

When Howard (Hal) Kuehne retired from the United States Navy in 2000 after 24 years of service, he was able to turn his attentions to something he had done as a hobby from an early age—making picture frames. The craft is a continuing tradition in Hal's family that began with his grandfather Max Kuehne (1880-1968). During the early 20th century, Max made frames for numerous museums, including the Whitney Museum, The Barnes Foundation, the Hispanic Society. An artist himself, he also made frames for other artists such as Charles Prendergast, Rockwell Kent, and William Glackens. Other Kuehnes that have carried on the craft are Max's son, Richard and his granddaughter, Lindsay.

Hal's passion for framemaking was sparked while watching his grandfather work in his workshop in Rockport, MA. Now, in Virginia Beach, VA, he continues the tradition of framemaking



This detailed example is gilded in silver and features an incised design.

Kuehne Frames: A Tradition Continues

by Anne Vazquez



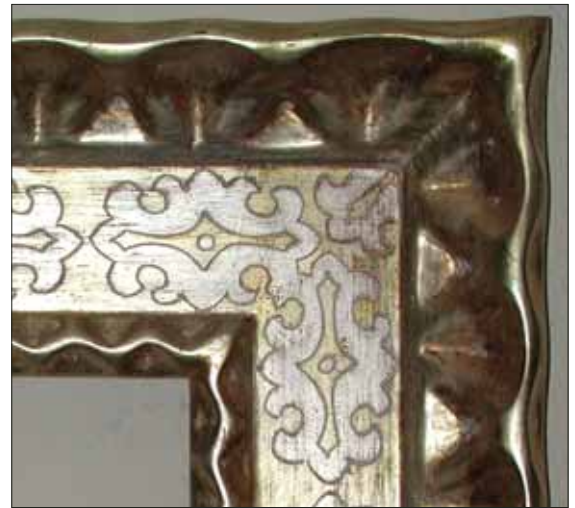
Hal Kuehne, seen here in his workshop, is a third generation framemaker.

from beginning to end, from carving to gilding. While each frame is a work of art, many of Hal's frames feature beautiful incising, a design that echoes his grandfather's style. Sgraffito floral patterns and scrolling foliate designs are among the motifs that grace Hal's work. And although the majority of his creations is picture frames, he also makes reliefs and furniture as well.

The conception of each frame begins with sketches of the desired design. When choosing the wood, Hal tends to use birch, mahogany, basswood, and poplar. They don't contain oils so can be successfully gessoed, he explains. His frames are also a wide range of sizes from an inside dimension of 8"x10" up to frames to house artwork up to 4'x4'.



The incising on this frame was applied on the gesso with blue tempera paint. It was gilded with silver, then rubbed with steel wool to reveal the color. (Inside dimensions: 8"x10"; outside dimensions: 22½"x20½")



This corner sample was hand carved from basswood. This profile is 6" wide with incising and silver gilding.



Made while Hal was in the Navy, this frame is one of his earliest works and features his signature use of bold color.



The design on this frame was applied to the gesso, gilded in silver, painted with zinc white acrylic, and rubbed down with steel wool. It was sold to Hollis Taggart Galleries. (Inside dimensions: 20"x24"; outside dimensions: 30¾"x35".)

The use of incising on the frames is reminiscent of Max Kuehne's work, but Hal certainly has a style all his own. He experiments with bold and bright colors. And he also likes bold designs, such as the carvings on the frames seen on page 52.

Once the frame is gessoed, Hal sketches the pattern he envisions on the surface. This helps to decide how large the design should be on the profile. Once the pattern is decided upon, he traces it to paper and uses that as a template for the rest of the frame. Hal finds this especially useful for creating consistent corner designs.

When gilding his frames, Hal uses both gold and silver, and does water gilding. The majority are adorned with silver leaf because of the range of finishes that can be achieved: from a bright silver shimmer right down to black.

Hal uses a variety of media, including egg tempera, watercolors, and acrylic, to add color to his frames. He experiments with different approaches, sometimes applying the color on top of the gesso, and sometimes the color is applied on top of the gilded surface. He then seals the surface with shellac, but furniture (that will be handled more often than a frame) is given lacquer for the final coat.

While framemaking is a creative pursuit for Hal, he also sells his frames. In 2000, he attended a showing of his grandfather's



In this assortment of Hal Kuehne frames, we see examples of both incising and flowing carved designs.



Seen here is a corner incised frame made by Hal housing one of his grandfather's paintings.

work at the Hollis Taggart Galleries in New York City. Soon after, with revived inspiration, he began making frames more regularly, and has sold a number of his frames to Hollis Taggart. One of his frames, a cassetta style with incising, was also sold at

Framefinders Fall 2001 auction in New York City.

When it comes to what people prefer for their artwork, Hal has found that simple incised patterns are the most popular. However, his penchant for experimenting with colors

and bold carvings results in frames of a wide variety. Although, the frames with bolder elements may be too powerful for some art, as frames have been seen as art unto themselves, someone purchased one of Hal's bolder frames to display on its own. The bolder



Hal Kuehne also dabbles in relief carving. This example measures 24"x49". The bird was leaved with dutch metal, with the panel portion gilded in silver.



This example was hand carved from basswood and gilded in 23 karat gold. In addition to the bold carving, there is incising in the flat panel area. (Inside dimensions: 25"x30"; outside dimensions: 43"x48".)



Seen here is a frame with scalloped carvings being made. Hal spends about 30 hours to make a frame like this.



Above is a corner sample of the scalloped frame. It was hand carved from basswood and gilded in silver. This profile is 5" wide.

colored frames have also been used to house mirrors.

With no formal training in framemaking, Hal considers himself a novice in the world of picture frames. He takes an active interest in learning about the styles of the artist and framemakers of the early 20th century, such as Charles Prendergast and Ben

Badura. He also would like to take instruction in painting. This is the opposite of his grandfather who was a painter first and then became a framemaker. As Hal puts it, "It's great that in this day and age, the tradition and craftsmanship continues to be appreciated." ■

An article on the work of Hal's grandfather, Max Kuehne, was written by William Adair in the May 2001 issue of PFM.