

Frame Design

by Tim Franer, CPF, CMG

Form & Function

Irregular Edges

How do you design and create a well-balanced look when working with artwork that has an irregular shape? When those edges of the artwork are important to form and composition elements? And

when the artwork is of collector's value and cannot be cut down or altered to create equal borders on all sides?

Shown here is an example of an etching that is off-center on the paper it was printed on. To create a well-balanced design, we will need to consider several design options.

The first and foremost goal is to create a good frame design. What is a good frame design? It is when all elements of the framing components enhance and complement the subject matter at its best.

I begin designing by considering the characteristics of the artwork: The subject... what does it "say" and do? What type of medium is it? What are the colors? What type of substrate is it created on? Does this piece have anything unusual to focus on? How can we frame to enhance but keep it simple?

In viewing this etching, I wanted to show the complete piece of artwork without covering the deckled edges. This technique was achieved by float mounting the artwork instead of placing a mat on top of the image.

One problem with floating this etching was that its irregular edges would be even more pronounced. I offset the unevenness challenge in a later step.

The Matting

What type, color, proportions? The artwork is in a sepia tone on white textured rag paper. I selected the beige, subtly textured mat with a weave-like finish to complement the rag paper finish and deckled edge of the artwork. With the subject etched in sepia tones, the complementary-colored, beige outer mat was selected to enhance the image.



In order to create a strong focal point, a dark brown mat was used for the immediate background around the etching. I chose to make $\frac{5}{8}$ " of the mat visible all around. The etching was centered on top of that mat. A wide matting proportion was selected to help create a stronger focal point with a $\frac{1}{2}$ " spacer between the outer and back mat to add depth and dimension.

The Unevenness Challenge

To help offset the uneven, irregular edges of the image, the element of line was used. Normally, I would draw a straight line around the outer opening for a finished, customized look. But in this case, I used a sepia tone pastel pencil



The etching was float mounted onto a dark brown matting.



The lines drawn on the top mat were used to enhance the artwork.

instead of ink. In applying the pastel line, I used a very “loose” technique to help offset the irregularity of the off-center etching. When I reached the end of each corner, or cross point, I extended the pastel line by tapering off each end loosely. This line added another dimension to help create the objective—a balanced look.

The Frame

A simple dark sepia tone cap moulding was selected for simplicity and unity. In viewing the finished piece, note that your eye is directed in toward the subject. From there, you begin to review the other components that create visual support for a this balanced design for an irregular image. ■

Tim Franer, CPF, CMG, has spent more than 30 years in the art and custom framing industry. Known for his creative design and skilled craftsmanship, Tim is a former gallery owner and is currently a chairholder with the Color Marketing Group. He is currently development, design, and educational consultant for Nielsen Bainbridge.

