

Finding the **RIGHT-SIZE** Cartomantic Collection

By Jaymi Elford

I'm on a quest to right-size my deck collection. As a reader, reviewer, and deck collector, I realize this will always be a life-long endeavor. But, I gravitate to challenges, and attempting to get both my oracles and tarot decks into a right size seemed like a good one to do. And what a challenge it has been.

The search started with finding the best container. I know this sounds weird, but for me, finding the best container makes sense. I can only have as many decks and books as the container can store. And what was the best container? Well, I already had an idea. My granny had a hutch in her apartment. It was a dark-stained, wooden free-standing case with two bookshelves, a drawer, and a cabinet. I remember climbing it to reach the books on the top shelf when I was little and could only reach up to the drawer. Those top-shelf books included two from the 1800s, an old Bible and one on Victorian fortune-telling games. Granny told stories about how she and her sisters would stay up at night and use the book to cast their fortunes or interpret dreams. Maybe this is where it all started for me, but I digress.

My desire has been to find a hutch that replicated hers, down to having the cabinet on the bottom with two shelves. This hutch would become the storage container for not only my deck collection but it'd be where I kept my working altar. My friends know how picky I am (*cough* perfectionist), so it took me many years to find something elegant, with simple lines. My search ended in December 2021.

Kendra and I built the unit as the new year rang in. Before I placed anything on the shelves, I washed and cleansed the cabinet with Florida water. Doing so cleared residual worker energy and made the object sacred to me. The real magic began after it dried. What to fill it with?

Adding books and crystals to the top shelves was the easy bit. Smaller books line the top with two pillar

candles on either side. The center space stores crystals, a portable altar box, and various items I integrate into my workings. The bottom shelf holds tall and heavy books. The bottom cabinet doors open to reveal two shelves for my private altar space. I store my favorite decks, journals, and current tarot spells here. Two LED lights illuminate this workspace.

The new hurdle became the collection drawer. This is where I wanted to store the tarot and oracle collection. Now, I knew that the collection in its current size was not going to fit in a 12" by 27" long box. Getting rid of some decks was going to happen. How to decide which items were going to stay and which were going required finesse. Two minimalist/organizational principles got me started.

The first principle is the container methodology. The same one that led me to the buying the hutch. Container keeping is an idea that comes from having read many books on organization and decluttering, a topic that's strangely calming to me. If you declare a

box, flat surface, or a drawer as the items' "livable space," then you can only have that many items in the container. Anything that doesn't fit, needs to find another place to live. The drawer became the declared space.

The second principle appears in the title of this essay, right-sizing. This came from hanging out in a room full of local Portland readers who gather for drawing cards and having good chat. In one meeting last year, we discussed our pandemic deck buying habits, or overbuying as the case may be (guilty here). I brought up how I wanted to destash and declutter to manage it all. As we pondered this dilemma, my friend Lynda suggested that we stop calling this de-stashing and use the term right-sizing. A collective sigh ran through the room at my realization. Changing the name of what we wanted to do, changed the energy in such a powerful way that it got us energized to work on our collections.

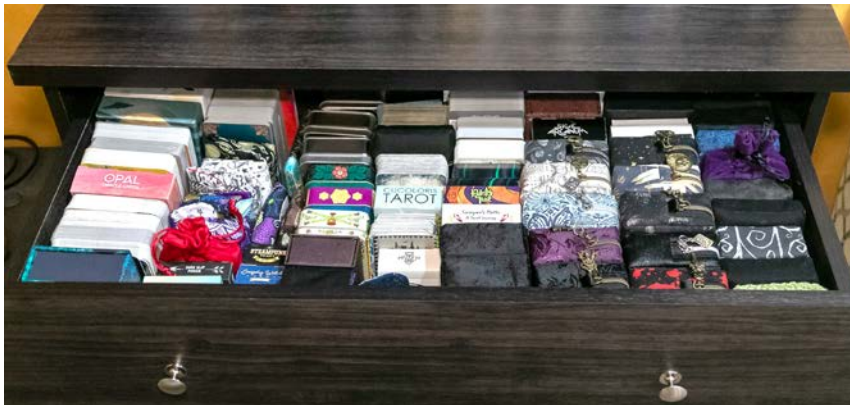
Right-sizing, or the ability to personalize the shape and design of a personal collection, became



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my new mantra. And I tackled the hutch with gusto. Now, this didn't mean going in and just tossing things out. I created and recreated plans as I strengthened the idea of what a right-side collection looked like in that drawer. I knew I'd need space to integrate future collections into that container. I also removed the cards from their boxes. These decks get new clothing that I buy that tells me what is in them. Decks with a compact tuck-box stay. Seeing what I had or didn't have gave me an overview of what it looks like stuffed into the space.

Every time I opened the drawer to see what I had, I thought about making right relationship with each item. Which ones got more playtime, and which ones didn't. I



also needed to know who I was as a reader and collector. I journaled and made lists for themes. In the end, this pre-work helped me shape my personal right-size cartomancy collection by asking myself the following questions.

Do I have duplicates?

This question answers the backup and collection-only copies. I used to keep spare decks for when the hardworking copy "retired". I also used to keep a brand-new copy of decks I wanted to have for resell later. Never in my life have I sold a collector's copy. I'm at the stage in my life where I didn't want to have duplicates line my shelves. I want a collection that I love and find useful. With unique decks. I, also, don't need three variants of the Rider Waite Smith deck. I just want the one I know I'll use and love. If it retires itself, then I can either buy another copy or find a replacement variant.

What themes does my collection contain?

Each deck can loosely fit into a theme (and I'm going beyond tarot versus oracle here). These groupings can be like cat, Samhain, ancestor, etc. While some people may want two or three decks for each category in their collection, I've decided to select the best one that exemplifies the idea. Doing this is hard. Especially when it comes to cat decks. I adore a good kitty deck. It forces me to really sit down with each pile of themes and work with each deck to see

if the theme, art, and cardstock really speak to me. The end goal is to have decks I enjoy working with.

How do I feel about the art style?

This question acknowledges the change our personal tastes and styles go through. There are times I will outgrow the style a deck has and stop using it. Since my end goal is to have a collection of current right-sized options, these decks go out of the collection.

By now you're probably asking, where do all of these done decks go? There are a couple of options. First, I try and find a new home for the deck. Sometimes the deck gives me the name of whom they

want to go to. In these cases, I'll ask the potential owners if they want the deck and work out details from there. Most of the others, however, go into purgatory.

Lisa Papez introduced me to this concept. Purgatory is a box (or boxen in my case) where decks go to stay while I continue to live my life. Having a hideaway provides breathing space to see how your life appears without the said item in it. You can hide whatever you want, but if you go and remove an item from it, then you have to consider whether or not it was a one-off or if it should go back into the greater collective. After a while, the unused decks get sold or placed on conference swap tables.

Curating a right-size collection hasn't been easy. There are times when I think everything is sorted — only to receive a new deck. Then I go through the process again. The temptation to buy new decks to just make sure I'm getting the best of the theme is also strong. Sometimes I'm not strong enough to resist that siren call. However, it's been about six months since I've started all this in earnest, and I think I have a good working collection now. Then again, if you ask me how everything is going in a few months, I might change my answer.

| Tarot is Jaymi Elford's inner compass; see how at linktr.ee/jaymi_elford.



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