

A Brief Guide to Ornament

By Laura Caiaccia



If you're frequently at a loss for words when attempting to describe the features on your favorite period frames, use this as your guide. The photos will help you spot the difference between a dentil and a dart; the definition will give you clues on where you'll find them.



Acanthus Leaf: Many designs based on natural forms have been used for ornamentation through the centuries, but the acanthus leaf is by far the most common. It was introduced by the Greeks, and has been a part of every important Western style since.

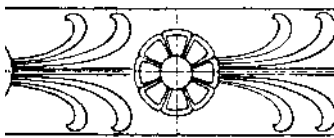
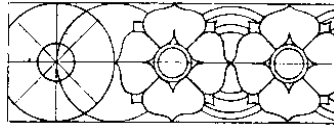
Dentils: These square projections were originally used on the cornices of classic Greek and Roman architecture.

Two examples of acanthus leaf.

Egg and Dart, Egg and Leaf, and Egg and Tongue: The repeating egg border often alternates with a spear-like dart motif, a stylized leaf motif, or an abstract tongue motif. In use since the time of classic Greek architecture, these combinations usually appear on a quarter round ovolo profile.

Festoon: Fruit, flowers, or leaves tied into a bunch with ribbons is a common decorative motif that dates back to the Romans. It is often used to decorate pilasters or panels.

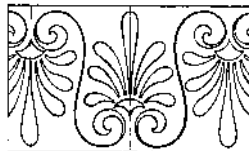
Flutes, Fluting: This pattern is made up of repeated, parallel grooves. It is usually



Two examples of rosettes



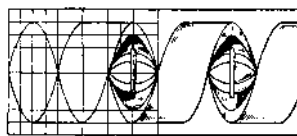
Leaf and berry



Palmette band



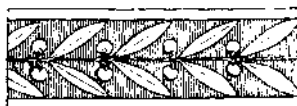
Reed, with strapwork



Ribbon and stave



Guilloche band

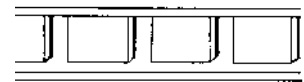


Laurel leaf

carved in the cove of a moulding, perpendicular to the profile, or in a column or pilaster.

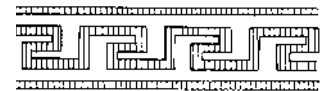
Gadroons, Gadrooning: This refers to slanted, oval-shaped bead carving. Derived from Roman vase decoration, it can be seen on either the side edge or back edge of frames.

Greek Fret: This panel features small, straight rectangular bars joined at right angles in a running band. It originated in Greek architecture, perhaps derived from a textile pattern.



Dentils

Guilloche: This decorative border features two (or more) bands woven together to form circular

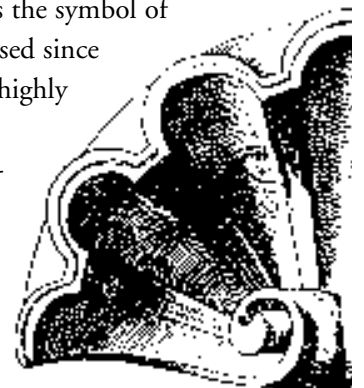


Greek fret

spaces between them. Rosettes or similar ornaments are often found inside those circular spaces.

Laurel: Both the laurel and olive branch were used by the Greeks for their symbolic significance: the laurel was sacred to the god Apollo and the olive branch was the symbol of peace. They have been used since in both naturalistic and highly stylized forms.

Leaf and Berry: Similar in appearance to the laurel leaf, this running pattern emulates the garlands of ancient



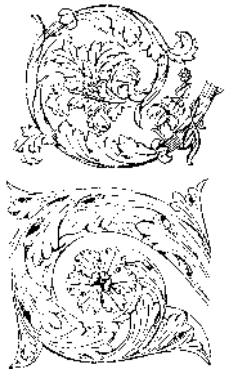


Festoon

Rome.

Palmette: Like many ornaments, the palmette originated in Greece. It contains an odd number of narrow leaves in a symmetrical arrangement. It can be used alone or in bands.

Pearls: Small balls rendered in slightly more than half relief are often known as pearls. These are usually accompanied by discs and ovals; the disc is sometimes called a “reel,” and the oval is commonly known by names such as “sausage” or “bar.” Pearls, in combination or alone, are used most often to ornament small, half round mouldings, or below other ornaments, such as egg and dart, on a larger profile.



Two examples of scrolling foliage

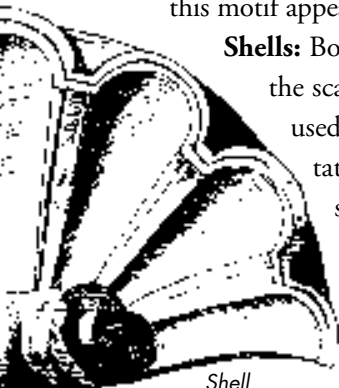
Reed: The reed ornament is found on torus mouldings, sometimes designed to look as if the reeds are bound together by scrolling leaves, straps, or ribbons.

Ribbon and Stave, Ribbon and Stick: This ornament is usually carved on a bead moulding and resembles a spiraling ribbon wound around a rod.

Rosette: Rosettes seem as more or less naturalistic flowers from a front view, commonly used singly or repeated in bands. These can either be directional or perfectly symmetrical.

Scrolling Foliage: Creative interpretations of natural foliage have led to many forms of ornament. Yet few natural plants have tendrils, and there are many forms of execution within the various styles where this motif appears. Also called Leaf Spiral.

Shells: Both the nautilus shell and the scallop shell have been used as decorative ornamentation since the Renaissance. Here a highly stylized scallop shell is shown. ■

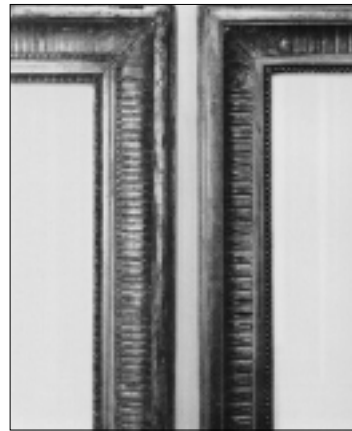


Shell

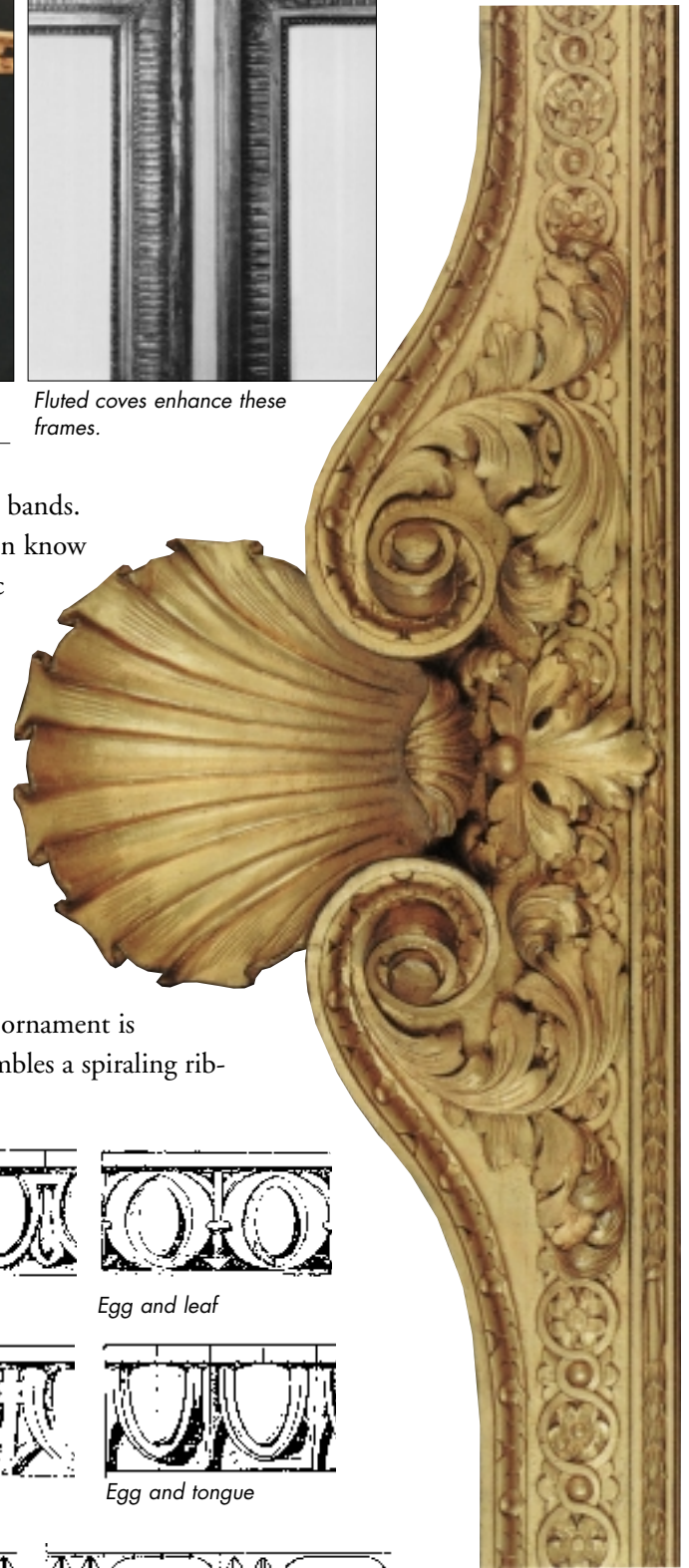
Line art from *Dover's Handbook of Ornament*.



Gardrooning occurs at the sight edge.



Fluted coves enhance these frames.



The top rail of this frame (shown vertically) features a guilloche band and scrolling acanthus leaves surmounted by a shell.



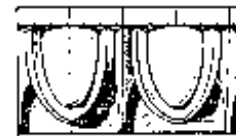
Egg and tongue



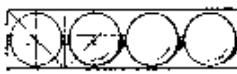
Egg and leaf



Egg and dart



Egg and tongue



Various examples of pearl ornaments