

Framing A Large Sari

by Ira Freinle, CPF

It's... It's... It's... MAGNIFICENT!

This was our customer's open-mouthed appraisal of the just completed framing of her wedding sari.

A sari, or saree, is a wraparound form of a woman's dress that exists in various forms from the Indies to Africa with different names and styles. In fact, in the country of India alone it has different styles in different areas. The sari has been described by classical Indian writers as "the costume that covers all and yet reveals all. How can a length of cloth so simply wrapped around a woman's body add so much charm and mystery?"

This particular sari that our customer brought to us was her wedding sari. The design consisted of three different patterns executed as borders and a central pattern, with the fourth pattern at one end as the accent to hang over the wearer's back. The fabric was six yards long and 48" wide, woven in red silk and pure silver thread.

Unfortunately, we could not wrap the fabric around our customer and put her in a frame. In addition, the fabric could not be wrapped to our satisfaction in a manner that would represent a sari when being worn. Therefore, we decided to frame it as a hand draped fabric. Our designer, Berenyce Freinle,

created four different draping designs for the fabric and showed them to our customer who selected one of them. For the background, we selected a red silk fabric, slightly darker than the sari.

There were several factors that came into play when determining the dimensions of the frame. For one, the frame size could not be more than 44" wide, because that was the existing width of the silk fabric we had selected for the backing. This also meant that the sari had to be draped so its 48" width was reduced to 40" to allow ample spacing from the frame edges. A maximum length of 64" was dictated by the available space that the customer had in the place where she wished to display it (After viewing the finished piece, she decided to put it in a more prominent location.)

The silk fabric backing was mounted onto an acid free mounting board. The

sari, which had been trial pinned to a piece of acid-free foamboard, was then transferred to this board and pinned in place. The various size pleated tubes and bulk areas in the sari were filled with Dacron® fiber to keep them full and prevent collapsing. Everything was then stitched down with cotton thread as necessary to



When completed, the frame design for this sari textile measured 44" wide, 64" high, and 4" deep. The challenges this project presented was well worth the customer's reaction.

keep things in place. (Cotton thread was used to avoid damage to the sari because the cotton is softer than the silk fabric.) The pins were then removed. To make sure that gravity would not affect the draping arrangement, the piece was held up on edge and rotated so the four edges and the face were in a down position.

The design required at least a 4" deep frame to contain the depth of the pleated fabric. We chose a moulding with a muted silver finish to set off the silver threads woven in the fabric. However, while this moulding met our depth needs, the face was only 1½" wide. This was not very impressive when viewed in the context of the large frame. Because we liked the finish of the moulding, we stuck with it, and chose to add a 3" wide profile that matched the moulding.

This would extend the frame front by 3" and worked well aesthetically. However, it created an assembly problem because the 3" moulding was to go around the *base* of the deep moulding, not the top as is customary when stacking frames. Usually, the rabbit lip of the outside frame overlaps the top of the liner frame, so the exact dimension of the outside frame is not too important. In this case, since we could not put a 44" object into a 44" opening we had to have an allowance.

We elected to make the site size of the outer frame $\frac{3}{8}$ " larger than the outside dimension of the shadowbox frame. We selected the fillet that coordinates with the mouldings we had chosen to be placed on edge between the two frames to fill the allowance space after the two frames were fastened together (see photo above). The fitting allowance

In order to build a frame that would not be "lost" on this large piece, we stacked two coordinating mouldings. The matching fillet completed the design and filled in the open space (as seen here).

between the two frames was set at $\frac{3}{16}$ " per side, the thickness of the undermat part of the fillet, plus a $\frac{1}{16}$ " to allow the fillet to drop into the space.

The two frames were joined as separate frames. Then, to join the two frames together, we marked locations for four screws on the long sides and three screws on the short sides inside of the inner frame. Holes were drilled using countersink drills, so the heads of the 2" long, #8 flat-head brass wood screws would set just under the surface of the inside of the moulding.

The two frames were then screwed together, with the bottoms of both frames flush. A separator block $\frac{9}{16}$ " square and 6" long was drilled with a clearance hole for the screw and placed between the two frames to prevent warping and to keep the frames centered on each other.

The fillets, which had to be cut on edge to get the proper miter, were fitted to length. Wood glue was run on the outside of the liner frame in the joint area and the fillet was slid into place and allowed to dry.

Although we recommended acrylic glazing to the customer, they opted for glass. The 64" length was easy to cut on our glass cutter, but the machine was not large enough to cut the 44" width, so this had to be done by hand on a tabletop. We placed the frame in a leaning vertical position to insert the glass. The whole thing was then placed on a table for the next



step.

The frame had to be spacer lined to hold the glass in place, finish the inside of the moulding, and provide a resting place for the mounting board. To accomplish this, the same red silk fabric used for the background was cut into strips that were 4½" wide. These strips were then dry mounted onto white conservation matboard strips 3¾" wide. The corners of the fabric were mitered and the ends and edges were then adhered to the back of the board.

The bottom and top ends (the shorter ends) of the frame could be lined with one long piece. However, since the frame was 64" long and the fabric was only 44" wide, those sides of the frame were lined with two pieces that were carefully butted at the center of the sides. The matboard was not thick enough to provide a sufficiently deep "pocket" for the glass, so the fabric covered matboard was then hot glued to $\frac{3}{16}$ " acid-free foam-board strips. This assembly was in turn hot glued to the inside of the inner frame in tight contact with the glass. This particular moulding had an unusual rabbit depth of

$\frac{3}{8}$ ", so the $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick lining was still recessed inside the lip and was not visible to viewers.

Everything was carefully cleaned and inspected. The mounted sari was then placed into the frame construction, the mounting board secured with brads, and the back finished. We recommended the piece to be hung with cleat plates.

The customers' only comment when they inspected the finished piece in our store before delivery was to stand there with their mouths open for a few moments and then stutter, "Magnificent." ■

Ira Freinle, CPF, has been a custom picture framer for 33 years, and maintains a strong interest in quality framing. He was a founding member of the "Professional Picture Framers Guild" in 1981, and was awarded his CPF in March 1988.

