Beige

Beige. A light beige was the near-universal color of plastic cases for electronic gear, back in the 60s and 70s when electronics were big enough to need cases. The ABS plastic from which almost all such cases were made has a natural color of translucent ivory, so pigments were added to make it more opaque. Still beige was the basic tone, starting around 1970 with an IBM terminal,

It was a bit more yellowish with the 1976 Apple II,

And more grayish with the early Macintoshes,

But always, basically, an *ecru* shade. At least, to begin with. But when ABS plastic is exposed for a while to oxygen and sunlight, it begins to age and change color. It goes to a yellow that might charitably be called “antique ivory”; or less charitably as “neglected teeth”.

There is a whole category of YouTube videos on how to correct the color of yellowed plastics. There are lots of people who want to restore old electronics, and they do it with a home-brew formula hobbyists call “Retro-Brite”. This is basically hydrogen peroxide bleach. Hydrogen peroxide gel is sold as a tooth-whitening agent and for hair bleaching. Apply the gel liberally to

your aged plastic computer case, expose the gelled surface to ultraviolet light, and soon it is back to something like its original shade.

At a museum, to even suggest using Retro-Brite on an artifact would elicit gasps of horror. If you have an artifact that is yellowed by age, well, the color is part of its history, the product of its years in a certain place used a certain way. Also, the bleaching process can increase the brittleness that develops in aging plastic anyway, making the artifact even more prone to damage from handling.

But museums are thinking long-term, retaining an object for decades. Hobbyists are thinking short-term, to the next Vintage Computer show, or for their next instagram post.