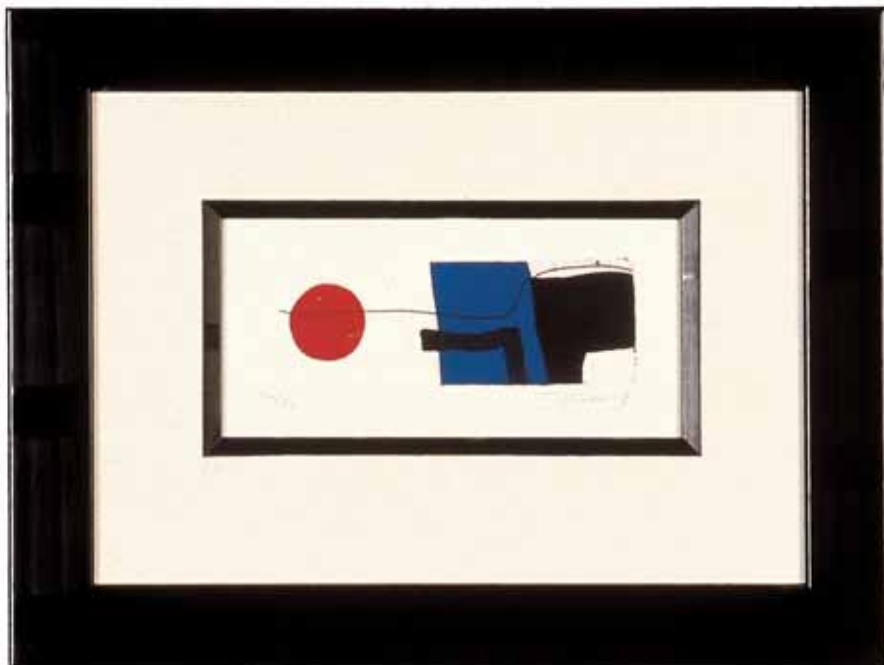


Profitable Frame Designs Begin with the Mat Borders

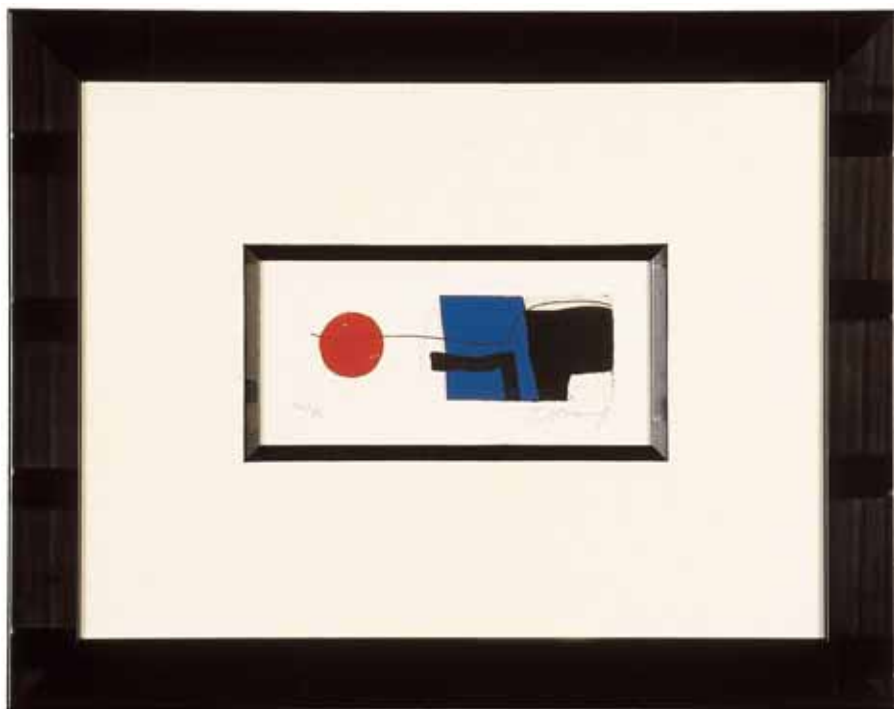
by Greg Perkins, CPF

One of the easiest ways to increase profits is to increase the width of your mat borders. Just think about it. Whether your mat has 3" borders or 4" borders, you still have to purchase the matboard you will use to complete the project. Unless it happens to be at the breaking point between a standard and an oversize matboard, your material cost is constant. A slightly wider mat border shouldn't change your production time to cut the mat either. Therefore labor costs remain the same, too.

What *does* change is the outside dimension of the mat. Since custom framing is usually priced by size or united inches, creating a larger size brings in a higher price. The increased mat size will also mean slightly more frame footage and generally you'll need a larger piece of glazing. While you will have to pay a slightly higher cost of materials, a profitable pricing system should provide you with an increase in



The same piece of art appears in both of these frames. The mouldings, mats, and fillets are the same in both designs. The difference is in the width of the mat borders—2" and 3½". The small design looks okay, but the larger one offers a much better sense of proportion. Notice how the wider mat borders allow you to focus on the art better. They also set the black frame back from the art so it doesn't confine it.



profits, giving you a higher return on your investment. On average, you can expect to increase every order by 11% when you increase your mat borders by just one inch. Isn't that amazing?

As mentioned above, retail prices for a complete frame order goes up an average of 11% when one inch is added to the mat borders. That number can vary from as low as about 2% to over 20% depending on the exact materials you use, the size of your project, and breaking points in the sizes of the products being used. If you increase your mat borders more than one inch, the potential for higher profits grows even more.

In the framed examples pictured in the photos, the same piece of art was matted with 2" borders and 3½" borders. The same moulding, glass, mat, and fillet were used on both sizes. By increasing the mat borders by ½", notice the change in cost and retail prices and percentages. The cost of materials price figures full sheets of mats and foamboard, but the actual project takes only a small portion of the board. You would have the remainder of each sheet to sell again to other customers.

Design 1: 9"x13" Frame Size with 2" Mat Borders
Cost of Materials = \$34.57
Retail Price = \$101.78
Gross Profit = \$67.21

Design 2: 12"x17" Frame Size with 3½" Mat Borders
Cost of Materials = \$39.76
Retail Price = \$128.92
Gross Profit = \$89.16

By upgrading the frame order from the smaller to the larger size, your cost of materials would increase by \$5.19 or 14%. As you can see, it is a great return on your investment to increase mat border widths.

Even ½" Makes a Difference

If for some reason you can't add an inch to your mat borders, as little as ½" can help to improve the frame design and your profits. Profits may not jump as significantly when the design size changes less, but it can still impact your bottom line. If we were to take the same art shown in the photos and add ½" to the mat borders, look at the change in the figures.

Design 3: 13"x18" Frame Size with 4" Mat Borders
Cost of Materials = \$40.93
Retail Price = \$132.96
Gross Profit = \$92.03

With this change, the cost of goods increased \$1.17 from the design with 3½" mat borders and the retail price went up \$4.04. In other words both figures rose by about 3%. Even so, there is still an additional \$2.87 in gross profit making this change. While that isn't dramatic, think what happens by the end of the year if you made these changes consistently.

Although the pricing is great incentive, your objective in framing should be to provide your customers with great frame designs. Making more money is simply your reward for doing a good job of getting your customers to see the value in spending a bit more for an upgraded frame design. This can be a challenge if you

Create In-Store Visual Displays of Wider Mats

As you know, framing is visual. In order make the process of selling visual concepts easier, it helps to have visual examples to show your customers. There are several ways to achieve this.

Wider Mat Corner Samples. The wider mat samples are a vital part of the design process. They allow you and your customers to get a better idea of the completed scale. Keep in mind when you are designing on a tabletop, the art is in an unnatural position and a confined space. If you can use easels, magnetic boards, or hold the design up, it helps people see it as it will be.

Framed Examples. Every single piece you display should be an example of the caliber of framing you wish every customer would purchase. If you compromise the framing for the models you display, you are endorsing that style. If you only show what you wish your customers would purchase day in and day out, it helps to prove your point. Be sure to walk your customers around to see your display pieces. When they come to you with their own picture in hand, they may not pay attention to your framed art. It is your job to point out products, techniques, and proportions that will help them visualize their own piece when it is framed.

Scrapbooks. Many of the best pieces you frame are for your customers. They are framed in a back room, wrapped up and then taken out of your store. When they are complete, take photos of them for your records. Digital photography has made it easy to archive images. Since you can create specific folder names, locating particular pictures is a breeze.

Home Decorating Magazines. Magazines show all the latest trends. Of course there are some poor examples in magazines that you don't want your customers to see, too. Cut out the pages that will help you sell what you want to and keep them in a binder or scrapbook. These pages can be divided into categories of frames, mats, display ideas for over the fireplace, on stairway walls, how to arrange groupings, etc. ■

aren't taking the right approach. (There are some thoughts and tips on this in the accompanying sidebars.)

After you have done everything you can to help your customers make informed choices, it is still their decision whether or not they want to follow your advice. Just do your best to make sure they will want the designs you show. If you have a few customers decline wider mats, don't give up on everybody else. Keep trying to sell wider borders on every occasion they are appropriate. How would you feel if you purchased new furniture for your living room and then kept hearing the colors and styles you chose were all passé? The best thing you can do for your customers and for your business is to keep up with the trends. ■

Why Wider Mat Borders are Appropriate and Fashionable...

A mat border provides an area of visual relief between the art and its surroundings, which includes both the frame and the room where it is displayed. Historically wider borders were used. Wider mat borders have been a constant feature in most museums, regardless of trends. Of course, museums are in the job of presenting art, not selling framing as room decor. This enables them to do the framing without compromising to meet a customer's wall space, room decor, and budget.

Home building trends provide another reason mat borders have been growing wider nationally. In general, new homes are growing in square footage. Also, open floor plans mean there are some large spaces to fill. High ceilings are another factor. In many cases wider mats are a necessity to make the framed art balance with the space.

Home furnishings have grown larger in scale over the past decade to coordinate with the changes in home building. Since our product is part of the room decor, too, our mats (and mouldings) typically should grow, too. The idea is to create an overall sense of balance between the home, furniture, and framing.

Many people live in older homes with smaller rooms. Even in those cases, designers often recommend using the scale that is popular today, but just limiting the number of pieces in the room. By doing this, the smaller room in the older house looks more up to date.

Wider mouldings have continued to become more popular for much of the past decade. As a result, wider mat borders have become stylish, too.

It is up to you to educate your customers about these things. Many people want to be stylish. If they understand what the current fashion is, they will desire it more. One of the challenges is that many people have framing with narrower mats in their homes. If you suddenly suggest wider mat borders, it seems unnecessary. You shouldn't say anything negative about the pieces they already have, but talk about the importance of keeping abreast of trends so everything in the home doesn't become outdated at one time. If you know the customer well, you might equate it to purchasing a brand new outfit that was stylish five or 10 years ago. ■