

Cellulose Supports

by Hugh Phibbs



The wooden fillet can be an attractive addition to a frame, but it poses a preservation dilemma. Even if the back of the fillet is sealed with a metal and plastic laminate, there is no guarantee that the face of the fillet may not emit harmful materials inside the frame package. Setting the fillet back so that it is separated from the art by an inner mat which extends in for one quarter of an inch can also be helpful, but this still leaves wood inside the package. The fillet can, however, be used outside the glazing to extend the lip of the frame and can become a valuable preservation tool.

Most frames on the market have a lip or rabbet width between one quarter and three eighths of an inch. This must hold the glazing securely and also provide enough room so that an adequate allowance (at least one eighth of an inch) can be built into the frame to permit the expansion of the mat package if the relative humidity rises.

A lip of this size often leaves little room for error. If the glazing is cut to the same size as the mat package and is not cut off the frame, it will rest on the bottom leg of the frame. This means that it will rest on the bottom, and so while it may come within one sixteenth of an inch of each side, its upper edge will be one eighth of an inch from the top of the frame. This can be hazardous if the frame is lifted by means of

its top member, as any flexing can result in the glazing coming out from behind the lip. The addition of a fillet to the inside of a frame can increase this margin so that the necessary clearances can be maintained in larger frames. There are other problems as well which can be best addressed by a frame which has an extra wide rabbet or lip extension.

There are materials which have historically been framed without any window mat. In the nineteenth century, many documents, such as decorated birth certificates, were framed between a piece of glass and a wooden backing with their frames coming over their edges. As harmful as this may have been, its role in the history of framing can not be ignored.

There are also works which have been done on heavy boards which may have been intended to be framed as if they were oil paintings or which may be so large that they can not be properly accommodated in a window mat. These thick boards can not be supported by tissue and starch hinges, and so another approach to framing them needs to be sought. Adding the fillet to the lip of the frame permits the site size of the frame to remain constant while the rabbet size can be increased to give the item being framed the room it needs.

In the nineteenth century frames often had gilded liners built into them, which gives an aesthetic precedent for this use of the fillet. The most common

was the flat and hollow pattern which can, at times, be found in multiple layers on the inside of some large painting frames. This same pattern is available as a fillet and can complement many profiles in current usage. Scraping off the coating which may be present on the bonding surface of the fillet will enhance its adhesion to the frame

(see figure 1). It is generally safer to cut the fillet separately and add it after the frame has been assembled, since it will be difficult to support from underneath during chopping or sawing of the framing itself.

One of the possibilities which an extended lip permits is the visual coverage of the edges of a work which may have been damaged,

while the edges are actually kept at a safe distance from the sides of the rabbet. This can be accomplished by designing the frame so that its site, with the added fillet, will be small enough to visually cover the damage, and by hinging the work to a back mat which has been sized so that it will fit the frame and will permit a spacer to fit around the work without touching its edges (see figure 2).

Expanding the interior of the frame will also enable the use of techniques such as inverted "L," paper-covered spacers, as described in the 1996 *PFM* Preservation Supplement. This type of spacer allows for the safe framing of such problematical items as pastels on board.

Oversize works which have been done on boards and

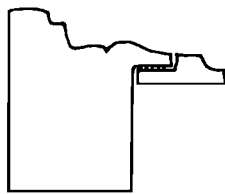


Figure 1

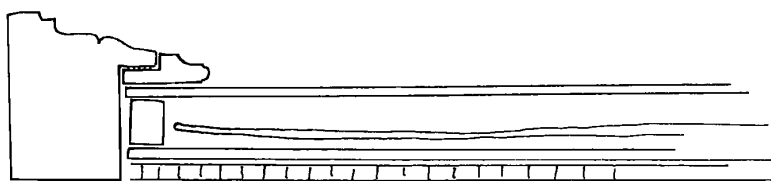


Figure 2

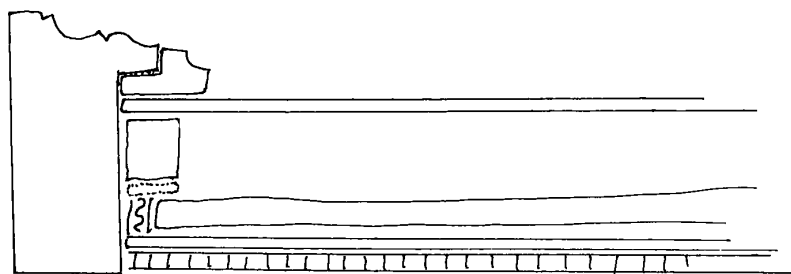


Figure 3

which may be intended to be framed as if they were paintings can also benefit from this use of a fillet. If such an item has a surface which will permit some contact with a spacer, the back side of the spacers can be lined with acid-free blotter paper to minimize its abrasive potential and the frame can be made large enough to permit

the additional expansion which may be expected from oversize items.

To prevent the art from shifting in the frame, a layer of acid-free corrugated board can be placed between the edges of the art and the sides of the rabbet (see figure 3). This should hold the art during normal conditions, but should collapse in

the event of a strong blow to the side of the frame or the expansion of the art caused by a rise in relative humidity in the frame.

Adding to the lip of the frame will provide this beneficial extra space without diminishing the strength of the frame. If the frame were rabbeted or hollowed out to create this space, it would be weakened. This extra space can enhance the opportunities for sealing the mat package since it gives greater coverage to the margins of the glazing where the seal will be applied.

Framers have made great strides stacking and layering mouldings to create more elaborate and dramatic frames. This idea can also be used to enhance the capacities of the frame as an instrument of preservation. ■