

# DESIGN FOR VINTAGE PHOTOS

BY TIM FRANER, CPF, CMG

**W**hen designing a custom frame for your customers, there's a number of factors to consider. When the item is a vintage photo of sentimental value, preservation is also an issue. The two photos presented here are examples of how to give two items the same framing treatment (to make them a set), even if one of them has an element that cannot be altered. In this case, that element was the original backing board you see behind the photo of the woman in Photo 1.

**OBJECTIVE:** Frame two original vintage photographs with focus on style, color enhancement, and overall design. In viewing the completed framed photograph, your focal point should be the subject matter—the photograph—not the frame or mat.

We have two photographs that each measure 8"x10" with one photo mounted in its original presentation folder (see Photo 1) and one photo that is unmounted (see Photo 2). After asking a few questions of the customer, we found out these photos are approximately 50 years in age. We see they are in excellent condition. It is apparent that they have been stored in a place where light has not been present. So when someone brings in photos of this type to be framed for display, it is important to tell them about the benefits of using preservation materials in the framing.

**LAYOUT & DESIGN:** Our first objective is to create a frame and mat design that will let the viewer focus on the subject matter and not compete. Since Photo 1 is permanently mounted in its original presentation folder, this will need to come into play when we design. Photo 2 can be properly mounted using preservation methods.



*Photo 1: The framing design for this photograph was largely inspired by the backing board that it was attached to when originally developed.*



*Photo 2: Since this photograph would be displayed alongside the photo above, the framing treatment was created similarly.*

The original presentation folder for Photo 1 has a wonderful mat that adds small details to the photo, like the deckled edges with an arch and embossed outline. The color of the existing mat is neutral but earthy and subtle in a tone that enhances the photo. During the period when this photo was taken, an embossed logo was very common on photographic mats. With these elements in mind, the design for both frames was then determined. In order to create a layout that would bring the eye into focus on the photo, we decided we should use space and depth around the subject.



Photo 3: Shown here is a detail of the corner of the design shown in Photo 2.



Photo 4: The narrow, metal frame seen here was one option for the photos since one of the design goals was to create depth and create the appearance of a shadowbox.

**THE FRAME:** In the design process, the first option I explored was to use a 2" metal shadowbox moulding to house each photograph (see Photo 4). The simple moulding has grooves for the glass and backing with each 2" side finished on the inside and outside. The finished frame eliminated many hours of lining the inside of the shadowbox—creating a real profit on the bottom line.

However, if your customer does not care for the thin metal frame, you could simply use this frame as an inner frame and cap with a more ornate frame that fits and complements the period and style. Using two frames to achieve this look can be a timesaver, as opposed to using one frame that you need to spend time lining and installing glass into. It was one option, and the designs shown on the previous page were created with the “two moulding” method.

**MATTING AND SPACING:** The spacing around the photo is very important when we want to achieve a stronger focal point. The spacing gives a subject breathing room and helps the eye to focus in, instead of around. Both of the photos were elevated using preservation-quality foamboard spacing to help create depth. Foamboard spacing adds another dimension to the overall design that enhances the images.

For Photo 2, we created several layers of spacing mats and thicker board treatment using a reverse beveled accent. The different layers were created to help balance the overall appearance when viewing both framed photographs. The fabric background mat was selected for its texture and subtle color. We used the same fabric mat for both frames to help create a look of balance. The result was a pair of vintage photographs that, although not identical, were certainly a pair. ■

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To read more about working with vintage photographs, look up these articles on the PFM website—[www.pictureframingmagazine.com](http://www.pictureframingmagazine.com): “Handling Photos in the Frame Shop,” by Anne Vazquez, October 2000; and, “Identifying Nineteenth Century Photographic Processes,” by Ana B. Hoffman, October 1998.