

Decorative Framing—



Photo 1: An inner and outer frame combine to give this piece the "space" it needs without letting it get lost in a field of white.



Photo 2: No attempt was made to repair this piece, only to frame it attractively.

When once in a lifetime opportunities present themselves, you don't let them pass by. Most of the time the job of the picture framer is mundane. Filled with many repetitive tasks, the framer lets his days go by with little excitement. Every once in a while, however, a special project comes up and the framer becomes artist allowing his imagination to run wild. It is even more rare when called upon to do something that will distinguish the professional life. So it was first for my father, then for me.

MISSPLACED
ARTWORKS LEAD
TO A NEW FRAMING
PROJECT.

Seven years ago my father was given the opportunity to frame a number of drawings by the internationally known artist Edna

Hibel for the Hibel Museum of Art in Palm Beach. My father was honored and spurred to do his best work knowing that his craftsmanship as a framer would be on display long after he was gone. He looked upon this challenge as an opportunity to create a legacy and he joyously found the work to be richly rewarding.

Recently, when looking through the print drawers in the shop, I came across a package labeled Hibel Museum of Art. Curious, I opened it and found six drawings that I could only assume my father was to have framed. Inquiry proved that to be correct and I was asked to pick up the ball.

Framing for a museum presents problems that aren't always the same as framing for individuals. While the concept of enhancing the artwork remains the same, the surrounding furnishings are

Museum Style

by Stuart M. Altschuler



Photo 3: Contrast holds this frame design and artwork together.

not taken into account. The design and aesthetic of each piece must appeal to a broader range of consumer. Neutrality is the keyword. To my way of thinking herein lies the challenge. How do I, as creative custom picture framer, come up with a design worthy of inclusion in a museum while not detracting from the artwork? The answer for me comes in the phrase “understated elegance.”

For this project, and any other where neutrality is important, gold is the best choice. Gold frames with white mats would be the obvious but boring choice. So, in each case, I chose to add to that a little visual interest using a subtle element that would complement the piece.

We as framers are called upon to make decisions regarding archival or preservation framing techniques every day. Our customers bring us their treasures and entrust them to our best judgment when it comes to materials and process. This responsibility is met, in almost all cases, with only the slightest of fear. After all,

this is what we do; and have been doing for years. We have our own experience as well as those of our peers, as published on these and other pages, to draw upon for guidance. However, on a project of this nature, I decided to check with others about what to do. This particular museum, I learned, has certain guidelines. Rather than meet them, I chose to exceed them.

Of course, only the top-line acid-free 100% rag mat-board was used. The same product was used for backer boards. Window mats were attached to backings with acid-free framers tape. Inert plastic photo-corner style pieces were used to hold the artwork in place. The frames themselves were lined with a museum quality acid-free barrier tape so that there would be no contact with the wood. Finally, acid-free dust jackets were used. These materials added somewhat to the cost of the job, but not significantly so. Also, no great amount of additional time was required.

The first piece (shown in photo 1), a charcoal on silk, needed breathing room. Only with plenty of space surrounding the image would its best be seen. Still, the piece needed a finished edge to define it. Further, the museum requested that this piece be framed without glass. My solution, as seen in the accompanying photo, takes advantage of two similar frames. To attach the inner frame to the matboard (which is laminated to acid-free foam core to add rigidity) I positioned the inner frame in place on the back of the matboard before inserting the artwork. Then I made a small pencil mark centered on

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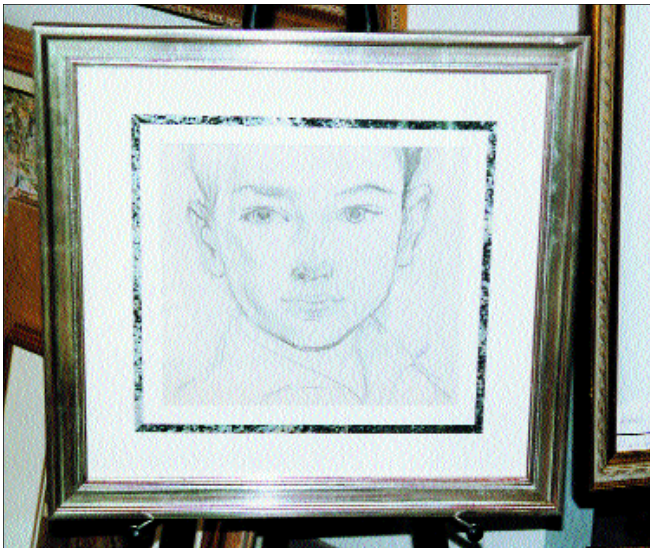


Photo 4: Another soft treatment for a portrait.



Photo 5: Simplicity prevailed for this frame design.

each rail at the inner edge of the frame and, after removing the frame, one 6 x 1/2" screw just to the outside of the pencil marks. Once the screws pierced the face of the matboard, it was easy to align the now filled frame and finish driving the screws to securely attach it. For this piece, no barrier paper was needed to cover the wood of the outer frame as there was no possi-

ble contact with the artwork. The second piece was a pencil drawing done on a paper with a pinkish tinge. A facial portrait of a young woman, it needed a delicate treatment. I think that among the most elegant of all framing is traditional gold. In this case I chose to incorporate a 23k gilt mat bevel edge. Gold is available in many different shades and I searched and found a shade that was more pink than red. Not wanting to further deepen the color, the gold is laid over a yellow base rather than rouge base. (The technique is as described in my article in the August PFM.) To continue with the

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pink motif, I selected a gold frame that had pink overtones. The molding was ornate and frilly befitting the young woman of the portrait.

The third piece (photo 2) was torn. It was an oil painting done on some sort of tracing paper. It was probably at least 60 years old. No repair was done and the piece was put under glass to prevent any further deterioration. The frame choice was a 22k water gilt swan-shaped molding. A double mat was used. The cuff of the under mat was custom made using Crescent Essential Accents. Four strips were backed with a transfer adhesive film cut to width and approximate length and pressed onto the mat. The corners of the pressed-on Essential Accents were then mitered using an X-ACTO™ knife and a straight edge.

The fourth piece (photo 3) was a quick line sketch of a woman with an instrument. I am a great advocate of defining the image and one of the ways that I do that is with contrast. If there is no clear delineation between artwork and

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framing, the eye is confused and not sure where to focus. Simple pencil sketches are frequently lost when matted using a white that appears to blend into the paper of the sketch. Either a black bevel edge or a double mat of white over black would have been sufficient to define the limits of the image, however, those treatments are nothing if not overdone. Fortunately, matboard manufacturers have recently released acid-free boards with a crackle finish. I chose a black crackle with a gold vein for the undermat on this lovely piece. All who have seen it comment that it immediately draws the eye to the image.

There is no greater compliment.

Another black and white, a pencil drawing of a young boy, similar to the previous piece, required the same type of treatment (shown in photo 4). Here I chose to use a black paper which I swirled with gold and silver as an accent atop the mat. Once again, it serves to draw the eye inward toward the art. The paper was attached with a transfer adhesive and mitered in the corners. The frame chosen here was 23k white gold water gilded. In all cases, the moldings were gilt prior to being chopped and joined so there are mitered corners on all.

Finally, the last piece (photo 5). Was I out of ideas? Well, not really. But, this piece, a double facial portrait, was done on paper that was toned by the artist. There was a clear edge. Simplicity prevailed and I used a plain white mat with a gold frame. The molding provided some interest as it had a rope edge.

After completing the six pieces, I paused and looked at the results. Surprisingly, it is only after I have completed a job that I ever really look at it as a whole. Up until that point I'm too involved. Here, I was pleased to find that my original anxieties were unrealized and the pieces would do me proud. The only thing left to do was sign and date the dust jackets giving me the opportunity to be remembered as a true craftsman. ■