

68 OF 172 / Set 1 Copyright (c) 2000 Los Angeles Times 000035494

The Right Frame of Mind

* For art or family artifacts that are suitable for framing, there are many options and an array of costs. Don't be afraid to take advice from store experts.

By MARNELL JAMESON, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Los Angeles Times Saturday April 15, 2000
Orange County Edition Home Design Part N Page 1 View Desk
33 inches; 1158 words

Whether it's Johnny's first handprint, that photo of Grandma Moses or that pastel picked up at a French flea market that may be worth beaucoup, almost everyone has a treasure or two around the house deserving to be framed--or reframed. But many would rather watch their masterpieces collect dust than face the fiasco of framing.

You've been there. Walk into a frame shop and before you can say Whistler's Mother, you're assaulted with a mind-boggling myriad of motifs, mats and mounts. You're reminded of the time you had to fill out that wedding registry and you want to bolt--all those irrevocable decisions.

Then there's the cost. The framer adds antique frame plus double silk reverse bevel mat plus archival mounting plus conservation UV glass, and ka-ching, you're the one framed.

Paul Butler, co-owner of Art & Frame Express in Costa Mesa, says establishing a relationship with a framer you trust can reduce a lot of frame anxiety. A little education can also help you actually enjoy--rather than resist--a process that can enhance your art and preserve those pieces most valuable--at least to you.

Here Butler and fellow framer Janice Maxson, co-owner of Peter's Gallery, which has frame shops in Rancho Santa Margarita and Costa Mesa, offer a divide-and-conquer approach to framing.

Choosing the Frame

Let the art tell you what it wants. A lot depends on the piece's style and subject matter. Is it contemporary, traditional or classic? Is it vibrant or subtle? Does it represent a certain period?

An old etching calls out for an old-style frame. An Andy Warhol picture wants a contemporary frame or a plexiglass box. The Mona Lisa looks most at home in an ornate gold frame and would look terrible framed in metal. Another faux pas would be putting a painting of a Spanish dancer in a French rococo frame.

Next consider the room. "I can frame a piece 100 ways and make it look great, but to make it really work, you have to consider where it's going," Maxson said.

After you've found the right frame style, focus on finish and proportion. The frame's color should complement the painting and the wall color. Getting the size right is where more mistakes are made, Butler says. "I hate to see people lose their courage and underframe a picture with a skimpy frame."

Less common, but equally offensive is the frame that is too much for the picture. "We have lots of beautiful frames that are great mirror frames," Butler says. "But I wouldn't put them on anything else."

Matters of Matting

If the art dictates the frame, the art and frame dictate the mat. Though most art needs a mat, some--paintings in particular--may only need a handsome gold or wood frame. But any art that is going under glass looks best set off with a mat.

Mats give art air: They put space between the art and glass, which helps preserve the art, and they separate the art from the frame, so pictures don't look choked.

When selecting a mat, consider these factors:

* **Quality:** If the art is something you want to preserve, such as family photos or heirlooms, choose matting materials that are "archival" quality. That is, they are acid-free/neutral pH. Cheaper products may have acid in the paper that over time can "burn" art.

* **Material:** Most mats are made of cotton (also called rag), linen or silk, but frame stores offer an array of colors and textures, including suede, wood, exotic faux finishes, and mats that look like lace, marble, bird's-eye maple, brick and metal. Here again, subject matter may dictate the best mat choice. Silk looks nice on Oriental art and also dresses up family portraits. Linen complements watercolors, while rag mats go well on photographs, posters, lithographs and serigraphs.

* Color and proportion: Think of mats as the "stage" on which art is presented. Depending on the art, the stage could be neutral or colorful, large and dramatic or small and intimate. Color mats can add zip to pictures, and make a great choice if the art is whimsical, say for animation cells for children's rooms.

If going with color, pull one from the art that ties into the room. But, in general, the neutrals--white, off-white, beige and eggshell--reign.

Again, don't be timid about size. "The most common mistake inexperienced framers make is putting too small a mat on prints," Maxson says. "A couple inches all around can make a dramatic difference and doesn't make that much difference in price."

Experts also recommend a wider mat if you have a narrow frame, and a smaller mat if you have a wide frame. Never make the mat the same width as the frame. Trust your eye and the opinion of the framer, provided he or she is well-trained.

* Layering: If you're unsure about color, layering mats offers a chance to show just a sliver of color beneath a neutral top mat. Filets--little strips of decorative wood--can also add a custom touch. Made to slip between frame and art and serve as a decorative lip, filets come both plain and ornately carved, and in all sorts of decorative colors and finishes. They can be used with or without mats.

Mounts as Foundation

Art can be mounted to a backboard in one of several ways. Vacuum mounting or "cold mounting" affixes art to a board with adhesives and won't damage most art because it does not use heat. Dry mounting uses heat to affix art to a backboard and is popular for a lot of commercial, or shorter-term applications.

Museum mounting places art on pH neutral backboards and uses archival linen tape. Float mounting makes art look as if it's suspended between the backboard and glass. This is a nice option when you want to feature the edge of the artwork, say, for example, if the artist has painted to the edge of the canvas.

Not as Clear as Glass

Any art done on paper should be covered in glass or acrylic to protect it from bugs and dirt. Works done on canvas, however, such as oil

paintings and acrylics, should never be covered because they need to breathe.

For years, the choice has been between clear or non-glare glass, which meant a trade-off. Regular (clear) glass creates reflection; non-glare glass eliminates reflection but the glass looks fuzzy and colors aren't true.

Most artists choose clear because they'd rather the colors were true. When paintings are large--24- inches by 36 inches or more, most framers recommend plexiglass (or acrylic) because it's lighter. (In this land of earthquakes, acrylic is also recommended for any art that hangs over a bed.)

Now framers are flipping for invisible glass, a product that doesn't reflect light or distort colors. It's also stronger and lighter than regular glass so it works on larger paintings. But it is expensive. For example, at one gallery, a piece of 24- inch-by-36-inch regular glass costs \$19, the non-glare version costs \$26 and the invisible glass equivalent costs \$70.

All options are available in UV or non-UV treated glass, a consideration depending on how much sunlight the piece will be exposed to.

Frugal Framing Tips

* Tell the framer what you would like to spend and ask whether that's realistic. In other words, make cost a part of the dialogue from the beginning.

* Ask which frames or moldings the frame store stocks a lot of. Often if a framer buys bigger quantities of a particular frame, he gets a volume discount that he can sometimes pass on to you.

* If you have two or three pictures that need to be framed, do them together and ask for a volume discount. Using the same frame on several pieces not only saves money, but also can give a look of unity to the art in a particular room.

* Keep the mat simple. Better to skimp on material than size. A larger rag archival mat usually will cost less than a smaller mat in linen or silk.

* Keep your eyes open for great frames at swap meets and thrift stores. You can throw the art away and reuse the frame and glass--if it's

the right size and motif, of course.

* Opt for regular glass. Most of the time it's just fine, and much cheaper.

* If you know (or hope) your child's motorcycle poster phase will only last a few years, have the posters dry-mounted on colored Masonite board, then laminated. At Peter's Gallery, the backboard comes in 20 colors and creates a colored border around the print. The hard protective finish is so durable, "you could eat lunch on it," says co-owner Janice Maxson. (And you never know with kids.) Total cost is \$50 and it looks a lot better than thumbtacks.

GRAPHIC: Frugal Framing Tips, DORIS SHIELDS / Los Angeles Times
ID NUMBER: 20000415ohm0010