

Merchandising Mat Designs

By Scott A. Lewis

Much has been written about the mat. At it's most functional, the mat is used to protect the art by keeping the glass from making direct contact with the art. As your framing gets more sophisticated, the design potential of the mat becomes more important. From a business perspective, the mat is the easiest (and therefore the most common) place to add value to the custom frame and to develop a reputation for creativity.

As you read articles and books, and view samples of mat and frame designs, select several mat designs that appeal to you and learn to produce them reliably. Once you have a battery of special matting effects, try them out on your customers. Here is one method of merchandising mat designs for upgraded sales and increased profitability.

Make Mat Samples

You've heard this over and over, but this is where sales begin. Make and, more importantly, show samples of your mat designs. Your customers will not ask for things they don't see. Make a 11" x 14" sample mat that your customers can pick up and hold. These samples will serve two purposes: they show your customers available designs and they give you practice that helps you create better designs more quickly and set prices more accurately.

Experiment with different color combinations, proportions, and placement of effects. Try producing the same design several times in different colors. Then place your samples in a bin within easy reach of your customers. Encourage them to peruse. Label each design with a recognizable name that your customers can use to ask for the design.

Make Corner Samples

While you're making your mat samples, turn some

into corner samples. Again, have several variations readily at hand and use them during your sales presentation. Place the specialty corners in with your regular mat corner samples and use them on your customers' art while designing. Suggest an effect, show the specialty mat sample on the art, and begin to explain that the design is crafted right there in your store. Point out that you can create the effect in any color or size. And don't forget to stress the one-of-a-kind benefits of such designs.

Use Specialty Designs

To further reinforce the value of mat design, use the same designs on your wall samples and gallery pieces. Then, during your sales presentation, as you select colors for the mat design with your regular samples and illustrate your design concept with your specialty corners, you can use the frame wall sample to associate the finished design with the corner elements laid out on the art.

This three-tiered sample presentation will help your customers visualize your design on their art. It will reinforce the value of doing business with you: personalized service and good design.

Get Started!

Learning to produce specialty mat design can be accomplished in several ways. Books and articles are primary sources. Videos and demonstrations at trade shows make the techniques come alive. A variety of classes are available that offer hands-on training in any type of mat cutting you desire.

Whatever methods you use to learn, the only way to really master the craft is to practice, practice, practice. Time invested in creative mat design will reward you with confidence, efficiency, and profitability. ■