

There Is More Than One Way...

by Greg Perkins, CPF

Years ago, as a novice framer, when one of my frame designs came out especially well, I'd offer the same type of design over and over again to other customers who brought in identical, or similar, prints. My eyes were opened when I attended a convention and viewed a print framing competition, which featured about 100 of the same print on display, all framed differently. Some of the designs featured the same color scheme, and a few had the same moulding, but essentially all the designs were one-of-a-kind.

Perhaps what surprised me the most, at that stage in my career, was the difference in proportion from the smallest piece to the largest. It was interesting to see how each framer inter-

preted the art. In some cases, I had to wonder what in the world were they thinking? But, for the majority of them, I could see the reasoning behind the design. I suddenly realized that many diverse options worked well with a single piece of art.

As framers, we know it is important to enhance the art that we are framing. However, if we understand that we can achieve that goal many different ways, then we increase the options. Remember that the same piece of art can look just as wonderful, and totally different, in several different framing designs.

Taking into consideration the room where the artwork will hang can create even greater results for your customer. I am not suggesting that your mats match the sofa, or you choose mouldings to coordinate with



Design #1—This frame design has a simplicity about it that responds to the peasant style of the art, a Van Gogh image. The mellow, aged finishes of both the frame and fillets have the appearance of being time-weathered, corresponding with the yellowed coloring of the art. A double mat with a fillet between the two layers provides added definition next to the art. Details make a difference, too. A reverse bevel cut on the inner mat eliminates the bright white bevel, which would distract from the muted colors in the art. This design would work well in a room decorated in a Country or Traditional style.



Design #2—Even though it's a simple country scene, this image by Van Gogh has become a classic. This frame design, with ornamentation on the moulding, is more classical and would work well in a formal setting. I intentionally chose a narrow frame for a lighter look. Slightly lighter mats remain true to the color scheme of the art, but also are closer to the mat colors we have seen on historical art. The generous mat borders make up for the narrow moulding, giving the small art more presence. The bottom-weighted mat not only enhances the balance within the framing, but would work well in a room with a high ceiling.



Design #3—Of these three designs, this one has a more Eclectic look. Mixing the rusticity of the liner frame with the aged elegance of the outer frame and the fillet inside the liner creates a look that could hang in many room settings. The absence of a mat also brings a different quality to the art; the print takes on the look of an oil painting. This would also be a great way to create impact when the wall space was limited. By switching the liner to a black silk, you could place this in a more formal setting.

the woodwork or end tables. Just keep in mind the overall decor of the room. I also believe it is important to incorporate your customer's personal taste, while still offering suggestions based on your design expertise.

Most framers have standard questions they ask their customers about the room where the framed art will hang. These generally include:

- What is the color scheme?
- What is the wall color?
- What is the style?

Additional questions you could ask are:

- What is the size of the room?
- How high is the ceiling?
- What is the scale of the furniture?
- What actual wall space is available for this piece?
- Are there other framed pieces in the room? If so, how are they framed?

It is better to ask too many questions rather than not getting the necessary information to help create the perfect designs for your customers. When I was in retail framing, I rarely had a customer get impatient with my questions. Most were impressed with my level of interest and concern. If I felt I still needed more, here are some questions I'd ask:

- Would you consider the overall look of the room to be light or dark?
- Do different elements in the room show a strong, or minimal, degree of contrast with each other?
- Is the wall that this will hang on prominent or more inconspicuous?
- Will the piece be seen mostly straight on, or from the side?

Once you have all the facts, you can put together the smartest design possible to enhance the art, both on its own and the way it looks in your customer's room. Let's take a closer look to better understand why each of these questions is so important.

Color Scheme? The goal of a frame design should be to enhance the art, not necessarily just to match the colors within a room. To truly make the art look its best in the room where it will hang, you also want to avoid clashing with the color scheme. By knowing all of the colors in the room, a framer can avoid inappropriate options.

Wall Color? In general, framed art shouldn't blend into its surroundings. However, take note that sometimes all of the colors in the art will "pop" out on their own even when the mat and moulding do blend with the wall. Knowing the wall color is crucial to creating a frame design that provides the best look for each individual piece of art.

Room Style? Today many people mix styles to create unique home environments. However, there are rooms where

a particular style is maintained and your customer may have that expectation for the framed art, too. Even in those cases when a person says they have an Eclectic mix, don't assume anything goes. Their mix may be mostly Mission and Traditional, while another Eclectic room is filled with Mid-Century Modern and Neo-Classical furnishings. In some cases, it is a good idea to stray away from the predicted style, but you should still find out the specifics to make best choices.

Room Size? Any given piece of art can be framed to different proportions. In order to maintain a sense of balance between the framed art and the room, you should be sensitive to the room size. Use wider mat borders and wider mouldings when the same art will hang in a larger space than you would for a smaller room.

Ceiling Height? If you are helping your customer choose art, you can select a vertical piece or suggest hanging one piece over another to help fill some of the height in a room with high ceilings. If you don't have that option, consider bottom-weighting or elongating the mat to create a vertical format to establish a better relationship between the art and the wall space.

Furniture Scale? The scale of individual furnishings is also good to know. If framed art will hang over a petite desk with narrow legs, large scale framing may be inappropriate. Using the same logic, too narrow a mat and moulding may create a design that is looks insignificant in a room with larger scale furniture.

Wall Space? This may seem the same as room size, but it is different. For example, the piece of art you are framing may have been chosen to hang on a three-foot wall space between windows in a room that is 20'x30'. In order to give it presence in the room, you may forego the mat to limit overall size, but use a substantial moulding to make it impressive. If the same piece of art were going over a dresser in a 12'x14' room on a five-foot long wall space between a door and a corner, a wider mat and average width moulding may be a great solution.

Other Framing in the Room? If there are three pieces of art in the room and your customer tells you they all have mahogany frames, you are likely dealing with a person who believes this fourth piece should also have a mahogany frame. If they tell you one of the pieces is in gold, one in black, and the other in mahogany, you know you are working with someone who accepts variety.

Is the Room Light or Dark? When a customer tells you the room is red, that doesn't tell you if it is light or dark. First, the red itself could go either way. Secondly, even a room

painted dark red could look light and airy if all the carpet, furniture, and drapes are light. If indeed the room is dark, too light a frame design may call too much attention to that one piece. And you would also want to avoid too dark a frame design that wouldn't show up in the dark room.

Is there Strong or Minimal Contrast? Imagine a room with white walls and black leather furniture. That is high contrast. A room with pale blue walls and pale yellow furniture is low contrast. To introduce strong contrast into a soft room can be quite jarring. To use a low contrast frame design in a bold room may look weak.

Prominent or Inconspicuous Wall? This is especially useful to know when helping a person with several pieces who has a set budget in mind. One approach may be to splurge a bit on the most prominent

piece where it will provide more impact, and keep the other pieces for other areas simple.

Mostly Straight or Side Views? Keep in mind whether the piece will be viewed most often straight on, or from the side. For instance, if the piece is intended for a hall or stairway, this may most often be viewed from the side. Utilizing a design where the frame moulding is flush to the wall will work best.

As you can see, there are many things to consider when choosing frame designs to fit into your customers' homes. It is best to work with the environment where the art will hang rather than to have a great looking framed piece that looks beautiful in your store and horrific in the room where it will live for years to come.

I equate it to when I shop for clothes. Just because clothes look great on the trim physique of the

mannequin doesn't mean they will look good on me! Unless I hold my breath for the whole day, my shape or lack thereof, may not do justice to the clothes. Even if I could manage to hold it in for the day, my eventual purple coloring may clash with the colors of the clothes I purchased to enhance my natural skin tones. Pay attention to your customer's circumstances and work towards the goal of creating designs that enhance both the art and the home. ■

Greg Perkins, CPF has spent 29 years in the framing industry. He developed a successful retail framing business, specializing in creative frame design. Greg is now responsible for Larson-Juhl's trade show booths and frame designs.

