

Object Box Planning

by Stuart M. Altschuler, CPF, GCF



This creative framing design was inspired by Indonesian puppets brought in by a client.

Many of the projects I have done that have appeared on these pages are very complex. They frequently include oddly shaped frames and mats—sometimes requiring materials that are not readily available from picture framing suppliers. In order to make the creation of these special pieces easier, I follow a standard planning procedure:

1. Create a list of materials
2. Determine the time involved (labor charge)
3. Total to determine the price

Indonesian Puppet Frame

Recently, I was asked to frame a pair of Indonesian puppets. They were approximately 14" wide, 4" deep, and 14" tall. The design led us to a hexagonal box with a crown. The client asked about using stained glass in the crown, lighting it, and being able to revolve the box. Also, the client needed to be able to open the box so that the puppets could be removed.

Making a hexagonal box is fairly easy. Simply find a nice moulding, turn it on its side, and chop and join a six-sided frame. That frame becomes the base with the rabbet on the top inside edge.

A second identical frame turned so that the rabbet is on the bottom inside edge becomes the top. The sides of the case can be either seamed glass or acrylic or bent acrylic. In my opinion, all frame shops should have a plastic line bender that allows you to easily heat and bend plastic. (Cost approximately \$35.)

The crown can be made in similar fashion. The problems that arose during the planning of this project were opening the box and attaching the crown moulding to the top frame. The crown moulding attachment was easily solved by adding a support block on the inside edges of the top frame.

However, the hinging proved much trickier. In order to hinge the piece, a frame (similar to a

door frame) would have to go around the opening door. This would require ripping the moulding that we were using lengthwise. The moulding chosen had two obvious lines in which to hide the rip cut but neither provided us the space to attach a hinge.

So, the idea of using a door to be able to remove the puppets was abandoned. The solution turned out to be a v-groove. After a sheet

of mat board was cut for the base, a hexagonal v-groove was cut into the board but not reattached. Instead, the inner portion of the "v" was precisely mounted to a piece of foam board sized to fit the base. This was held into place with shelf supports. Remove the shelf supports and the base is easily removable.

Once again, the pricing problem is the same as above. Create a list of materials, include labor (don't be shy), and total to get to the price.

Asian Inspiration

Another challenging item that I was asked to frame was a Japanese kimono with all of its accoutrements. When fully opened, the kimono measured 56" x 66". The piece has great sentimental value and should be framed using preservation techniques.

Not knowing much about this type of clothing, I questioned how the piece could be displayed to its best advantage. I learned that the obi (the sash) is usually tied in an elaborate knot at the back of the kimono. Therefore, it would be advantageous to be able to view all sides of the piece.

The client wished to give this piece to her daughter and had a budget of approximately \$750. My first reaction was that the project would not be possible given the size of the item and the client's budgetary constraints.

Further thought yielded a different result. What about making a display case rather than a frame? I felt that we just might be able to achieve that while sticking to the budget. The now happy client

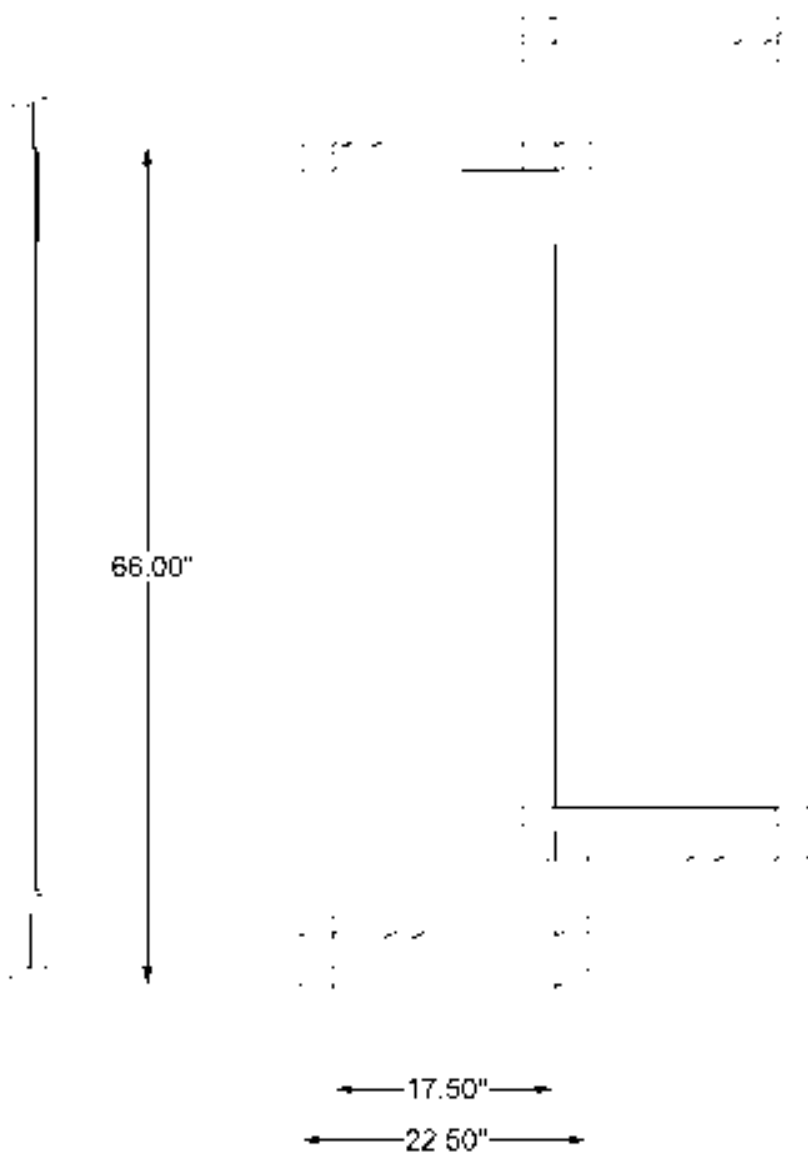


Figure 1: A sketch of the planned object box aids in visualizing the finished product.

asked for more information and a price quote.

Where did I go from there? Projects like this should be fun and challenging for the framer. You are given an opportunity to be creative and extravagant. The key to success on these projects is to minimize the frustration and ensure a profit. In order to prevent the frustration, it is mandatory that you plan exactly what you are going to do before you begin. Once you have determined what you will do, you can source and cost materials and estimate the time it will take to complete.

To determine what size case would be right for the kimono, I thought about the type of display that would be used. My first thought was to look for some kind of mannequin. Where? In the old days, (pre-Internet) the yellow pages was the best source that you could have. Now, I fire up the computer and go online. My search engine turned up over 50 sources for mannequins and I began looking at web pages.

Prices seemed high and the look was not what I had in mind. The most economical display mechanism turned out to be an adjustable metal dress form that was depicted on the home page of one of the mannequin suppliers.

With the rough dimensions of the dress form, I could begin to sketch a layout of what we would do (see Figure 1). The sketch allowed me to estimate the time and materials necessary for this job.

The four sides of the case would be made of UV-filtering acrylic that went into a dado

(groove) in each of the side stiles. Base and top pieces (rails), also dadoed to accept the acrylic, would complete the case. The case had to be able to be opened, which necessitated a hinge handle and catch. Finally, self-leveling casters would be added to allow the case to be repositioned easily.

This led me to the following list of materials that made it easy to price the job.

- Mannequin
- UV-filtering acrylic
- Lumber (Poplar)
- Hardware
- Finishing

I then calculated the cost of my labor to construct the case and install the piece.

It is important to note that in projects like this, you will often have a couple of calls and usually two visits with the client before a decision is made. I don't charge for my design time and don't provide clients with sketches. Rather, if the project is approved, a design fee is incorporated into the total price as part of my labor costs.

This allows me to give an estimate on a job without obligation. Note that I say estimate, *not quote*. A price quote is an offer to do the specified job for that amount, while an estimate is just that—a close approximation of what the final charges will be. This is an important clarification to make to the client as changes (usually requested by the client) frequently arise during the construction.

Now it was time to get back to the client. I called her with the news that we would be able to do the project at an estimated \$700 to

\$750. This was acceptable and the job was done. During the job, the client asked about the possibility of lighting the case which we were able to do for an additional \$90.

Every framer wants to create pieces that are worthy of a *PFM* cover, but frequently is unaware of the proper approach. Using the methods described above, you'll find even the most complex jobs are much easier to handle than you had originally thought. ■

Stuart M. Altschuler is the director and lead educator for Prestige Framing Academy located in Danvers, Massachusetts. He has been in the picture framing and art gallery business for over 30 years.