

An Arched Frame Design

Sculpture Put on a Pedestal

by Thomas M. Houston, CPF

When a customer of mine saw an arched frame that I had built displayed in the front window of my shop, it was an inspiration for him to have one of his sculptures surrounded by such a frame. The project you see here was designed for that sculpture and it presented several challenges. We wanted to create a frame that served as a backdrop to the art piece, rather than

fully housing it. It was decided that the sculpture would sit atop a pedestal and that a framed mirror positioned behind the piece would visually support it.

I set to work to design the construction of the frames and decided the piece would measure about 12" wide, 14" high, and 8" deep. After sketching out the basic frame, my task was then to determine how many frame segments would be required to create the arch for the vertical frame and to what angle the pieces would need to be cut.

Fortunately I had previously designed and constructed an arched frame so I was familiar with the calculations. For the equation to work, however, the pieces had to be cut at precisely the right length as well. This meant recreating a jig for my table saw (an invaluable tool for this type of project) that would give a precise, repeatable segment.

Making a prototype is a key practice for work of this sort. To achieve this, I first used small strips of hardboard to make the prototype model to be sure of all my calculations (see Photos 2 and 3). After the prototype was worked out, I proceeded to cut the moulding for the frame.

To build the arched frame, I decided on a 1" wide Louis XVI-style profile because of its simplicity. For the pedestal, I used a 1½" wide Florentine-style moulding for the base. I found that using the two different mouldings added to the interest of the

design; still, the two profiles are similar enough that they complemented each other.



Photo 1: The aim for this frame design was to give the sculpture a distinctive place in the owner's home.

When designing for the pedestal, I first decided that composition ornament in the shape of acanthus leaves would be applied around the two front corners of the base, under the ledge. In order to embellish the pedestal, it was decided that a burgundy, velvet fabric would be mounted onto the top surface. This would help to set off the vivid colors and richness of the sculpture.

The Florentine-style moulding used for the pedestal was turned upside-down for this design, and the back of the profile was positioned at the top to serve as the support for the velvet-covered board. The composition ornaments were steamed until pliable, applied to the corners of the pedestal (see Photo 5). The ornament was then prepared for gilding, along with the rest of the frame.

Since the frames were going to be water gilded, I ordered pre-gessoed moulding for this project in order to expedite the process. (There was plenty of time consumed in the planning and prototype.)

After all of the segments were joined with glue, I filled the gaps with a bit of spackle; then proceeded with light sanding. From there, I proceeded to apply the clay (bole) needed in preparation for laying the gold leaf—five coats of yellow clay, three coats of red. Again, a bit more light sanding. As the layers of clay were built up, the small angles of the arch became softer, appearing more like a



Photo 2: Creating a prototype of the arched frame occurred before actually building the frame.



Photo 3: By calculating the correct angle to cut each piece of the angled frame, they were able to be pieced together.



Photo 4: Before the gilding began, the two frame elements were fitted, but not attached, to make sure the design was on track.



Photo 5: Composition ornament, in the form of an acanthus leaf, was adhered to the front corners of the pedestal moulding.

smooth arc.

Next, I began the gilding, first with the front of the frame lip and working my way around the entire edge. Then, I moved onto the middle section of the frames width and then to the back cap edge. The base was gilded in the same way—inside, middle, then outside edge. At this point, I was beginning to see the potential of this project and that it was going to exceed our expectations indeed. Laying the leaf is where it really gets exciting!

After the gilding was complete and left to dry for a day, I proceeded to burnish the raised sections of the frame and pedestal.

Finally, I moved onto the finishing of the gold with some mild distressing (I had a bit of distress myself with doing this but I got over it) and then some washes of casein and wax and rottenstone dusting. By this time, the frame was definitely taking on a life of its own. That was good!

The most challenging part of this project for me was yet to come: how to attach the vertical frame to the horizontal base without any visual disruptions. I came to the idea of cutting a wood backing, measuring $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick, that would cover the back of the frame all the way down to the bottom of the base (see Photo 6). This worked beautifully; it was minimally visible, yet created a solid surface for hangers to be attached to without creating stress at the seams. Fortunately, the sculpture was not very

heavy. (The total weight of both the sculpture and the frame was approximately five pounds.)

The backing board was fastened with wood glue. Also, four metal right angle brackets were attached with screws to the backboard and to the bottom of the base for extra strength. The visible back of the frame and the underneath side of the pedestal were then painted with raw umber casein paint.

The top of the base was then covered with the burgundy velvet. The fabric was mounted with drymount tissue in a heat vacuum press onto black matboard. This was then cut to exact size to fit the pedestal using a mat cutter to bevel the edge outward for a nice appearance around the sides and front. The back edge that touches the mirror was cut flush. The mirror was measured so that it extended down slightly below the back edge of the velvet-covered base by about $\frac{1}{8}$ " to achieve a clean reflected edge.

And, also, how was this piece going to be attached to the wall? The hanging hardware consisted of two D-rings placed low on the back to lower the center of gravity. There was a bit of trial-and-error involved in the placement of the hangers, but the result was perfect. My client's very words were, "...it couldn't have been more perfect!" ■

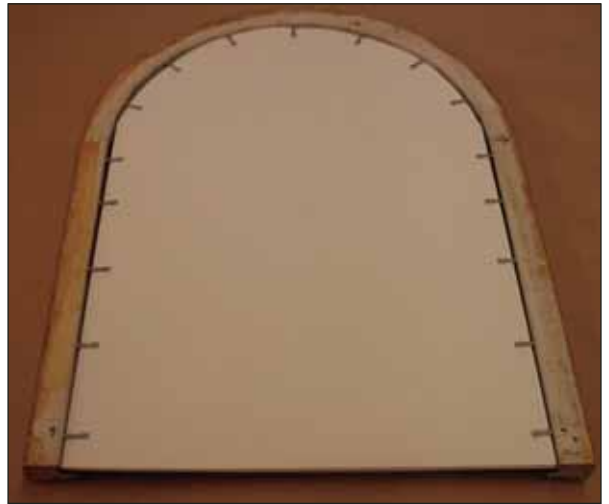


Photo 6: Shown here is the foamboard backing used to secure the mirror into the arched frame.



Photo 7: Upon completion, the velvet-lined pedestal awaited the sculpture.



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To read more about design for an arched top frame, visit the PFM website—www.pictureframingmagazine.com, and look up "Arch-Top Frame," December 1999, by Stuart M. Altschuler, CPF.