

Consideration of Two Norwegian Match Safes

By Neil Shapiro

Two Norwegian enamel match safes, both made for export by David-Andersen, circa 1901-1910, sit on my work table. I am trying to decide which one I like better, no really, I am trying to determine how to tell which safe is the better one.

I know which one I like better but in trying to articulate why I prefer one to the other I've raised questions of aesthetics, value, and craftsmanship that I am finding hard to answer.

Both safes are colored blue, but the blues are quite different in depth, hue, and tone. The blue that may be called "royal blue", is more eye catching and at first glance more likely to catch the eye.(figure #1) It is on the surface of a more rounded body, a full eight of an inch taller and longer than the other safe. Both safes are guilloched in complex patterns that reflect the light in different ways. The royal blue safe's basket weave guilloche design is more easily seen when the safes are lying on a flat surface. The vermeil over the silver body makes the blue stand out even more than a plain silver rim would.



Figure#1



Figure #2

To me, the royal blue shade has a high intensity and brightness and is not serene or calming as other blue shades. The blue on the other safe (figure #2) has a different tone; one that reduces the intensity of the color, makes it pleasing to the eye and is more complex, subtle, and sophisticated. It is a blue that has a tint that lightened the intensity of the color, reduced its brightness, and made it easier to live with and use on a daily basis.

To carefully compare the safes side-by-side it is easy to see the guilloche design patterns on the figure #2 safe are more complex and intricate. Look at the surface in one

direction and there are vertical elements, look at it another way and there are interwoven boxes traveling across the surface. Defining all these lines are a thin undulating border around the body and separately around the lid. The surface of small objects, like match safes, are not as easily discerned as larger objects. It takes a good artistic craftsman to create sophisticated surfaces that both draw the eye, yet, do not detract from the object. And those surfaces change when the object is moved, say from the pocket to the hand. The royal blue safe is a more static design, while the other safe appears to have surface movement, a gentle rippling as the safe is move through space.

The shape of the royal blue safe is thicker, rounder, and narrower. This makes it a little more difficult to hold and open. There is less room for the thumb to press on the surface of the body while the opposite hand lifts the lid. The other safe is flat, wider, and thinner. These qualities make it easier to hold and use while extracting and lighting a match.

Size, shape, color, utility, translucency are qualities that both safes share but to my eye and mind one is superior to the other.

It would be interesting to know if other IMSA members feel the same way about these two safes. I know that the reproduced photographs in the Newsletter make it difficult to judge my opinions but perhaps other IMSA members can make judgements based on similar pieces in their own collection. I'd be pleased to read their opinions.