

# Oh Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel!

by Stuart M. Altschuler



*The number of dreidels coincided with the eight days of the holiday. This enabled the display itself to look like a menorah, the candelabra used to light the Hanukkah candles. The ninth candle, the Shamas, is used to light all the others. Since the dreidels could be removed, the correct number could be displayed each night. Here, six of the nine are shown.*



*The dreidels sit in the holes cut into the top of piece. This served the purpose of removability and also gave the option to change the decorative order of the dreidels.*

Recently, while teaching an advanced creative design course, I took part in a discussion about the scope of our work as picture framers. I asked the participants what, beyond the traditional framing, do we do? Do we build display cases? If not, then when are the object or shadow boxes we build considered display cases? The most frequent answer was, “We do whatever we can get paid to do, whether it’s a shadow box, display case, or traditional frame!”

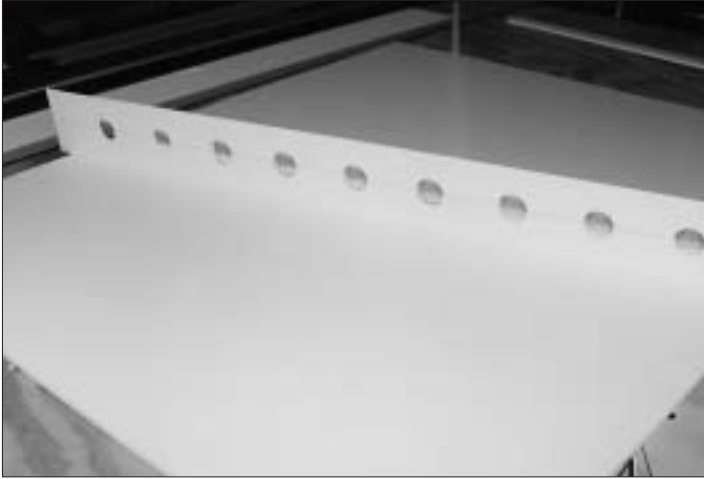
I am definitely an advocate of doing diverse projects for clients: it sets a shop apart from the others in the area. It also brings you opportunities to excel with what I call “challenging projects.”

Every framer has a customer (or two) who comes into the shop with a bag of items, dumps them down on the counter, and says, “Frame these!” The customer continues, of course, by asking you to do it beautifully, quickly and cheaply. So it was that I came to frame a collection of exquisite, ornate dreidels.

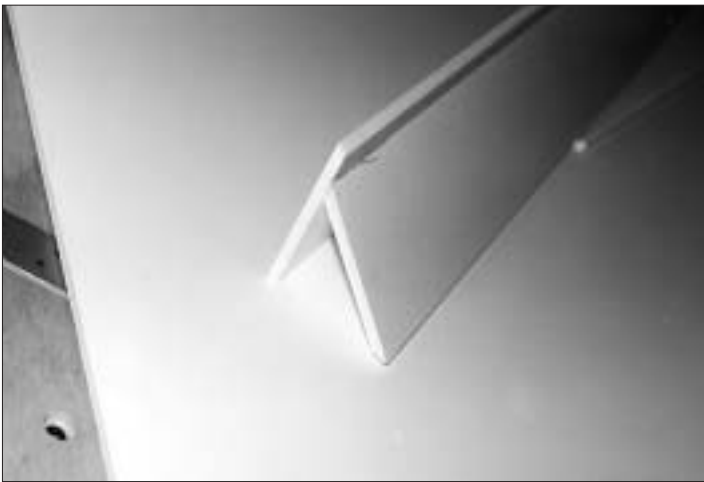
Dreidels are the spinning top toys that are customarily used to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. The tops have four sides, each with a different Hebrew letter standing for the phrase “A great miracle happened there,” which refers to the miracle that the holiday celebrates (the oil in the last lamp in the synagogue, which had enough oil for only one night, burned instead for eight days).

Many aspects of the project affected its design, particularly the large number of dreidels in the collection. In discussion with the client, we decided that not all would be used. In addi-

# Dreidel



Holes 1" in diameter were centered front to back on a 3" wide shelf. The nine holes were also spaced evenly across the 30" board.



The support boards, like to the top shelf, were made from Gatorfoam and then hot glued together.



The entire shelf assembly was covered with white velvet attached with fabric adhesive.

tion, the ones that were included had to be removable so that they could be spun at holiday time.

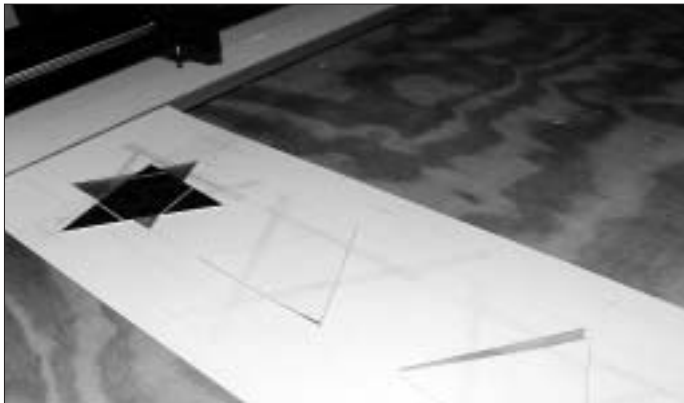
Another consideration was aesthetics: I came up the idea to include nine dreidels and display them in the shape of the menorah (a type of candelabra) used for the holiday. Given that the dreidels were to be removable, the display case could even reflect the number of candles required during each of the eight days of the celebration.

With the design concept settled, let's look at the specifics. This is a shadow box where the inside rabbet is visible. ATG tape was used to secure matboard to the insides of the frame, easily finishing the rabbet. Dark blue suede matboard was chosen to provide a rich background for the pieces. Because the backing has to support the assembly that holds the dreidels, a strong material was needed. Gatorfoam® provided the structural integrity needed without extra thickness. (If on another project you needed something stronger, plywood could be used.) The matboard was mounted to the backing using ATG 969 high tack tape. The tape was used liberally.

I ordinarily use black core mats in this type of project because the visible edges are less obtrusive than those on a white core. However, for this project I wanted to incorporate the Star of David as a v-groove to help focus the viewer's eye. Due to the shape of the piece this was done with three small stars rather than a single large one. This also gave a sense of focus to the horizontality of the piece. While there is nothing wrong with a black core v-grooves, given that this mat was a dark color, I thought that black would be too subtle.

Cutting the Star of David v-grooves is easy. The shape is simply two interlocking triangles. Since the sides are straight, this v-groove can be

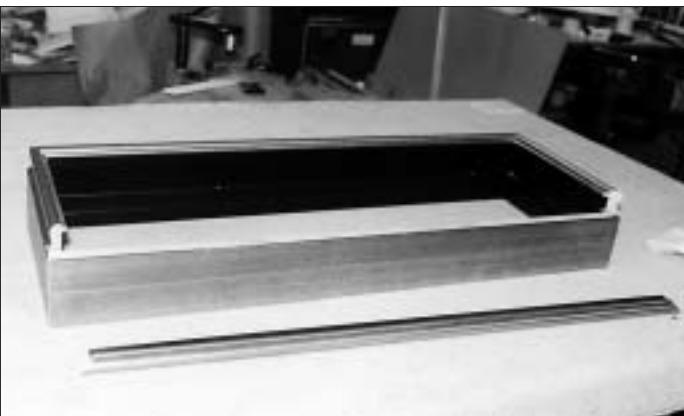
# Dreidel



Three small Stars of David were used to give a sense of focus to the horizontality of the piece.



Dark blue suede was chosen to provide a rich looking background. The white bevels of the v-grooves provide contrast.



Chopping the two strainers together ensured the exact match to the shadow box. They were then underpinned and dry fitted. The top rail was designed to be removed to reach the dreidels.

cut on any mat cutter. I first laid out all of the cutting lines before making any cuts, allowing me to preview the design. I made some adjustments and then cut one triangle completely before moving on to the next. It is important to burnish your tape well when replacing the fallouts, since there are intersecting cuts.

The assembly that holds the dreidels was easy to make. I used Gatorfoam once again. The dreidels sit in holes cut into the top piece. The largest dreidel that was to be included was  $2\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter. That meant there had to be at least  $1\frac{1}{8}$ " clearance from the back of the case. I chose to position a 1" diameter hole centered front to back on a 3" wide board for each of the dreidels. The board was then cut to fit the inside of the 30" wide shadow box.

I drilled the nine holes using a forstner bit in a drill press set apart 3" on center. After the drilling was complete, I cut a support strut from scrap Gatorfoam and beveled it on both sides. This was attached to the pre-drilled piece using hot melt glue. A further piece of Gatorfoam was fitted into place as a back to this assembly. The entire subassembly was then covered with a piece of white velvet using a fabric adhesive. The subassembly was attached to the backing using screws.

As previously mentioned, removability was a key factor. To accomplish this I chose to attach the glass to one rail of the frame and allow that rail to be pulled up from the top.

To do this, I first built the frame. This shadow box was made using materials that many manufacturers now provide: an additional strainer or "extender" that adds depth to a frame moulding that also matches its finish. I chopped those together to insure that they matched exactly. I then underpinned the frames as I normally would and dry fitted them to see that the depth attachment fit.

I then took the front shadow box frame (the moulding without the extender) to the table saw and cut the top rail at a depth of almost one inch. This

# Dreidel



*The frame was build using a shadow box moulding and a matching "extender" from the same supplier. The top rail was cut to accommodate the glass and could be used as a handle.*



*The backing was placed in the back rabbet of the frame and secured using points.*



*The customer was presented with the final product so she could open the case and choose her own display order for the dreidels.*

would eventually sit back in place with glass attached and allow that glass to be removed by using the frame rail as a handle. The glass was glued to the rabbet using clear silicon. Then matboard was used to fill in the gap caused by the saw cut.

The backing was placed in the back rabbet of the frame and secured using points. The back was then finished with a piece of blue felt, since I knew the piece might be displayed where the back would be visible. (I always want the back of my work to reflect the professionalism that I demand of all my work.)

When I delivered the piece to the client, the dreidels weren't inside. This was because they merely rest in the holes and wouldn't be secure for travel. However, when she came in, I opened the case and had her place the dreidels as she wished. This showed her both the beauty of the finished piece as well as the ease in which she could open the case.

Remember that when you do a job like this you have to charge appropriately. What that means specifically is to look at how long it takes you to do each individual aspect of the project and figure the labor for that into the job. Don't forget to include time spent tracking down special hardware or fabrics for the job. Also, don't cut corners on the materials. If a luxurious fabric will look best on the project, its cost will only add a small percentage to the price, but will create a more upscale look that further justifies the total price of the framed piece.

As you can see, several technical problems were solved in order to complete this job. Each aspect had its challenges. Always look for solutions by using techniques that you already know how to do; think of what works from other areas of your framings. This will help you to successfully tackle your opportunities to excel. ■