

Centered Chopping—By Design

by Bob Hamon, CPF

Over the past twelve years I have used the following technique to chop picture frames that have an ornamental pattern to them. When my customers comment on how nice the finished frames look, I explain to them why the frame seems to “feel” better than others they might have seen. Once they understand, they begin to see the craftsmanship I have used in framing their piece.

To cut frame stock with this method will add to both your chopping time and your waste factor. However, neither is large, except when a frame has a long pattern to repeat.

The little extra work will distinguish your framing above the rest, and all the tools you need are probably already in your shop.

Candidates for Centering

To begin, note if the design on the moulding has an undulating, directional flow, or if it is straight. A frame with a straight, symmetrical design will repeat with a pattern that crosses the width of the moulding (as shown in Photo 3). This simple design is the easiest to plan for and cut. If there is more than one design, as in the photo, you will cut the frame based on the predominant pattern and design.

A directional flow design may present a few more problems, because there is not a marked point in the design that is the center. A running pattern has a beginning and end, but the visual center may not be half-way between the two.



Photo 1: If the frame for this oil painting seems to have a certain “balanced” feel, that’s no coincidence. Each moulding length was cut and joined to show the moulding’s pattern at its best.

Frames with this continual pattern often have asymmetrical designs. The pattern will feel balanced, although more elements may favor one section of the design over another. To center the pattern, lay two sections of the moulding together, rabbet to rabbet. Move one of the sticks back and forth along side the other until your eye establishes some type of “center” (see Photos 4 and 5).

Chopping frames using the design as your guide emphasizes the visual look of the sides of the frame. The pattern of each side becomes important, although you can still control, to some extent, how the design will match in the corners. Sometimes, a frame will look better if the middle of the design is centered, others are nicer if the center is the mark between the designs.

A good example is shown in Photo 6. The 11"x14" corners show, from top to bottom, a frame cut the stan-

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dard way. The second corner is improved, as the design is centered on both sides. The change in the next corner is due to the long side being centered between the design, with the design in the short side is still centered. The next corner was cut with the centers of both sides being between the design. On the final corner, the short side is cut with the center between the design and the long side cut with the design centered.

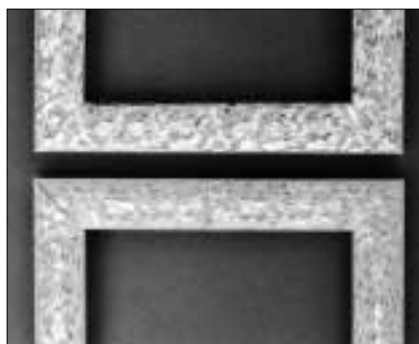


Photo 2: Centered designs improve the look of these cut and joined frames.



Photo 3: A repeating, symmetrical pattern allows your cut to be determined by the largest design.

Four combinations result, each with a different look and feel. By visualizing the cuts before chopping, you can determine which combination is best for the frame. The key is to have a pleasing feel to the frame while maximizing the design placement at the corners.

Chopping the Frame

To cut frames on your chopper with this simple method, begin by setting the stop on the slide bar to your first dimension. You will be cutting the longer sides first, as normal, to minimize waste.

With a metal tape measure, determine the actual overall length of the cut. This will be a tip-to-tip measurement. To get this measurement from the chopper, measure the distance from the space in the chopper's fence (where the blades travel) to the farthest point in the measuring stop (see Photos 7 and 8).

In this example, the chopper is set to cut a frame of 11", plus an allowance of $\frac{1}{8}$ ". The actual length of the stick from tip to tip will be 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". A little math will determine that half of the actual length is 7 $\frac{13}{16}$ ".

Now, with your tape measure, measure from the



Photo 4: A directional, asymmetrical pattern can be more difficult to balance. This combination seems uneven.



Photo 5: With the mouldings moved just slightly, a more balanced combination is achieved.

same space on the chopper's fence to mark a point at 7 $\frac{13}{16}$ " (see Photo 9). A pencil or marker line drawn across the top of the fence or slide bar will highlight this location. This is the center point of the moulding that you will chop first.

Draw your moulding onto the chopper bed and line the center mark to an actual

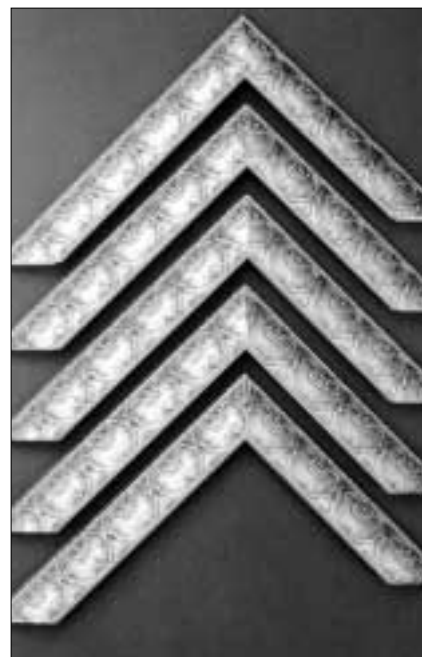


Photo 6: There are multiple combinations for any patterned moulding.



Photo 7: Make your first measurement from the space in the chopper's fence.

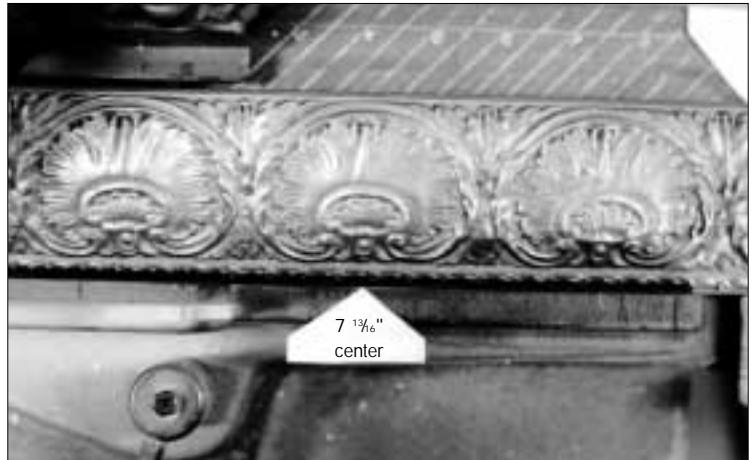


Photo 9: The center of the design is where you will place this measurement.



Photo 8: The farthest point on the measuring stop is where the moulding sets on the stop.

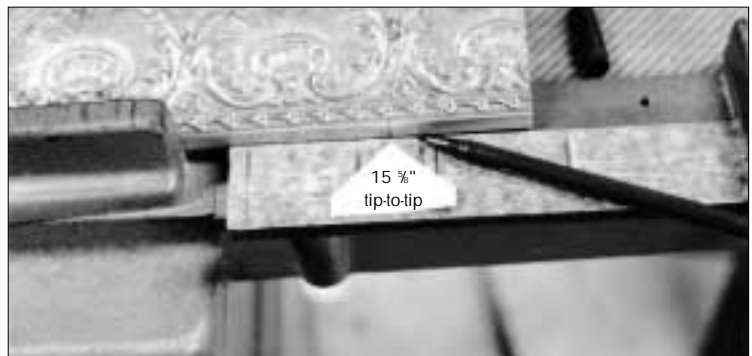


Photo 10: Mark the back of the moulding at the spot where you need to cut the first end.

center of the pattern. The moulding will extend over the top of the measuring stop when you do this. With your pencil or water-based marker, mark the back of the moulding at the point where the moulding lines up to the tip of the stop.

With these first measurements done, draw the moulding back through the chopper and chop the moulding at the mark on the back. To finish the chop, draw the moulding across the bed to seat into the measuring stop and chop the remaining end. The pattern center and the center mark you drew should line up on this cut. Repeat the marking process and cut the second long side. The two short sides are cut in the same fashion, after taking your measurements and doing the calculations.

With a few center pattern projects under your belt, the process will go smoother, faster, and seem second

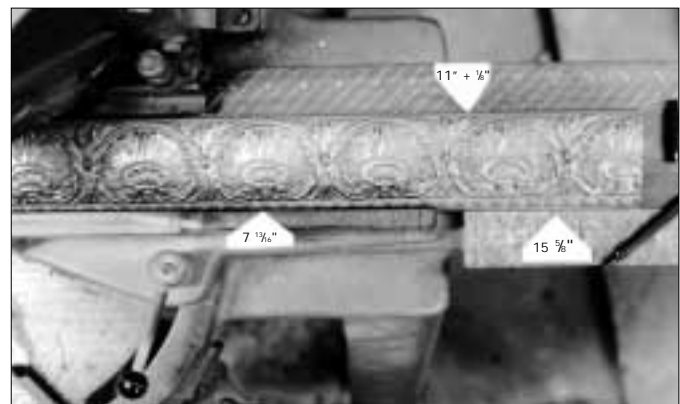


Photo 11: An overall view of the chopper, with measurements.

nature to you. Price your time to compensate for the extra steps. If you have several mouldings that are constant candidates for this method, add an extra amount to their retail price so that this technique can become the standard you offer. ■