



INSPIRING CUSTOMERS WITH AN INSPIRING SPACE

By Micah Ruiz

To stay current, we as picture framers have to keep up with style and trends of picture framing, art, and interior design. Our clients care about aesthetics, and they come to us for guidance. If we're up to date on the latest looks, it will be easier for us to guide them. They rely on our taste, expertise, and creativity to make their space evoke the feel they're trying to accomplish. They want us to be informed, enthusiastic, and imaginative—not just about framing, but also about the overall design and end result of their project as a whole. This is why it's so crucial for us to present ourselves the way we want our clients to perceive us.

If we want to be looked to for design direction, we need to look and act the part. We need to be really thoughtful about the way our shop represents our perspective. We control the narrative.

I began picture framing at the end of 2001. Since then, there hasn't been a lot of innovation in frame shop design or merchandizing. And for some reason, we seem to be pretty okay with that. I think partly this is because it works just fine and it's easy to have an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality. There are also a lot of preexisting framing businesses being purchased, and shops don't always get the facelift that they desperately need. Just because it's working does not mean that it's functioning any-

where near its best. You see other businesses updated all the time to keep current. I think it also stems from this being the only way we've ever known a frame shop to look. We're playing this ongoing game of telephone, and I think it's time for us to start a new conversation.

My dad is a pastor, so growing up I heard a ton of those parable-type stories. One story in particular really resonated with me. Basically, a kid is helping his mom make Thanksgiving dinner. His mom tells him their family tradition is to cut a turkey in half, put one half in the oven for dinner, and freeze the other. The kid asks his mom, why do you cut the

turkey in half? She says, well, that's just the way my mom showed me—I guess you'll have to ask her. So, the kid goes to his grandma and asks why they cut the turkey in half. The grandma says, I don't know, I never asked—that's just the way my mom showed me. The kid then asks his great-grandma. She tells him that back in the '50s, they lived in a very small house, and the oven was too small to fit a whole turkey!

I think a lot of us are doing just that—following a tradition without questioning or understanding why. We control the industry. We dictate how a frame shop looks, feels, and operates. We are not bound by any unwritten rules, and it's up to us to continue innovating and pushing to



● *Help your customers get in a creative mindset with your shop's layout and design.*

better the industry and our craft. We aren't doing ourselves or our clients any favors by staying faithful to an outdated philosophy.

Now, I'm not saying we should throw out the baby with the bathwater. I think there are still viable portions of the original shop design that can be brought up to date to make them more appealing and more fitting for our modern needs. I'm also not saying that I can give you all the answers. I don't believe there is one correct set of answers. Our needs and requirements vary as wildly as our regions and our clientele. What

works for me in San Francisco might not work for you in your town or city. What I am saying is that it's vital for us to question our reasoning for everything we do and move forward intentionally. We have to ask ourselves, why we do things the way we do them? Why do we set up our shops and our moulding walls the way we do? Why indoor/outdoor carpet? Why pegboard and slat-wall? What still works efficiently, and what could be improved?

When it came time to design my own shop, "elevated but approachable" was my mantra. My concept was to create a space that feels high-end but not stuffy. I wanted my space to feel like an interior design studio or even a spa, with lots of white space and clean visual lines. Keeping the shop immaculate is a big part of the feel, too. It's a blank canvas for people to come in and be creative.

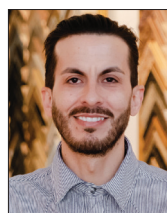
It's difficult to get into a creative headspace when you're surrounded by clutter. I know we're building and working on



● The space was designed with an open, airy feel.

every day before opening. Yes, it's overkill, but I love overkill. My aesthetic is modern and minimal with touches of Art Deco. I broke up my sample wall into 4' x 8' wallpapered panels to give a visual break between the overwhelming amount of options. They now feel easier to categorize and understand as a client and easier to maintain as a shop owner. It doesn't seem like a big difference, but it makes a greater impact than you might think. When you're in my shop, you feel the quality and attention to detail immediately. You understand why framing costs what it does. I don't have to get people in the mood to be creative because as soon as you walk in, you want to be creative. It's easy to be inspired in an inspired space. I've set myself and my clients up for success. I'm pulling in more clients, higher sales, and turning out designs faster based on the look and feel of my shop.

I would be a fool to think that I will just be setting up my shop once and be good forever. That's one of the big problems we're having with the industry now. I am staying open and totally prepared to update and redesign my shop to stay relevant and beautiful and pull in the right clients as the time comes. I assure you, the investment in fixing up and refreshing your space will pay off in higher sales, happier clients, and better projects. Think openminded. Think intentionally. And stop just cutting the turkey in half. **PFM**



Micah Ruiz

Micah Ruiz, owner of Orion Custom Framing in San Francisco, CA, has been picture framing for 20 years. He began his career in a wholesale frame shop and quickly fell in love with the precision and pursuit of efficiency. After mastering high-volume framing, he worked his way into high-end conservation framing, and that's where his passion really ignited. When not in the shop, you can find him in his East Oakland home spending time with his wife, Alexis, his son, Asher, and his daughter, Arrow.

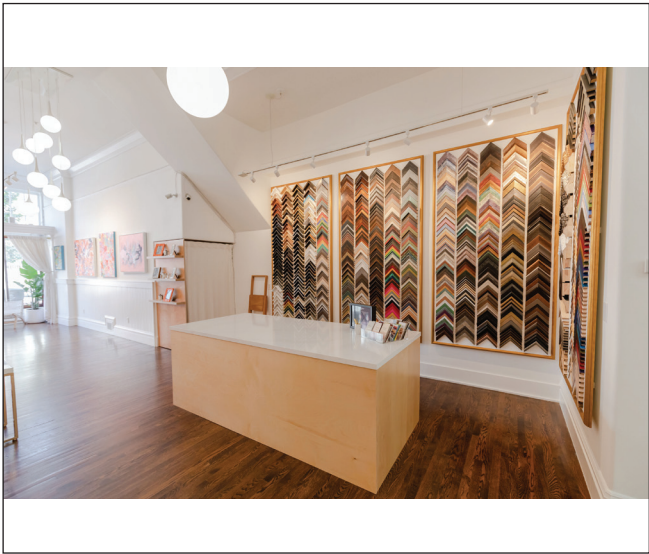
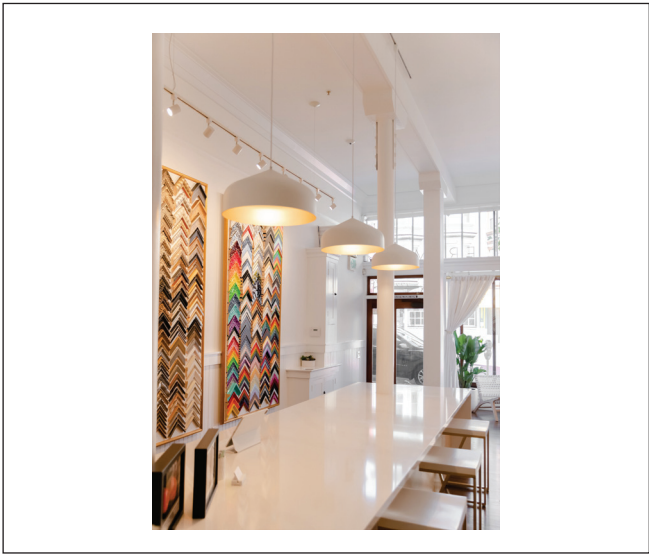


● Having a shop that's inviting is a crucial sales tool.



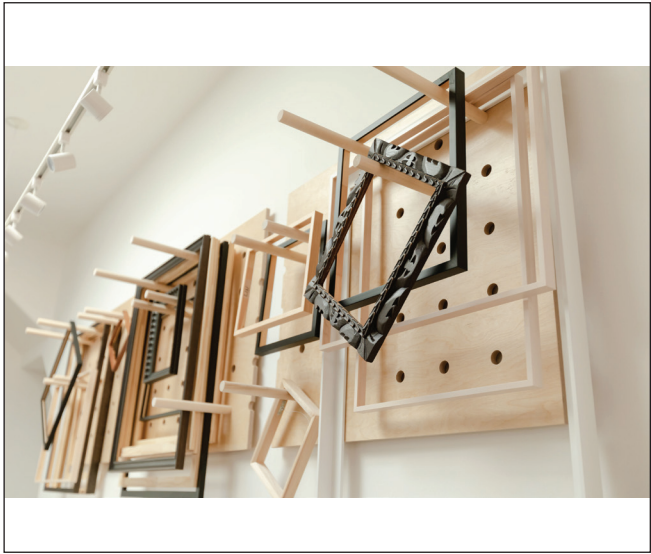
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