

THE PHILADELPHIA SHELL SHOW  
*Guide to Judging*



*Presented by*  
**THE PHILADELPHIA SHELL CLUB**

[www.phillyshellclub.org](http://www.phillyshellclub.org)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The competitive shell show has existed for well over half a century, and is a particularly distinctive facet of shell collecting in the United States. The educational value of many scientific exhibits is complemented by the quality of work in the artistic divisions, and shows play an important role in bringing together scientists, collectors and shell enthusiasts.

Organizing clubs have at various times published sets of rules and judging outlines, and their use by both judges and competitors has helped avoid disputes and misunderstandings.

The Philadelphia Shell Show was first held in 1983, and has grown to become one of the nation's premier events. Its published rules have been continuously modified to keep pace with the show's expansion, and now for the first time the judges' guidelines are being published as a separate document.

## **JUDGING CRITERIA**

### **Scientific exhibits**

The Philadelphia Shell Club has for some years employed the criteria and points system set out in this document as the standard for judging the scientific division of the show. Exhibitors are encouraged to use this document as a guide in preparing their exhibits, and judges are required to follow it as closely as possible. Both should also have read and understood the Show Rules that accompany the official entry form, available at [www.phillyshellclub.org](http://www.phillyshellclub.org)

### **Artistic exhibits**

It had long been thought that a detailed points system for the judging of artistic exhibits would not be practicable in view of the subjective nature of artistic appeal. In addition to compliance with the individual class rules as set out in the Show Rules, however, it is clear that artistic exhibits can also be objectively judged at least in part on the quality of their craftsmanship, and guidelines for this are set out here. These mainly deal with the choice of materials and execution of techniques. The originality of a theme or motif and the effectiveness of its presentation, as well as the appeal and attractiveness of a work remain matters for the judges' assessment, both individually and in consultation with each other.

### **Judges**

Judges are selected for a combination of experience in judging shows both at a local and regional level and proven expertise in their fields. Candidates for the post of scientific judge are expected to have published papers on mollusks in peer-reviewed journals and to have experience in editing and reviewing written works. They should also have experience in judging scientific divisions at major shows. Artistic judges are chosen for their expertise in a field represented by at least one of the major artistic divisions and for familiarity with other fields of figurative art and craft represented at the show. The judges are issued with exactly the same guidelines as those given to exhibitors, and are expected to exercise complete impartiality throughout. The club works with judges to ensure that both divisions receive the highest standard of assessment possible. Exhibitors are encouraged approach the judges for discussion and advice once the show is open. The club endeavors to make copies of the judges' scoring sheets available as soon after judging as possible.

### **Unopposed entries**

The judging of unopposed entries represents a potential dilemma for judges and a source of hurt feelings for exhibitors. The question is whether an entrant deserves a blue ribbon for a sloppy and hastily-assembled exhibit that is the only entry in its class, or whether it is preferable to judge unopposed exhibits against a universal standard. Even after the objective criteria set out here are applied, the judges' decisions will to a certain extent reflect their experience as well as their own scientific or artistic knowledge. In all cases, however, the basic rule is that a blue ribbon will be awarded to any unopposed exhibit that scores more than 50 points under the attached rules, with a red ribbon awarded for 30 points and a yellow for 20.

## SCIENTIFIC CLASSES

MULTIPLE SHELL CLASSES 100 points total	SINGLE SHELL CLASSES 100 points total
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Specimens (total 25 points)</b></p> <p><b>Choice of specimens</b> (15 points): Quality, rarity, desirability; presence of flaws or breaks; presence of operculum; live or dead taken; preparation and presentation of specimens (treatment of periostracum; cleaning; overall condition)</p> <p><b>Completeness of selection</b> (10 points): Diversity (taxonomical, morphological, ecological); presentation (multiple specimens showing different views); variation within species (color pattern, shape, size); attention to appropriate procurement of juveniles and/or egg cases.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Specimens (total 80 points)</b></p> <p><b>Choice of specimens</b> (80 points): Rarity, both objectively and at shows; rare forms of known species; quality; presence of operculum; presentation of specimen (cleaning; treatment of periostracum)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Aesthetics (total 25 points)</b></p> <p><b>Attractiveness</b> (20 points): Quality of cases, background material and color schemes that complement shells; labels (uniform size and/or format; consistent typefaces, borders, colors); arrangement and density of specimens; quality of graphics, illustrations and supporting text (where provided)</p> <p><b>Detailing</b> (5 points): Overall attention to detail, avoiding smudges, loose ends, exposed adhesives, misaligned text etc.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Aesthetics (total 10 points)</b></p> <p><b>Attractiveness</b> (20 points): Quality of cases, background material and color schemes that complement shells; layout and presentation of label(s); quality of illustrations, graphics and supporting text (where provided)</p> <p><b>Detailing</b> (5 points): Overall attention to detail, avoiding smudges, loose ends, exposed adhesives, misaligned text etc.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Labels and Text (total 25 points)</b></p> <p><b>Deductions:</b> <u>Misidentification</u>: -3 each case (15 maximum); <u>Outdated name</u> (synonym or wrong genus): -1 (5 max.); <u>Switched labels</u>: -2 (6 max.); <u>Missing label</u>: -1 (10 max.); <u>Extra label</u>: -1 (5 max.); <u>Impossible locality data</u>: -2 (10 max.); <u>Consistent misspelling</u>: -2 (6 max.); <u>Typographical error</u>: -1 (4 max.); <u>Capitalizing specific name</u>: -1 (2 max.); <u>Incorrect use of parentheses</u>: -1 (3 max.); <u>No comma between author &amp; date</u>: -1 (2 max.); <u>Incorrect or missing author or date</u>: -1 (3 max.); <u>species name not distinguished by italics, bold or underline</u>: -1 (3 max.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Labels and Text (total 5 points)</b></p> <p><b>Deductions possible for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Misidentification</li> <li>Outdated name (synonym or wrong genus)</li> <li>Impossible locality data</li> <li>Misspelling or other typographical error</li> <li>Capitalizing specific name</li> <li>Incorrect use of parentheses</li> <li>No comma between author &amp; date</li> <li>Incorrect or missing author or date</li> <li>Species name not distinguished by italics, bold or underline.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Educational Value (total 25 points)</b></p> <p><b>Clarity</b> (10 points): Focus, organization, integration; quality of bibliography and of explanations of non-obvious points</p> <p><b>Accuracy</b> (10 points): Evenhandedness, completeness, precision</p> <p><b>Interest</b> (5 points): Informativeness, originality, memorability</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Educational Value (total 5 points)</b></p> <p><b>Clarity:</b> Focus, organization, integration; quality of bibliography and of explanations of non-obvious points</p> <p><b>Accuracy:</b> Evenhandedness, completeness, precision</p> <p><b>Interest:</b> Informativeness, originality, memorability</p>

## ARTISTIC CLASSES

GENERAL ART WORKS 100 points total	SAILOR'S VALENTINES 100 points total
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technique (total 25 points)</b></p> <p><b>Choice of technique</b> (10 points): Suitability of technique to materials and theme chosen.<sup>1</sup></p> <p><b>Execution</b> (15 points): Application of techniques; control, mastery of techniques.<sup>2</sup></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technique (total 50 points)</b></p> <p><b>(Traditional)</b> Use of Barbadian shells<sup>3</sup> and authentic other materials; use of acknowledged historical techniques; use of authentic woods, hardware and techniques in construction of case.</p> <p><b>(Contemporary)</b> Choice of shells and other materials; originality of theme; proportions of elements; execution of non-shell-based parts.</p> <p><b>(Both) Execution of technique:</b> grading of shell sizes; consistent posing of shells; consistency in background fill<sup>4</sup>; execution of color blends and shading; calligraphy and typography; skill in gluing and other construction techniques.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Command of media (total 25 points)</b></p> <p>Control of media; ingenuity in exploiting qualities of media in expression of chosen theme; choice of shells.<sup>5</sup></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Aesthetics (total 50 points)</b></p> <p><b>Balance:</b> accurate execution of symmetrical designs; (in doubles) balance between both sides; balance of colors and densities.</p> <p><b>Theme:</b> Sympathy of the chosen theme with the medium of the Sailor's Valentine.<sup>6</sup></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Overall aesthetic appeal (total 50 points)</b></p> <p><b>(Figurative works)</b><sup>7</sup> Correctness of form and color; accuracy of rendition; composition; technical proficiency.<sup>8</sup></p> <p><b>(Abstract works)</b> Balance of color and form; dynamics of shapes and line; originality; overall impression.</p>	

<sup>1</sup> Examples: Using quilting to portray the ribs of scallops; using glass to portray squids.

<sup>2</sup> Examples: Quality of brushwork; finishing and polishing of cut shells; stitching; mounting etc.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>4</sup> Backgrounds in contemporary valentines need not be composed entirely of shell; however, judges may mark down works in which areas of plain, uncovered background are visible.

<sup>5</sup> Examples: Balancing colors and textures; choosing appropriate shells to represent e.g. a particular species of flower, rather than flowers generally.

<sup>6</sup> Common traditional themes include romance, dedication to faraway partners, the seafaring life, longing for home; modern themes include celebrations such as weddings and anniversaries, the ocean and its life, mermaids and other maritime fantasies. Other themes are of course acceptable, but judges may prefer those that lend themselves particularly to expression in the form of a Valentine rather than another art or craft idiom.

<sup>7</sup> Figurative works include still-life renderings, paintings, photographs, etchings and other two-dimensional portrayals of shells as objects. Judges can make allowance for the limitations of media such as needlepoint in otherwise figurative works.

<sup>8</sup> Example: Appropriate density, accurate color rendition and quality of printing in digital photographs.

## Appendix 1

### Traditional Sailor's Valentines

Of the 35 kinds of shell that were used in original valentines from Barbados, Fondas (2002) identified 34. They are:

Atlantic Jingle <i>Anomia simplex</i>	Lunar Dove Shell <i>Mitrella lunata</i>
Gaudy Asaphis <i>Asaphis deflorata</i>	Tesselate Nerite <i>Nerita tessellata</i>
Scorched Mussel <i>Brachydontes exustus</i>	Netted Olive <i>Oliva reticularis</i>
Yellow Mussel <i>Brachydontes modiolus</i>	Rice Olivella <i>Olivella floralia</i>
Common Atlantic Bubble <i>Bulla striata</i>	Spotted Atlantic Limpet <i>Patelloida pustulata</i>
Glory-of-the-seas Venus <i>Callista eucymata</i>	Dwarf Atlantic Planaxis <i>Planaxis lineatus</i>
Common West Indian Chiton <i>Chiton tuberculatus</i>	White Atlantic Semele <i>Semele proficua</i>
Common Dove Shell <i>Columbella mercatoria</i>	Emerald Nerite <i>Smaragdia viridis</i>
Atlantic Yellow Cowrie <i>Cypraea acicularis</i>	Common Spirula <i>Spirula spirula</i>
Volute Turret <i>Daphnella lymneiformis</i>	Atlantic Thorny Oyster <i>Spondylus americanus</i>
Dwarf Keyhole Limpet <i>Diodora minuta</i>	Stellate Mangelia <i>Stellatoma stellata</i>
Barbados Keyhole Limpet <i>Fissurella barbadensis</i>	White Strigilla <i>Strigilla mirabilis</i>
Gray Atlantic Auger <i>Hastula cinerea</i>	False Red Strigilla <i>Strigilla pseudocarnaria</i>
Common Janthina <i>Janthina janthina</i>	Sunrise Tellin <i>Tellina radiata</i>
Rough File Clam <i>Lima scabra</i>	Atlantic Partridge Tun <i>Tonna maculosa</i>
Rough Scallop <i>Lindapecten muscosus</i>	Coffee Bean Trivia <i>Trivia pedicula</i>
Barbados Miter <i>Mitra barbadensis</i>	Smooth Risso <i>Zebina browniana</i>

For more information about traditional valentines, competitors are referred to the following works:

**Madeira, G. L., Miller, C. M., Page, M. S. & Schutt, A. T.** 2006. Sailors' Valentines: their journey through time. 160 pp. Pennsylvania, Schiffer Publishing. ISBN 0-7643-2378-4.

**Fondas, J.** 2002. Sailors' Valentines. 95 pp. New York, Rizzoli Inc. ISBN 0-8478-2414-4.

**Hughes, J. C.** 1961. Sailor's Valentines. Antiques, February issue: 187-189.

**Bittel, D. B.** Sailors' Valentines. <http://focus.antiquescouncil.com/articlepage91.php>