

# Mirror, Mirror on The Wall

by Greg Perkins, CPF

People have used mirrors in their homes for years, and today they are more popular than ever. A mirror is rare because it has no inherent style or color scheme of its own. We can take advantage of that freedom and create beautiful frame designs that we may not be able to use with art. Of all the things we frame a mirror is generally one of the easiest projects, too. Mirrors are timeless and can be used in every room of the house. What more could a framer ask for?

## Design Possibilities

Sometimes framed mirrors are more about the frame than the mirror. A decorative frame can add interest on a blank wall and help balance with a piece of furniture on the other side of the room. Mirrors can also be used to reflect color from the opposite side of the room, unifying the decor.

When you talk to your customers about mirrors, be sure you understand their needs, but also help them understand the possibilities available to them. Here are some of the options I'd suggest.

**On the Wall**—Even though your customers know mirrors can hang on the wall, show your customers that they don't all have to look alike. To differentiate your example, use one of your biggest and best mouldings or try a stacked moulding combination.

**On the Floor**—It's now fashionable to set large framed mirrors on the floor. Even though the mirror still filling the same wall space it would if it were to



Photo 1: When displaying mirrors in your shop, make sure they will reflect something attractive, like a nice piece of artwork. This ornate gold frame is a beautiful choice for a mirror. Moulding is Larson-Juhl/Imperial 8611G.



Photo 2: This framed mirror is used as a tray. The frame is Larson-Juhl/Intaglio 443226. The handles were made from reverse cut pieces of Larson-Juhl/Eastlake 287615. The exposed raw miters were painted black. Kitchen cabinet handles may also work well for tray handles.

hang, it adds a bit more dimension to the room.

**Folding Screens**—Individual mirrors can be framed and hinged to become a screen. Whether the screen is a full height room divider or a smaller tabletop conversation piece, hinged mirrors create interesting reflections.

**Serving Tray**—Frame a mirror in a moulding with a flat top or side so that you can attach handles at each end. (Kitchen cabinet hardware works well for this application.) Rather than a paper backing, you may want to use a suede matboard with a black core.

**A Base for a Centerpiece**—Framed mirrors look great under floral arrangements or candles on a dining table. Pay attention to the moulding profile you choose for this purpose: a reverse profile will curve down to blend into the tabletop whereas a tall cap profile with a straight back edge will project from the table. Fill the space behind the mirror with backing boards to help support the objects that will sit on it.

**A Mirror Grouping**—Suggest a grouping of mirrors for a staircase wall, a hallway, or any room. The group will look interesting in a variety of shapes and sizes, with all different frames, especially in a traditional setting. For a more contemporary look, a grid of identical frames will look stunning.

**Bathrooms**—Many bathrooms have medicine cabinets with a mirror on the door—and often these can be framed. (Keep in mind the door has to open when choosing the moulding.) Sometimes a large mirror has been hung directly on the wall that can be framed. The goal here will be to design framing that will fit flush with the surface of the mirror. Some large baths have a long expanse of mirror over a double vanity. To customize the room, you can frame two mirrors and mount them in

## Some Clear Facts

- Mirrors, like glass, are available in different thicknesses; 1/8" and 1/4" are the most common.
- Quarter-inch thick mirrors typically produce truer reflections than eighth-inch mirrors, but that isn't always the case.
- Mirrors can be purchased with or without a bevel.
- The width of the bevel can vary on custom mirrors. Narrow bevels won't show much when the lip of the frame covers a portion of it.
- Some mirrors come with polished edges making them easier to handle. In my experience, polished edges seem to make the mirror less prone to chipping.
- Mirrors are available in acrylic, a great choice for high traffic public areas, kid's bedrooms, or places like home gyms.
- Some mirrors have painted backs to protect the silvering.
- Although most mirrors today are of the standard silver variety, there are other options like smoked glass, gold veins, or etched designs.

front of the existing mirror, above each sink.

**Creative Applications**—Think about how and where mirrors are used. Some people like to take one last look at themselves before they leave the house. A framed mirror can be hung near the door or, for a door leading to the garage, design a combination mirror/key holder by adding hooks on the frame. Another alternative is a combination mirror/bulletin board. You can frame each individually and then surround those two with one frame that unites the design.

**In Shadowboxes**—When framing objects, a mirror background will allow both sides to show. While this may be desirable for a figurine, remember that images appear in reverse in the reflection so it may not be ideal for coins or other items with writing on them.

## Merchandising Tips

It's important to let people know that you sell mirrors. When you frame a mirror (or anything else for display) your goal should be to get your customers excited. Today there are many stores where inexpensive

framed mirrors can be purchased. It's difficult for an independent retailer to compete on price and still make a profit. There are fewer stores appealing to the consumers who want a beautifully designed mirror or an unusual custom size. When you compete for that business, there are more profits to be made.

When displaying mirrors in your shop, think carefully about where you place them. You want them to be in an area where they will be visible, but pay attention to what they are reflecting. Avoid hanging a mirror where the reflection is a supply shelf in the back room, the ceiling, or in the window where it will pick up the glare of the sun. Mirrors make a better impression when they reflect something attractive.

Display a sign near a framed mirror example indicating the sizes you stock, that you can order custom sizes, and similar information. Signs are like silent sales people. In retail studies, in-store signage has been proven to increase same store sales.

Select a few creative mirror applications and create beautiful display pieces. These samples can be for sale. When you sell one, replace it with a

new sample. Use a different frame design to make it obvious it's new. When your customers see something new and different, it helps to hold their interest in your store. They will also come to realize that if you keep changing displays, you must have sold what was there before. Consumers like doing business at successful stores so display a diverse range of models and moving them around regularly.

## Handling Mirrors

Framing a mirror isn't too different, but there are some special considerations.

**Wear Gloves**—Today most mirrors have a paint coating on the back to protect the silvering. On mirrors without this finish, the oil in your skin may eventually penetrate through and show up as a dark spot on the front of the mirror.

**The Frame Lip**—Since a mirror is a reflective surface, the underside of the lip of the frame will show—not very attractive, since this portion of the frame is often unfinished or just partially finished. Color that part of the frame. Black is a universally good color since it creates the appearance of a shadow, or you can custom match the finish of the frame. Use acrylic paint, permanent markers, or stains.

**Reinforce the Frame**—Mirrors can be quite heavy; use a moulding that can support the stress. If the frame your customer wants is not as sturdy as you would like, here are two solutions. You can suggest a very narrow metal frame as a liner inside the desired frame. Metal frames support weight well and certain profiles won't even show. Another alternative is to screw metal corner plates on the back at each corner. It may be best to avoid deep, narrow mouldings since the weight of the mirror will be at the

front, away from the reinforcements. **Hanging the Mirror**—Take precautions to hang mirrors properly. If your customers will be hanging it themselves, educate them. Avoid using wire on anything that is heavy. (Let your customers know you intentionally left off the wire.) Hang the frame from hangers positioned on both sides of the frame. The hangers and the hooks must be of appropriate size to hold the weight. Wall anchors may be preferable to picture hooks. ■



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