

Frame Design

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Form & Function

Shadowboxes: Tips for Layout

Have you ever heard the question, “What is the perfect gift for someone who has everything?” When it comes to picture framing, shadowbox framing is perhaps the most versatile type of service we can offer to our customers today. It can be an opportunity to show creative

versatility in layout, design, and presentation. With the example shown here, I will discuss the various elements that help to create what a shadowbox should convey in layout, design, style, and color to capture the versatility of this type of framing.

Design Layout

In reviewing the items that you wish to frame, it is important to have an overall theme and a focal point in the layout. When viewing your completed shadowbox, one should be able to view it without wondering what is being presented; you don't want a hodgepodge of confusion. Present less than more to keep it simple. With this format, your focal point can be balanced and well-presented.

In the example here, I have framed various photographs, objects, and unique items that are sentimental to the customer. The overall theme in this example is the family photos and gun-related items that family members remember most when talking about Thomas Turner Criswell—the man who is the subject of this shadowbox.

Once the items were presented, a layout was needed. What type of format size or shape should one use in a layout? In some instances, I find that vertical formats work very well because they occupy less space. Also, as you view the layout your eye will flow in a natural left to right direc-

tion where each item is laid out starting at the top moving in a “Z” movement towards the bottom of the frame. Since the main focal point was to be



the large headshot photo of Criswell, I decided to place it at the top of the layout and design the balance of the items to complement that main subject.

Inside the Shadowbox

In order to draw attention to each item in the frame, I paid careful attention to the interplay of each object to be housed in the shadowbox. To begin, each individual photograph was reproduced from its original for preservation purposes. This enabled me to enlarge, mount, and cut the reproductions without harm to the original. (A pocket was designed on the back of the frame where the originals were placed in a preservation sleeve.)

The large photo at the top of the layout was dry mounted onto a matboard and then cut out around the outer edges. It was attached to a fabric-covered 1/2" foamboard spacer that was then cut at an angle. The spacing and angle was designed to add dimension and simulate a floating effect. The full-length image of Criswell with his hat was also mounted onto matboard and attached to a foamboard spacer.

The photograph showing a group of people, as well as the bullet mounting were mounted on top of a textured matboard, then placed on top of a black foamboard with a reverse bevel. That reverse bevel was used to accent the photo by projecting it out toward the viewer—versus housing the subject in a window mat.

The plaque bearing the subject's name was created by printing onto an antiqued paper, then mounting that onto an 8-ply black ragboard with a reverse cut angle. Those components were then glued to a 3/8" thick suede board of a darker color. The suede board, which extended beyond the edges of the plaque, was cut with a reverse bevel so the white inner edge would not show against the dark fabric background.

The collection of four bullets was mounted in the same fashion as the photograph of the group of people was mounted. The difference was I chose a different



A black foamboard with a reverse bevel, along with a textured matboard, was used to back this vintage photo image.



These bullets were also mounted onto a black reverse bevel board. This served to make the bullets draw attention in the overall design.



As was done for the large headshot photograph, this image was mounted to an angled foamboard spacer.

matboard than that which I used for the photograph.

The gun and leather holster were mounted with wire.

The depth inside this shadowbox is 2" from inside the front edge to the backing board. To visually support this depth, the objects were mounted on top of a brownish gold suede matboard, then placed on top of a backing that had been cut 1" larger along all four sides. This 1" black edge was used to further add contrast around the entire layout.

The gun and holster were large compared to the other objects in the design, and to offset their dominance I mounted them onto a suede color that blends well. In viewing the black and white photos you can see how they are projected in contrast to the darker suede background that helps support the focal point. All the objects were mounted in a way that would call attention to creative mounting, dimension, style, color, texture, and finish without competing with the main focal point.



Corner Detail—The rustic style of the frame chosen complemented the items being housed in the shadowbox.

The Frame

A frame should have enough depth and width to display whatever you are housing, and it should provide adequate spacing or breathing room for each object. It's important for the frame to also reflect the style and period of the items being housed. Also, its width, depth, and finish should balance and complement the overall presentation. The frame in our example is a 2" deep distressed hand-waxed finish with a silver leaf front edge panel. The finish works well with the colors of the other framing components. Also, the frame strength and durability were adequate to support the shadowbox items.

The Finished Shadowbox

I completed this design by choosing anti-reflective, UV-filtering glass. What we have achieved is creating a shadowbox that has a theme and simple design using colors, textures, finishes, dimension, direction, breathing room, and preservation. These are the winning elements that put the finishing touches on the perfect gift for "someone who has everything." ■

For more than 30 years **Tim Franer, CPF**, has framed artwork for heads of state, corporations, galleries, and fine homes across the globe. Known for his creative design and skilled craftsmanship, Tim consults with industry leaders to define color and design, and is a speaker and educator on art, design, and framing. Tim is an instructor of seminars and workshops throughout North America, Europe, South America, Australia, and New Zealand. Tim is currently development, design, and educational consultant to Nielsen Bainbridge, as well as consultant to The Fletcher-Terry Co. and Roma Moulding. He is a regular contributor to *PFM* in "The Mat Doctors" and "Frame Design" columns.

