

Planning for Future Storage of Architectural Materials: Tips from Rehousing Richard Neutra's Collections

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Introduction

In 1998 UCLA Library received an accrual to Richard Neutra's collection, and to quickly process the 1,410 individual rolls of architectural materials they were rolled as tightly as possible, covered with kraft paper, and packed into 207 boxes. Neutra was a prominent modernist architect who lived and predominately worked in Los Angeles from 1925 to his death in 1970. His buildings and influence can still be seen throughout Los Angeles, thus his work is often requested for viewing and research. However, the current storage system was not recommended for the collection's stability or access.



Figure 1. Left image: before rehousing. Right image: after rehousing, three rolls no longer fit in original box.

Methods

The rolls are a combination of blueprints, diazotype prints, original sketches on synthetic vellum and tracing paper, hand-colored renderings (colored pencil, oil pastels), photographs, photostats, common office prints (carbon copies, stencil copies). After removing the dusty cover and determining the contents, the roll of materials is rolled around a PAT tested archival storage tube. If the materials are under a quarter inch in thickness when stacked, they are rolled onto a 2" diameter tube; otherwise, they are rolled onto a 4.5" diameter tube. The roll is then covered in Mylar if it contains diazotype prints or blueprints. If not, then the roll is covered in Permalife paper, as it's more sustainable than plastic. Finally, the roll is tied with cotton tape.

It was clear from the beginning that once these materials were rolled around tubes not all of them were going to fit in their original boxes and a separate storage structure would need to be constructed. The structures' design was created by Jasmine Jones (UCLA Library) and inspired by the one at Syracuse University Library¹ where tubes make up the interior supportive structure. For this structure 8" diameter structural tubes were chosen to accommodate the larger sets of materials rolled around 4.5" diameter tubes.



Figure 2. Examples of before and after rolling materials around the storage tube. Left image: tracing papers rolled around 2" diameter tube and covered with paper. Right image: diazotype prints rolled around 4.5" diameter tube and covered with Mylar.

Special thanks to Jasmine Jones, Head of Collection Management for Special Collections at UCLA Library, and Chela Metzger, Head UCLA Library Preservation & Conservation

Results

The specs for the wooden structure in Figure 4 (the frame and base minus the tubes) were sent to UCLA's carpenters, and it was constructed of uncoated ash wood. It became apparent only 300 large rolls could fit, and a space was needed for the overflow of smaller rolls.

The 2" diameter tubes were put inside the 4.5" tubes, which doubled the storage capacity of the new structure without requiring more space. The items on the smaller rolls are still supported with a curved surface, to prevent flattening on the bottom of the roll. The rolls can be removed from the structure together or separately, taking out the small and then the large, which keeps the materials easily accessible. In re-rolling the items with clean and supportive materials and re-imagining old and new storage spaces, this rehousing has provided stability and thus longevity to the collection.



Figure 3. Constructed rolled storage structure.

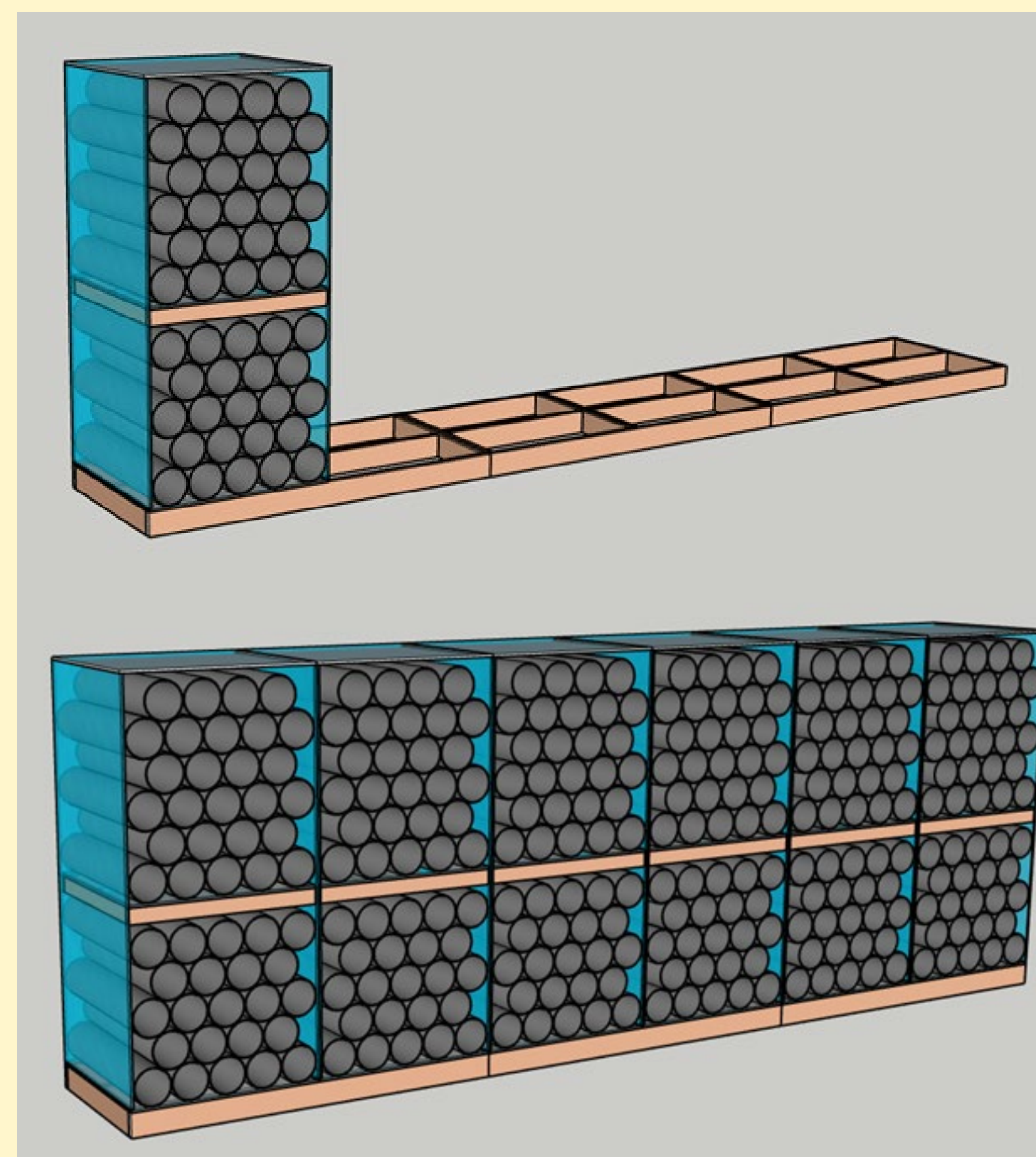


Figure 4. Top image: storage structure with one bin of tubes to show base. Bottom image: final storage structure (created by Jasmine Jones, UCLA Library).



Figure 5. Close-up showing 2" diameter storage tubes in 4.5" diameter storage tubes in 8" diameter structural tubes. The 8" structural tubes are made out of kraft paper (non-archival), to cut down on costs, and then lined with blotter to prevent acid migration.

Conclusions

The Neutra collection won't meet the full capacity of the new storage structure, so there will be space and a template for other large rolled collections. This new storage of the rolls greatly improves the physical control of the materials, both in the way they are rolled and how they're stored. This increases the accessibility of the collection and the likelihood it will get pulled for research.



Figure 6. Devin Mattlin removing roll from structure.

References: 1. Verheyen, Peter D.; Davis, Carolyn; and Olson, Debra, "Storage of Architectural Materials at the Syracuse University Library" (2003). Libraries' and Librarians' Publications. 3. <https://surface.syr.edu/sul/3>