant impact on funding our important programs. Ask us about the many endowment opportunities available to you and how you can create a meaningful legacy through a well-planned charitable bequest. For further information, contact Carrie Gustavson, Director, at (520) 432-7071 #3 or by email at carrie@bisbeemuseum.org for details and references.

We would like to thank the following for their wonderful support

**Les Johnson Bequest
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Sylvia Iriarte & John Albert Riddle Bequest
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Museums & Museum Exhibits



"Sure, it's historically inaccurate, but memberships
are way up."