

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Florida Museum of Natural History

Preserving the Past, Protecting the Future: A Case Study in Innovation

The Florida Museum of Natural History is a monumental hub for scientific research and education, renowned for housing one of North America's most extensive collections in herpetology, ichthyology, and invertebrate zoology. Dr. Coleman Sheehy III, Collection Manager of the Division of Herpetology, underscores the global significance of the collections: "Even though it's the Florida Museum of Natural History, the herpetology collection, specifically, represents about 75% of all the countries in the world. So, it's a global collection."

With these diverse origins, the collections play a crucial role in supporting worldwide research and education initiatives. This case study delves into Patterson Pope's innovative solutions to address the Museum's pressing need for a more efficient and safe specimen storage system.

THE PROBLEM

The Museum's transition to a new Special Collections building underscored a critical challenge: safely accommodating approximately 4 million wet specimens preserved in ethanol. The Museum had previously housed all collections in Dickinson Hall on the University of Florida campus. "Dickinson Hall was completed in 1970 and therefore could not meet modern fire code regulations for a long time," recalls Sheehy. "It's a beautiful building architecturally, but it was not designed for holding wet collections."

The new facility emerged from the pressing need to resolve the longstanding safety concerns and spatial limitations. The collections required a secure

and efficient storage solution that could meet current needs and anticipate future growth.

"This took some time," Sheehy explains. "Finally, the University of Florida was able to allocate the money — about \$13 million — to build a customized facility to store literally 60,000 gallons worth of ethanol safely on campus."



Watch Now
P2 Talks Museum Collections
Storage

"The herpetology collection specifically represents about 75% of all the countries in the world. So, it's a global collection."

Dr. Coleman Sheehy III
Collection Manager of the Division of Herpetology
Florida Museum of Natural History

THE SOLUTION

Patterson Pope's involvement marked a turning point in the Museum's quest to re-envision its storage infrastructure. *"In the previous building, we were cramped,"* says Sheehy. *"With this new facility, we have much more room. Our specimens can spread out, and most importantly, we have room for future growth, which we didn't have before."*

The Patterson Pope team designed a high-density storage system to house wet specimens of varying sizes, from jars to large stainless steel tanks, tailored to the unique dimensions and preservation needs of the Museum's diverse collections. This innovative approach maximized spatial efficiency and introduced a level of flexibility and scalability previously unattainable.

The collaborative design process emphasized the importance of vertical expansion and specialized shelving solutions to ensure the long-term sustainability and accessibility of the Museum's collections. *"Since we were limited in the horizontal growth of the compactors, we worked with Patterson Pope to see how high we could go vertically... By doing that, we have a lot more space for future growth than we would've had otherwise,"* Sheehy emphasizes. *"That's important because we won't be building more of these facilities any time soon."*



"With this new facility, we have much more room. Our specimens can spread out, and most importantly, we have room for future growth."

Dr. Coleman Sheehy III
Collection Manager of the Division of Herpetology
Florida Museum of Natural History

THE OUTCOME

Implementing the high-density storage system marked significant advancements in safety, mobility, and organizational efficiency. The new system's ability to securely accommodate the Museum's vast and invaluable specimens while meeting stringent fire safety standards represents a monumental achievement in collection management. Moreover, the ease of access and reorganization capabilities introduced by the high-density shelves have transformed daily operations, enabling simultaneous research activities and enhancing overall productivity.

The partnership with Patterson Pope not only solved immediate logistical and safety issues but also set a forward-looking precedent for efficiently accommodating and managing growing collections. Specifically, the ichthyology collection designed its high-density system to accommodate specific-sized jars, and the opportunity to reorganize has yielded 40% space savings, exemplifying the profound impact of Patterson Pope's solution.

Sheehy reflects, *"Working with Patterson Pope has been a great experience. I would consider it a partnership. They've always been interested in our input and try to factor that into a product that does exactly what we need."*

High-density storage systems and collaborative expertise are critical in addressing the ongoing space challenges in museum and collection management. *"Sometimes there are unique challenges with a collection like this that we need to solve in creative ways, and Patterson Pope has always been there, willing and able to do whatever it takes to make those changes and to make it work,"* says Sheehy. *"When things creep up that we don't expect, they come right over and help us find solutions that usually work out really well."*

Dr. Sheehy offers valuable wisdom for museums planning for future growth: *"Moving forward into the future, one of the biggest hurdles any museum or collection will face is, simply, space. High-density storage systems like these, which are efficient at storing large numbers of specimens and accommodating future growth, really are a very important solution to that problem."*

The Florida Museum of Natural History's experience serves as a blueprint for institutions navigating similar complexities, highlighting the transformative power of innovative solutions and strategic partnerships in overcoming the challenges of modern collection management.

