

The New York School of Frame Making: Part 2

A few of the creative minds who shaped the way frames were made in New York and beyond (cont. from May).

Julius Lowy and Co. (Est. 1907)

Founded in 1907 by Julius Lowy, Julius Lowy Frame and Restoring Company is the country's oldest continually operating frame makers in New York. In addition, their antique frame collection is the one of the top resources in the world. They still today make exquisitely designed hand-carved and gilt frames. In addition, Lowy is widely known for its beautifully crafted Arts and Crafts frames.

The breadth of the collection provides historically accurate and aesthetically appropriate frames for important works of art. They also conserve antique frames using the techniques and materials employed so as not to lose antique value. Larry Shar and his son, Brad, are the driving force behind the scenes today. When I worked for the Portrait Gallery, we selected Lowy to create historically accurate travel frames for our newly acquired George and Martha Washington portraits by Gilbert Stuart.

George F. Of

A Norwegian artist and frame maker, Of's craftsmanship and elegant designs were preferred by many of the American artists associated with the Modernist movement. He was also a painter, and his work was included in the 1916 Fo-

rum Exhibition of Modern American Paintings at the Anderson Galleries.

The most typical frame for the works of Georgia O'Keeffe was the silver "clam shell" or "airplane wing" profile shape, which was most likely

conceived by Of. The sides of a clam shell frame slope inward toward the painting. Each side is half of an arch that peaks at the inner edge where the frame meets the canvas. The rabbit width is a very shallow 1/8"—a framer's nightmare as everything in the world is slightly out of square, and with the narrow rabbit, the sight edges of the painting become critical. The design looks good but has inherent vice: cracks form in the corners over a period of time, the wood warps, and the gesso is extremely thin and fragile. The frame is often imitated but rarely duplicated to the original specifications.



Alex Gagna, master wood carver and gilder, with Henry Heydenryk, Jr.

The House of Heydenryk

Founded in Amsterdam in 1845, the House of Heydenryk is one of the world's oldest and most respected makers and dealers of custom and antique picture frames and is still in operation today. In 1936, Henry Heydenryk, Jr., the



William Bruce Adair received his B.F.A. in studio art from the University of Maryland in 1972. For the next 10 years he worked for the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery as a museum conservator, specializing in the treatment of picture frames. In 1982 he formed Gold Leaf Studios to make frames and conserve gilded antiques. His clients have included the U.S. Department of State and the National Park Service. In 1991, he was awarded the Rome Prize in Design from The American Academy in Rome. Over the years, William has written articles in PFM that describe in detail some of the traditional embellishment techniques.

great grandson of the founder, started a new firm in New York in the grand tradition of his family. At first, Henry imported and later began designing and making frames for important clients. He established himself as one of the leading authorities on picture frames and their history, authoring two definitive books on the subject: *The Art and History of Frames* in 1963 and *The Right Frame* in 1964.

My first introduction to serious frame making was right out of college when I first met New York's legendary frame impresario. I asked Henry how he became the most famous framer in America, and he smiled and replied, "My dear boy, I survived by making fewer mistakes than my competitors." Henry and I became fast friends, and any opportunity I could take to be with him was like gold to me. He taught me everything I know about American frames and wrote the introduction to my book on the subject, *The Frame in America, 1700-1900: A Survey of Fabrication Techniques and Styles*. Over the years we discussed the quest for an aesthetically and historically perfect frame for any particular painting as a kind of double-edged sword.



A frame label from the House of Heydenryk.

He and his carver, Alex Gagna, worked together for over 50 years. Basically, the Heydenryk style is a distinctive and recognizable effect of scrubbed, weathered, worm-eaten wood finish commonly recognized by collectors. I once asked him how he developed the look. He said that chestnut developed a

blight at the turn of the century, and he started using it with the worm holes as part of his style. At first it was used as a backing board to the frames; later, it was used to make rusticated finishes that looked like well-worn ski slopes on the side of a mountain.

The House of Heydenryk has worked directly with many of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, from such European masters as Dalí, Mondrian, Leger, and many American masters such as Hopper, O'Keeffe, and Wyeth. Henry collaborated with many of these painters and developed new frame designs and finishes that were created exclusively for their work. The current director, David Mandel, has been the keeper of the flame for this venerable old firm. **PFM**

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