

Style Snapshot

A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history

by Mark Guthrie, CPF

What style frame is this? Louis XIII (or Louis XIV, or Louis XIII/Louis XIV “transitional”) flower-corner frame. Due to the fact that frame design and frame production throughout the French “Louis” periods aren’t necessarily concurrent with the reigns that they take their names from, there is valid debate concerning this particular style’s attribution.

Where is it from? France

What time period is it from? Originated in the latter Louis XIII reign and produced through the Louis XIV reign [Louis XIII (1610-1643), Louis XIV (1643-1715)].

Who and what were instrumental in developing this style of frame? Aesthetically, pronounced corner activity on a frame of this style created a diagonal interplay with the composition of the painting it would house. Historically, the origins of the design has been traced to Italy. Maria de Medici, acting as Regent during the minority of Louis XIII (1601-1617), contributed stylistic influence to art, architecture and to frame design.

What are the defining/common characteristics of this style? Projecting carved corner activity consisting of: “Fanned Lambrequin” corners (a borrowing from the plumed scarf from a knight’s helmet); Asymmetrical floral garlands on either side of the corner (often containing one sunflower—contributing to the “transitional” attribution argument); and clean reposes (the space between the corners) or reposes with finely inscribed leaf and tendril design

What design departures might be seen on some frames of this style? On frames of the period, sand panels may be present and the detail at the sight edge (the lip of the frame) may be continuous around the frame or only occur near the corners.

What type of artwork would this frame most likely house? Originally, the design was most commonly used for portraits.

What furnishing/interior styles accompanied these style frames in their time? Although denounced by critics of the time, the germs of 17th Century Baroque architecture and interior design existed in the Roman scaena frons (a massive and opulently decorated backdrop of the antique Roman theatre). Articles of interior furnishings took on a reflection of “State”: ‘Every object swells with State, all is pious, all is great.’ And as an expression of the current day’s “theatre of State” the use of sumptuous lambrequins, swags and grotesques appeared within early Baroque textiles, furnishings and interior mouldings.

Additional comments: In today’s culture, this frame’s distinctive appearance can evoke emotions from awe to outright revulsion. But when viewed by professionals, it is important to remember that this frame signifies a beginning of purely French design aesthetics. It stands as a milestone that shifted framing styles long beyond its popularity. Stylistic variations that grew from this frame include designs of the Louis XIV, Regence, Louis XV periods, the English “Lely” frame as well as American 20th Century “Taos” frames. ■



Mark Guthrie, CPF is a 26-year veteran of the framing industry and owner of ÆDICULE in San Francisco, CA. He provides consultation services to industry manufacturers and retailers, and has served as V.P. of Sales for Abe Munn Picture Frames in New York City. His background also includes management of multi-store operations and ownership of Guthrie’s Picture Framing in Houston, TX. He has taught at the National Conference. He can be reached at emguthrie@yahoo.com.