National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Admiral Model 20X122 TV



This 1950 black and white television set with a ten-inch picture tube is unusual because it is encased in a one-piece molded Bakelite plastic cabinet. Console television sets of this era were almost invariably housed in wooden cabinets. Bakelite cabinets were common for table radios and for small table-model TVs, but Admiral really pushed the envelope when it decided to try making a plastic *console* cabinet.

One museum visitor, claiming knowledge of such things, said that this Admiral cabinet was the largest one piece Bakelite casting ever made. We have not validated this claim, but if you know of a larger Bakelite object, please let us know. Because of the weight to be supported, the walls of the cabinet are unusually thick. Roughly three feet tall, it does look diminutive beside other 1950s consoles.



Why make a plastic console cabinet? Of course the answer is to lower the cost. The amount of labor in casting a plastic cabinet is dramatically less than that required to fabricate and finish a wood cabinet. The accompanying ad talks of “The New Wonder Set—At the lowest price ever for a full-size television console.” Priced at $249.95 ($2700 today) that was a bargain at the time. A similar ten-inch set in an attractive wood cabinet would have cost at least $100 more.

The cabinet had to be sturdy, and it is. Our Admiral shows no cracks in spite of its age and having been moved and handled multiple times.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!