

Excellence of Craftsmanship

“Picture framers are not all the same; framing has its standards but it is also an art. The innovation and creative work will not be the same from shop to shop. Do not count on every framer having the same materials sources, or in house standards of quality.” (From artfacts.org/quickfacts/finding_a_picture_framer.)

Are you confused about picture framing? Not sure you know good framing from poor framing? Not sure you know the ‘lingo’? Not sure how to choose a framer? Not sure how much it costs? The following discussion should help you get comfortable with the process.

DESIGN. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder - it’s true! A good designer will incorporate your personal style and will also gently steer you away from a design faux pas, unless of course, you just insist! Art without a frame looks unfinished. Inappropriate moulding and mat colors and styles don’t flatter the art. Balance and scale are important in the design. The color, shape, texture and size of the moulding all play a role. The best framing for each piece of art evolves from a combination of personal preference, current fashion, and cultural traditions.

When mouldings and mats are being determined for art, each component must relate well to the rest to bring an overall sense of balance and cohesion to the completed design. Well designed framing will enhance and beautify the artwork – unity is created. Frames surround art creating a unit while setting it apart from the rest of the room. The frame creates a visual separation between the artwork and the wall that will gently lead your eye into the artwork. The matboard creates a resting place for your eye as it moves on into the artwork. If you find your eye drawn to the frame or matboard rather than the artwork, additional work is needed to find the perfect design.

Whether seeking period authenticity or eclectic flair, or anything in between, there is a line of frame mouldings to suit every style. Today’s mouldings are made from wood, aluminum, and newer materials such as polyfoam (not used in this shop). They may be hand-carved, machine embossed, extruded, or molded. The finishes range from simple solid colors to elaborate, multi-layered colors and textures.

Stop by our shop and let us show you several different mouldings for your picture. Notice how different mouldings affect the appearance of the art: some look important, some look formal, others playful. One may accent a particular color in the art, while another one seems to reflect the overall style of the art. There are many possibilities and looking is fun!

MATTING. Mats should be cut out of the board you chose and not substituted without your knowledge or approval. Once the framing is complete, matboards

may appear to have a subtle color change. Glass has a slightly green tint and will therefore change the matboard color ever so slightly. Acrylic glazing will cause the matboard color to darken just a bit. Our manufacturers do an excellent job of quality control, so there is rarely any difference between the sample matboard and the actual matboard. So, any significant difference between what you chose and what you got should raise a red flag.

The cut edge of the matboard openings is called the bevel. A quality matboard will have a very clean cut opening. The bevel should exactly meet in the corner that is without 'overcuts', "undercuts", or 'hooks'.

The mat surface should be free of defect – no scrapes, gouges or irregularity.

FRAMES. A well constructed frame will meet tightly with no gaps across the entire miter of each corner. Matching putty is often used to give the corners a more finished look. If correctly applied, the putty is not noticeable to most people. The top surface at the miter should be level across with the exception of some moulding designed in such a way that the two sides will not meet in a continuous pattern. An example is a wavy moulding where an up and down part of the moulding meet in the corner. A good framer can usually minimize the effect so it is barely noticeable. Alternatively, you can request that the pattern of the moulding be matched at the corners. But, this is generally very wasteful and expensive. It can often take more than double the moulding requirement to match the pattern, plus extra labor is involved to fit it all together.

Check the frame finish. It should be free of flaws, uniform in color and shape.

No nail holes should be visible from the sides of the frame (except for some tall thin frames where nails may be required to properly hold the frame corners together. Our shop uses an underpinner that drives V-shaped metal wedges into the frame from the back. Frames made in our shop are also glued as this is what really gives strength to the corners.

GLAZING. Glass or acrylic should be free of scratches and blemishes including small bubbles in the materials. It should be properly cleaned so there are no streaks or foreign particles sticking to it. Only picture framing quality materials should be used. Glass or "plexiglass" products purchased at the hardware store for instance are not framing quality and are not free of defect. If you have purchased a preservation quality glass, a sticker is attached to the back of the frame that shows exactly what glass was purchased and how to care for it.

SPACER. Spacer is used to separate glazing from artwork when there is no mat present, or to keep glazing from touching items in a shadowbox. It can be made of a thin plastic that attaches to the glazing and is generally not visible unless you are really looking for it. But, make sure it is there if you are framing without a mat. Unless you have a very large piece of artwork – over 60 inches – the spacer

should be applied in a single strip, not spliced. It should not be visible when you are looking straight into the frame. Spacer is also made from mat covered foamboard to line the inside of a shadowbox frame. Rules are the same – no splicing unless the piece is over 60 inches; if properly fit, the edge of the matboard or foamboard will not be visible along the inside edge of the frame.

ASSEMBLY AND FITTING. There should be no specks or foreign particles under the glazing, on the matboard, or art. The perimeter of the mat should be uniformly spaced all around (unless of course you have specified an asymmetrical mat). The mat should be snug around the artwork – no gaps (unless the artwork itself is very wavy). The backing board has to be installed the correct way to ensure this.

In the case of a wood frame, the back will be sealed with a black paper backing. The backing paper should fit neatly to the outside edge of the frame. A properly installed hanging system will use hardware to accommodate the weight of your piece. We never use the little saw tooth hangers that attach to the top middle of the frame. They are notorious for coming loose resulting in broken glass and possibly a broken frame and damaged artwork. We also avoid screw eyes as they are not always reliable either. However, if the frame is very thin on the back that is sometime all you can use. Wire should be neatly and tightly wrapped with equal amounts of wrapped wire at each end. We often use a hanging system called “Wallbuddies”. This is a wireless system that provides added strength to the corners. It is a self leveling system that is especially good when the art is long, oversized, or heavy.

Metal frames are generally not sealed on the back. This is usually okay since metals are generally used for framing inexpensive prints and posters. However, even valuable artwork sometimes looks great in metal frames. If appropriate, we can seal metal frames with a paper backing just like we do wood frames.