

Frame Design



by Greg Perkins

Tricks of the Trade

Successful frame design results from combining the best colors, styles, textures, and proportions to work together to enhance the art. When my designs fall short, I find that it is usually because one or more of those elements detracts from the art. When reviewing other framers' designs, I also find that distractions are a consistent reason why they may not be as perfect as they could be. To be more successful more often, it's necessary to reduce distractions from designs.

To avoid distracting frame designs, try these solutions to keep the eye focused on the art

It's unrealistic to assume you will ever be able to eliminate all distractions from your frame designs, however.

Any time a customer is involved, that person's taste may lead to a design that detracts from the art in some form or fashion. If you want your framing to look good in its environment, you may also have to make compromises to help it fit in. Although a good compromise should lead to a frame design that is good, it will probably never be as successful as it could have been if it had been framed for a room for which it was better suited.

Trends can also work against you. Many consumers like to go with a popular look. Sometimes the trend may not be the best option for their art, but they want it. Or, when you frame something to look accurate to a specific historic period, the result can be very distracting due to its opulence—even though it was the correct look for that time.

When you are unable to eliminate distractions, the next best alternative is to figure out ways to



The egg-and-dart pattern on this frame is larger in scale than the fine ornamentation on the batik block. It wouldn't be helpful to add yet another really bold pattern, so a fillet with a reduced scale pattern was used to recapture some of the attention that the frame is receiving.

reduce them. The four most likely distractions result from using colors, styles, textures, or proportions that aren't suited to the art. Perfect options aren't always available, but you can compensate for the selections you have or choose to use.

Tricks of the Trade

It would be ideal if you could choose the perfect frame designs for all the art you frame. All too often you are faced with making alterations and compromises to please a customer or to help the art fit well with its environment. Here are some of the common examples of things that can cause framing to distract from the art. Each of these distractions is followed by a framing solution (a.k.a. Trick of the Trade) to help overcome or reduce it.

Color

Colors can distract from art in several different ways. There is rarely one right color choice, but there sure can be plenty of wrong ones!

Potential Distraction 1: When the colors of the framing components are lighter, darker, or brighter than the colors in the art, they can easily pull attention away from the art.

Trick of the Trade: Strong or bold colors in the frame design can leave the art looking faded, dingy, or weak. Soften the color choices of the framing components to keep attention focused on the art.

Potential Distraction 2: If the level of contrast in your frame design exceeds the level of contrast in the art, not only can the focus move from the art to the frame but it may also leave the art looking unimportant. For example, when a picture with a pastel color scheme is surrounded by a white mat and black frame, the contrast of the dark frame will pull attention away from the art.

Trick of the Trade: Reduce the contrast by moving from a black frame to one that contrasts less with the white mat and with the art. If your customer insists on a black frame, it may actually look better to switch to a black mat. Doing this, the moulding will blend with the mat so attention is not pulled outward to the frame.

Potential Distraction 3: Using colors from the decor that are not a part of the art's color scheme can be conflicting and creates undesirable friction between the art and frame.

Trick of the Trade: The best practice is to avoid unrelated colors altogether. When a customer insists on using them, suggest a minimal accent under a neutral versus using those colors for the primary mat or frame.

Potential Distraction 4: During the frame design process, most people select mat and frame colors to match colors in the art. Repeating the same colors in the frame design may not help the art become a strong focal point.

Trick of the Trade: Although there is nothing wrong with matching colors, sometimes you can use variations of a color to manipulate the viewer's attention. When a stronger shade of a color is placed adjacent to the art and a subtler variation of the color farther away, it can help keep attention focused on the art.

Style

It's common to choose a frame of the same style as the art, but there are times when it is interesting to use a different style to add some drama to the design. When straying from the inher-



The greens of this birth announcement, the mat, and the frame are all slightly different from each other. Choosing a green frame that is slightly muted compared to the more vibrant announcement ensures that the announcement is the brighter and fresher focal point. Selecting a slightly darker shade of green for the accent mats helps to pull attention from the frame back to the announcement. If all the greens were the same, the viewer's attention may wander from the focal point.

ent style, be sure alternate choices are logical so they make sense for the art.

Potential Distraction 1: For a frame design to achieve historical accuracy, there will be times when the right choice for the era will look out of place by current standards. In order to remain authentic, you simply overlook the power of the frame, distracting or not, and realize that it recreates the look that was intended for that art in its day.

Trick of the Trade: If the art will be framed for personal enjoyment rather than to sell or to show, it can be framed in a way that is more appropriate for today. For example, a nineteenth-century American landscape painting may have been placed in an ornate gold frame at the time it was made. That may look garish in a casual home today. Using a walnut frame with a gold lip (or whatever works with the art) may create a more subtle, pleasing look for today.

Potential Distraction 2: There will be occasions when a customer chooses a specific moulding in a style different than the art to coordinate with room decor. Sometimes this works, but at other times it will detract from the art.

Trick of the Trade: When customers insist on frame choices you don't agree with, you can try to educate and sway them,



This is definitely an unexpected moulding choice. The strong pattern could easily pull a lot of attention from the art. The first step was to choose a mat close in color to the frame. By reducing contrast, the eye doesn't drift as much to the frame. Adding a band of contrasting white matting immediately around the art creates a strong element to keep viewers focused on the art.



A 4" border was used around this small print. This border width serves to stop the pattern on the frame from crowding the art, and it adds a sense of importance to a small piece of art. To prevent the border from looking too wide, four layers of mat were used to break up the space, resulting in sort of a faux French mat look.

but the choice is theirs to make. You can redirect attention from the frame by adding a strong element, such as a fillet, to pull attention from the frame back towards the art.

Pattern or Texture

Patterns and textures can look beautiful in frame designs when applied appropriately. When they are not, they can be distracting and look out of place.

Potential Distraction 1: When a pattern used in the mat or frame is larger than the scale of similar shapes in the art, the framing will attract attention away from the art.

Trick of the Trade: A good rule of thumb is to reduce the scale of patterns used in framing materials compared to any similar patterns you are trying to mimic in the art. If you cannot steer a customer from doing this, add an element to pull attention to the art.

Potential Distraction 2: When patterns used in framing do not relate to the shapes in the art, they can look out of place and detract from the art.

Trick of the Trade: Whether you directly match the shapes in the art, such as a leaf pattern; look for a moulding pattern with soft curves for art with round shapes; or perhaps use a frame with a ribbed panel or square profile for art with straight lines, the frame design will make sense with the art.

Potential Distraction 3: It isn't always necessary to choose a

frame that matches the style of the art, but you can't put just any combination of styles together and expect it to be successful. For example, a bamboo frame is not the right look for a piece of western art, but it may be fine for a traditional garden scene.

Trick of the Trade: The key to mixing art and frame styles is generally to coordinate the shapes or textures in both art and framing. Even then it is tricky, but it can be done. Say an artist painted an abstract image and combed through the paint. It ends up resembling barn wood in look and texture. A barn wood frame would look out of place on its own, but a narrow barn wood profile used as a liner inside a more contemporary moulding could give the design an unexpected twist that makes it dynamic.

Proportion

One of the more common problems with proportion is the use of mat borders and moulding widths that are too narrow to visually support the art or balance with the space where the art will hang. Less common is using too wide of a mat or moulding, which can drown the art.

Potential Distraction 1: Some people think a 4" or 5" mat border will detract from the art compared to narrower borders. The opposite is generally true. A 2" border may not provide enough of a resting point between the art and frame to allow a

viewer to focus attention on the art.

Trick of the Trade: Choose more generous borders to provide adequate visual relief to separate the art from its surroundings so you can fully enjoy the art.

Potential Distraction 2: When too narrow a frame moulding is used, it gives the impression that the frame isn't enough to support the art. This can leave the viewer distracted by the presentation.

Trick of the Trade: Everyone has seen people who wear clothes that are too small for their frames. Rather than being able to focus on their good qualities, you tend to notice flaws. The same is true with frames. When you see a narrow frame on large art, you tend to be distracted by the frame width versus the beauty of the art. Overcome this problem by choosing frame widths relating to the overall size of the art as well as to the size of the shapes within the art.

Potential Distraction 3: Most people choose frames and mat borders to enhance the art, but it is also necessary to consider where the art will be displayed. When the proportions of the framed art look wrong in a room, it diminishes the quality of even the nicest looking frame design. Too wide a frame in a tight space or with delicate furniture may appear ostentatious. If the framing is too narrow, it may cheapen the art.

Trick of the Trade: When you create frame designs, consider the size of the room and scale of furniture in that room. If necessary, make alterations from the exact design you would have chosen to help the completed piece look appropriate where it will hang.

Satisfying Both Art and Customer

Each time you design framing, you risk the possibility of doing something that will distract from it. If you maintain an awareness of all the elements that may distract, you can do everything in your power to overcome or reduce them.

Although you take pride in your individual design style and generally know more than a customer, you must face the fact that customers pay the bills. You can try to educate and influence them from making choices that will distract from the art, but ultimately the decision is theirs. You just have to keep doing your best to create successful frame designs that truly enhance the artwork. ■

Greg Perkins, CPF is in his 39th year in the framing industry. Starting out as a retailer, he has been with Larson-Juhl for the past 20 years. He holds the position of Customer Programs Manager. In addition, he is an author, contributing editor, industry educator and an artist.

Engraved Picture Nameplates

Roman

D L Script

Victoria

DL BLOCK

Small orders and rush orders are welcome. Plates starting at 54 cents & engraving starts at 14 cents per character. Ask for display.

Small orders usually shipped in 1 working day.

Signs by Paul Phone & Fax (918) 484-5381

R.R. 2 Box 14230, Porum, OK 74455-9565

email: sbp@crosstel.net web site: www.crosstel.net/~sbp



Use Lineco's Self-Adhesive FRAME SEALING TAPES

For sealing off raw wood rabbets and fillets to protect the art and stop acid migration.



Self-Adhesive Frame Sealing Tape - Blue/Gray



Self-Adhesive Frame Sealing Tape - White



Self-Adhesive I-Film™ Frame Sealing Tape

Contact Lineco® or your distributor for a sample and more information.

LINECO

517 Main Street, Holyoke, MA 01041

Phone: 800-322-7775 • FAX: 800-298-7815

Web: www.lineco.com • Email: info@lineco.com