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Novelty Print Techniques

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The format and appearance of the postage stamp had scarcely changed until recent times. Worldwide, from Britain's Penny Black of 1840 through to the early nineteen-sixties, stamps were mainly square or rectangular and were regularly printed in just a single color on plain white paper. Multicolor printing was then more generally introduced, coinciding with a greater assortment of themes.

Now, major technological advances permit interactive and fun stamps, and this new century has seen Post Offices develop stamps beyond all recognition and from merely paying postage, as initially intended, through to becoming a modern collectible that can uniquely express a nation's culture and history.



Fig. 1, Sc4018 & 4019,
Lithographed with hologram
affixed from U.S.

The USPS has not been slow to adopt some of these novelties, or perhaps innovations is a less contentious word. These include the application of holograms, as with the airmail stamps shown in Fig. 1. Hidden imagery or text revealed only when a stamp decoder (Fig. 5 on page 3) is deployed at a certain angle found favor with young and old collectors alike for some time, and America was an early adopter of self-adhesive paper. This was very much seen as gimmicky in its early days, but eventually the poor-quality initial trials of 1974 were perfected and the Post Office was vindicated in the use of this substrate.

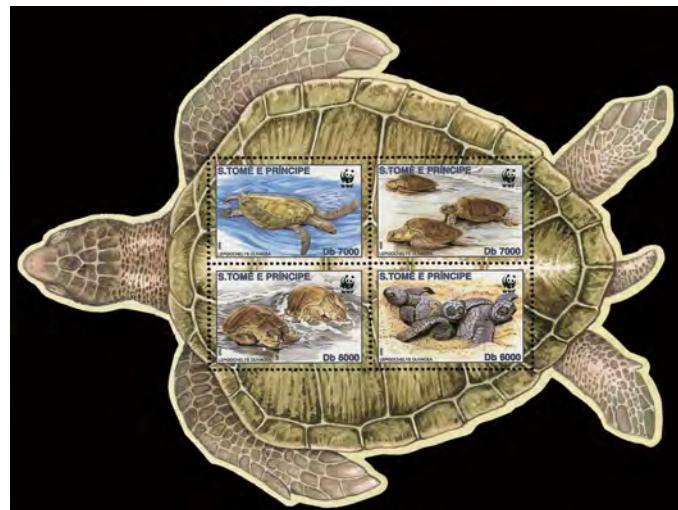


Fig. 2, Sc1431a-d. Innovative die-cutting from St. Thomas & Prince Island.

America is not alone in producing innovative stamps, of course, as the turtle-shaped sheet (Fig. 2) from São Tomé illustrates. Hundreds of further examples exist, such as Italy's 2004 embroidered stamp (Fig. 3) and Great Britain's lenticular stamps for the Thunderbirds (Fig. 4 on page 3) that move when tilted. Other techniques include meteorite dust or wood

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Fig. 3, Sc2624.
Embroidery from
Italy.

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Fig. 4, Sc2863a-d. Lenticular from Great Britain.

stuck to stamps, transparent stamps and lots more besides, to the point where almost anything these days is deemed suitable for use on, or as, a postage stamp.

Such ideas would have been unthinkable even a short time ago and help sustain the fascination and appeal of collecting. But are these the kind of stamp formats that you want to collect? For many traditional stamp collectors, the answer is a resounding ‘no’!

To be innovative by creating and printing* unusual formats such as stamps with holograms and special reactive inks costs the postal administration much more to produce than a conventional stamp does.

Do you think that the authorities and their designers are using these ground-breaking production techniques as

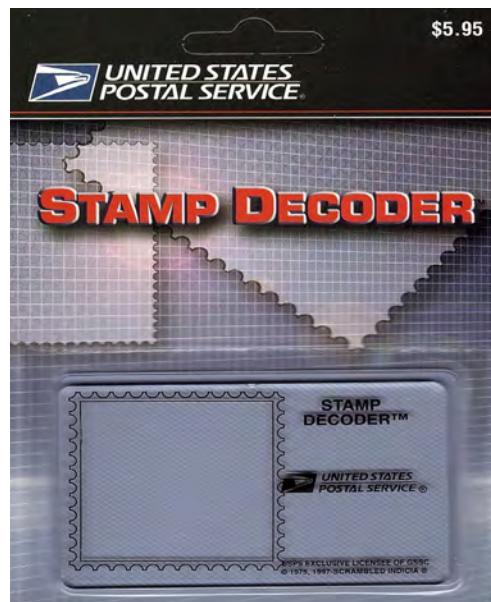
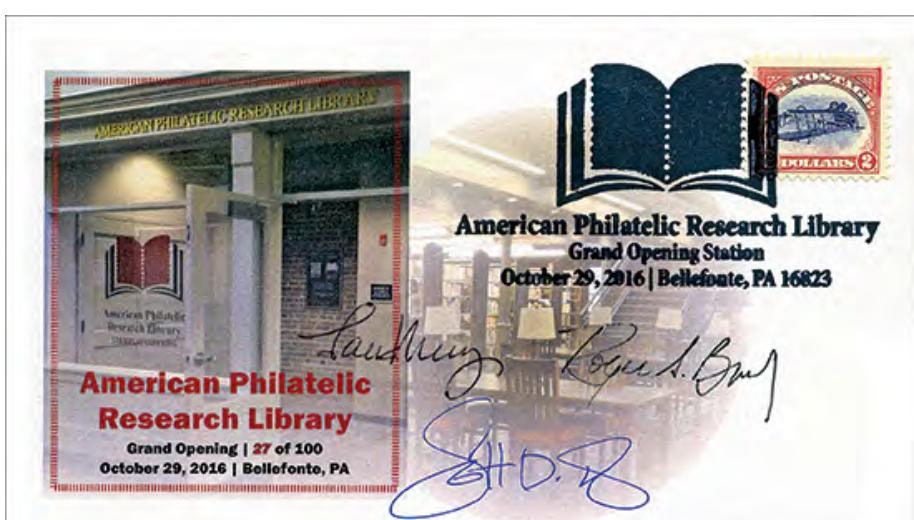


Fig. 5, A decoder from the USPS opened up a whole new world for collectors.

a gimmick simply ‘because they can,’ or are they making stamps that truly stimulate and excite you? I am sure that your Editor would welcome your feedback on this controversial question.

**In fact, it is not uncommon now for a stamp to be manufactured rather than to be traditionally printed, as with the 2014 ‘stamp’ from Austria (Sc2492) made as an imperforate unbreakable thick porcelain tile by Augarten (founded 1718). It was fired in a kiln and had its famous 1924 Viennese Rose design, country name and face value of €5.90 (around US\$6.60) screen-printed onto it in a run of 150,000 copies.*



The American Philatelic Research Library Grand Opening Cover (left) is postmarked October 29, 2016. The cover is autographed by the APRL president, administrator, and librarian. Individually numbered 1 through 100, the cover is franked with the \$2 Inverted Jenny stamp and postmarked with a Bellefonte pictorial cancellation with the library logo. Covers can be ordered for \$15 via the following link: <http://stamps.org/DisplayPage.aspx?id=36&Search=APRL>.