



Shadowbox

A Different Approach to Design

Solutions

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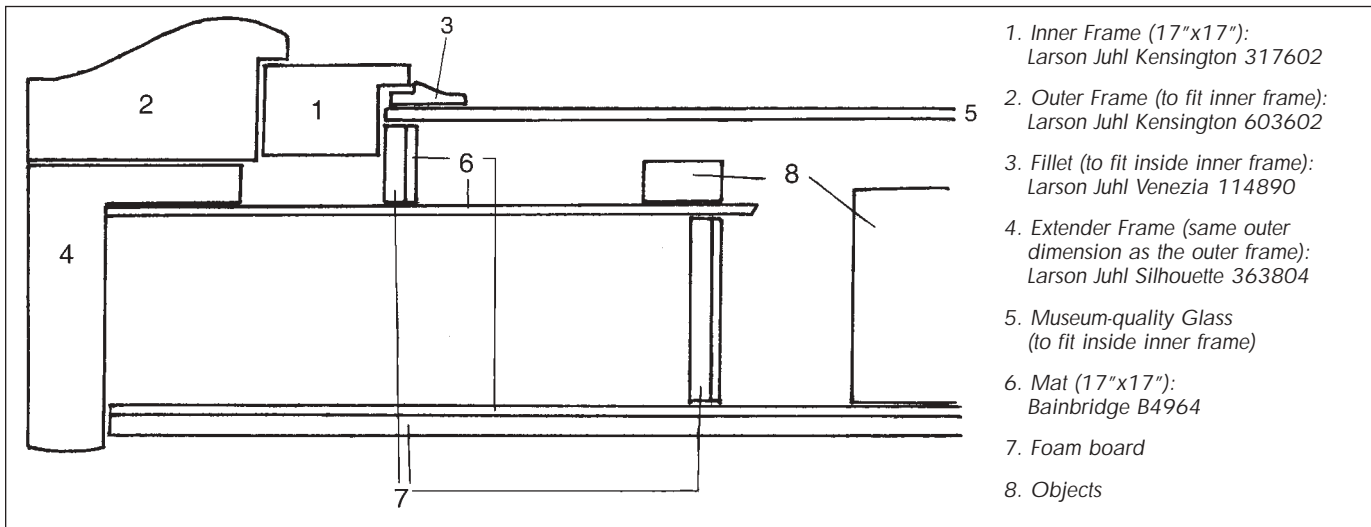
The most common shadowbox design consists of a deep moulding, glass, a mat background to mount the object to, and mat strips to line the inside rabbet of the moulding. This type of design is more basic than the framing used on many inexpensive reproduction prints—at least those designs generally include mat borders and even a fillet!

The objects consumers bring to you for framing are often among some of their most treasured belongings. Your goal should be to create frame designs as special as the object itself.

What's more, this standard shadowbox design can

also be time consuming. To measure, cut, and install the mat strips to line up perfectly isn't a quick process. This creates a situation where you'll need to charge a premium price for a design that looks less than "premium." Try to figure out alternate methods for creating shadowboxes that look great but are less labor-intensive.

Many consumers will pay a premium price to have their objects framed, but they expect something special. People who complain about price may simply be telling you they don't see the value in spending the quoted amount on the design you have shown them. The shadowbox design featured here is easy to construct and fea-



tures upgrades that make it look special. However, no part of it was difficult or time consuming. A design like this can provide your customers with a one of a kind look that justifies its higher price. Getting the looks without the effort helps your profitability.

The Project

Objects: (A clamp, oil can, trowel, carpenter's ruler, and bobber.) I purchased these objects at antique and collectible shops. Let's assume a customer brings the objects into a frame shop wondering if they can be framed. After saying yes, the framer shows the customer several shadowbox examples on display. He or she also shows the customer photos of objects that have been framed for other customers. These pictures are in an idea scrapbook on the design counter. The customer mentions these objects belonged to her father and they bring back special memories every time she sees them.

Room Decor: The customer tells the framer this will be displayed in her living room. The room is elegant yet comfortable. The walls and carpet are off-white. All upholstery and drapes are neutrals. Aside from the art, the only color in the room comes from sage green pillows. Her end tables have antique brass legs and glass tops. A walnut burl desk and walnut bookcase completes the furnishings. The artwork that hangs in the room is all in gold frames.

Frame Design Philosophy: The framer's goal is to create a frame that best suits the objects while at the same time seeking a design that will look good in the room where the completed piece will be displayed.

The Solution:

The framer begins by complementing the objects. He or

she mentions to the customer that from her description of the decor, it seems the objects here are more casual and masculine than other furnishings in the room and asks if he is correct. She agrees it is true but these objects are special and she wants them in that prominent room. The framer explains that a gold frame (like the others in the room) would be rather formal for the objects and also may be too bright in color compared to the subdued coloring of the objects.

The framer remembers the customer mentioning the walnut burl desk and suggests a frame to coordinate with that. Upon seeing a sample, the customer agrees it is similar to the desk but thinks it is too casual for her room.

Providing suitable frame designs for your customers often involves compromise. While maintaining the integrity of his concept, the framer must satisfy the customer. He or she pulls out an antique gold fillet and inserts it into the lip of the burl frame. The framer then tells the customer this fillet can be used to dress up the overall look of the design and help it tie to the other frames, as well as the desk. She likes that idea.

It's common to choose mat colors before mouldings. However, in a case such as this (where the objects don't relate in style to the room's décor), it may be helpful to reverse the process. The frame selected is a shallow moulding so depth must be created to accommodate the objects. After studying the side of the burl profile, the framer sees it is black. Then he or she looks for a black frame that will serve as an extender and finds a float frame will provide the perfect solution (see Figure 1).

With the frame selection finalized, the framer returns to selecting the mat design and brings out some light neutrals. Both the framer and customer agree they

don't look right. Recalling her sage green pillows, the framer and pulls a gray-green fabric mat for the customer to see. This darker color sets off the objects better and has a decidedly more masculine flair. She is pleased.

The way objects are arranged within a shadowbox is as important as the mouldings or mats you use to frame them. When objects are "too perfectly" aligned in a row, they appear static and unnatural. It's more pleasing to see the objects staggered, overlapped, or even on different levels. Be creative. (Any items of value should be mounted in ways that are reversible. In this case, each item can be attached with thread or plastic clip holders, like Mighty Mounts.)

This framer likes to think outside the box when planning the arrangement. In this case the carpenter's ruler was unfolded and used as a decorative border around the mat opening, rather than being just another one of the tools in the box. This ruler border locks the viewer's eye into a specific space for the remaining objects. The framer then suggests various configurations for the remaining tools until he comes up with one his customer is happy with.

To complete the design, glazing will be placed over the objects. This will prevent dust from collecting on them and keep people from touching them. The framer tells the customer of the different glazing options and recommends a conservation-grade glass that will prevent fading, both of the painted objects and also the fabric they are mounted on. ■