

# Profiles ◆ in ◆ Framing

## Finer Frames

Going the extra mile for customers is a key factor at this shop in Idaho.

by Anne Vazquez



*Finer Frames was named Small Business of the Year in 2002 by the local chamber of commerce.*

In the early 1990s, Meg Peters was living on the Azores Island, located about 900 miles off the coast of Portugal. While her husband served in the military on an island base, she attended classes for business. She was also looking for a creative pursuit, and a class in picture framing piqued her interest. After completing the class, she volunteered at a frame shop on the island, and learned the trade during the two years she spent there.

Upon returning to the States,

**Owner:**  
Meg Peters

**Location:**  
Meridian, ID

**How Many Employees:**  
One full-time; one part-time

**How Long In Business:**  
4½ years

**Square Footage:**  
1,500, with 800 for showroom  
and 700 for production area

Meg went to work in a frame shop in Boise, ID for several years. She had always wanted to be self-employed, and eventually decided to use both her business training and framing experience to that end. Four-and-a-half years ago, she opened Finer Frames in Meridian, about 10 miles outside Boise.

This past summer, Meg returned to Europe for a both business and pleasure. To make the most of her trip, she looked into visiting frame shops while in the U.K. One of her moulding



Owner Meg Peters welcomes visitors in true framing fashion.

sales reps put her in contact with Arqadia Moulding in the U.K. She toured Arqadia's facility and then spent a day visiting various frame shops in the Cambridge, England area.

During this trip, Meg was struck by the fact that the framers she visited are not using the technology available to the framing industry to the extent that framers in the U.S. do. And from a design standpoint, she observed that the trend is not so much toward wide mats and wide mouldings as she'd been seeing at home. (She attributes this difference in design style to the smaller scale of the homes in the U.K., as compared to in the U.S.)

When Meg opened her shop, she decided to focus on being a high-end shop with a niche for conservation. (Currently, she does not stock any

plain paper mats, and the majority of glazing sold is at least UV-filtering.) While about 90% of the business is custom framing, Meg also sells a selection of artwork consisting of prints and some original works. She also sells ready-made frames made from scrap moulding. Much of what is framed at Finer Frames consists of original works of art and collectibles.

And as more and more collectibles are brought in to be framed, making shadowboxes has become more frequent. Meg has found that most people don't know what to do with favorite items until they see some examples. For that reason, she dedicated a wall to displaying shadowboxes—many of which house her own items. She also keeps a photo album of past projects to give customers ideas, as well as to instill confidence in Finer Frames' services.

Meg takes pride in custom frame designs to meet virtually every person's needs. "We have no fear here," she says. "And a lot of learning is done out of necessity," she explains. In many cases, they will design the framing job with



A wall filled with shadowboxes and other framed items is meant to show consumers what can be done with special items. Many of the framed samples house items belonging to Meg.

the customer and then begin to figure out the mechanics of the construction afterwards. Her two employees, frame designer Cynthia Moore and head framer Ryan Bayne assist Meg in the creative framing they design.

On any given day, Cynthia and her staff can be found finishing raw moulding, or altering an existing finish, to get just the right appearance. Meg also meets custom needs by doing "extras," such as painting mats and offering glass etching.

In addition to local advertising, much of Meg's marketing efforts are concentrated in community involvement. She belongs to the Meridian Chamber of Commerce and has found it a great way to network and increase the visibility of her business. (Finer Frames was named Small Business of the Year for 2002 this past April by the chamber.)

When we spoke, Meg was preparing to host a charity art auction at the Boise Hotel. She had been busy framing up the variety of artwork she had gathered (many of which were donated)

from local artists. Her goal is to raise \$10,000 for a local non-profit volunteer group, which helps senior citizens to live independently.

Meg's other community activities include teaching local adult classes. She recently taught a class on good frame design. The focus was to show attendees what is possible with custom framing and why your framer chooses what

they do at the design counter. She looks at it as another way to educate the consumer.

To keep in contact with existing customers, Meg maintains a mailing list. She uses the list, which currently contains about 600 people, for several mailings throughout the year. She informs them of special events, such as the upcoming art auction.

When asked what is most challenging about owning her business, Meg points to outside forces—things not directly under her control. For one, she's noticed that people are shopping around and there's more competition for the frame sale.

She worries about the home décor stores. "Much of the pre-

framed art is looking better and better," she says. "And I've seen beautifully framed mirrors at Home Depot for under \$100."

And when asked if the state of the economy has affected business, Meg says that Finer Frames has actually continued to grow. She attributes this to the fact that many of her customers continue to have disposable income. (Her targeted market consists of upper income, educated consumers.)

Still, when she reviewed sales numbers recently, Meg found that the average ticket price of framing jobs had decreased. About a year ago, the average sale was \$250; as of a few months ago, the average was down to about \$200. "People are not as frivolous. You show them a suede mat and a fillet, and

they might say let's try something less costly," she explains.

Meanwhile, Meg is staying focused on what she can control—offering creative, quality custom framing for all her customers' treasures. ■



*Head framer Ryan Bayne takes a minute out from chopping frames in the backroom.*