



Working with a custom framer brings a host of benefits—especially when you understand what to look for, ask and expect.

What a Framer Can Do for You

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THE THOUGHT of getting artwork professionally framed sometimes makes artists queasy with intimidation. Thoughts run from “It’s too expensive!” to “Why can’t I just do it myself?” If you have the skills to do it yourself, you most likely will but, if you have any doubts, teaming with a competent framer is one of the best moves you can make toward enhancing and protecting your art.

What are the advantages of using a professional framer?

A framer’s services go far beyond simply framing your art. Professional framers are trained

ABOVE: Design experts: Goldleaf Framemakers, of Santa Fe, N.M., is a quality resource used by many other framers. As a manufacturer of custom gold-leaf frames and a fine art conservator, the company assists in research and makes suggestions for the creation of authentic presentations of period pieces.

in the care and preservation of artwork. Not only can they guide you through the design process, but they also can explain things like the differences between economy paper mats and rag mats, the respective advantages of buffered rag mats and unbuffered rag mats,

the pros and cons of glass over acrylic glazing, and the benefits of various mounting methods for your medium. To a reputable framer, discussing these points isn't about pushing for a higher-priced sale but about finding the proper materials for the art being framed at a price that works for the client.

From your point of view, working with a framer is more than a matter of convenience; it's the opportunity to learn more about the care of your art. A framer should always talk with you about the preservation of your work and suggest reversible methods of mounting as well as neutral materials for framing or storage. If you opt out of preservation materials and methods, you may be asked to sign a release so the framer isn't responsible for damage that might occur over time. Keep in mind that you're the customer and, although your framer may know more about the display and care of your work, the final decisions are yours.

Full-service framers will have a frame designer to assist you in your selections. A wall of 3,000 frame corners and a thousand mat samples can be overwhelming, but a good designer should offer you two or three different approaches to showcase your piece in a way that maintains the dignity of the medium, whether oil, acrylic, watercolor, pastel, or something else. Your designer should be able to point out why the selected colors, spacers and frames work with your art and help draw the eye into it. A frame should complete a piece of art, so the frame should be noticeable but not so much so that it distracts from the art itself. Then the designer will help you narrow the options. This is a collaborative process.

Other services available from framers may include home or business delivery, installation of a single piece, installation of a professional hanging system for multiple pieces and the construction of storage or shipping boxes.

What questions can you expect a professional framer to ask you?

Your framer will begin by asking a few basic questions to get to know a little about you, your home and your art. Knowing your wall color, flooring, basic furniture and personal design aesthetics helps, but that's not to say that a frame should match your sofa. When framing is well designed, it often melds with any decor, and since current decorating is rather eclectic, good design fits anywhere.



Your framer should ask whether you have a vision for the framing or anything else specific in mind. A framer also needs to know whether there's an expedited turnaround time or a budget to stay within; these factors particularly come into play with corporate projects or exhibitions. Installation challenges, like a brick or marble wall, or location issues, such as a basement or bathroom, are also important to know. The intended display location will dictate special hardware needs or required treatments, such as sealing the inner package against moisture and humidity (A).

Be prepared to discuss your particular media—watercolor, pastel, oil or other—in terms of your historical, traditional or competition/exhibition needs. Most importantly don't hesitate to share what you know, but also be open to your framer's suggestions so the two of you can learn from each other.

What questions should you ask a professional framer?

Understand that all your framing ideas might not be possible to achieve; for example, centrally floating a wax-soaked encaustic monoprint is difficult if paper hinges haven't been adhered to the top back corners of the work with encaustic medium and heat fusion (B). Framers may know what needs to be done but not have skills in working with encaustics; furthermore, framers aren't legally allowed to provide that service for you because doing so

A. Specialized protection: This original watercolor painting was to be displayed in a bathroom, so I knew it would need special handling to guard the painting and mats against humidity. With the help of a Bienfang tacking iron, I sealed the protective covering of the framing package with Marvelseal, a flexible, heat-sealable barrier material that resists the transmission of oxygen and water vapor.

would alter the original work; only the artist can do that.

If you have special concerns or requests, write them down so you won't forget to mention them. Don't hesitate to ask for explanations about preservation techniques and their importance, and have your framer explain the differences among glass and acrylic glazing options.

B. Limitations: The light-colored piece in the foreground is the back of a freeform-shaped encaustic painting; the mottling indicates wax saturation. Traditional starch-pasted Japanese hinges won't adhere to this wax-saturated surface; instead the hinges must be heat-set with encaustic medium—a procedure the framer isn't permitted to do because it would alter the artwork. The artist must apply the hinges, or the framer can administer an alternative means of mounting, such as edge strips or corner pockets.

How can you tell a good framer from a less desirable one?

A framer with a good clientele or a framer for whom you've received a recommendation is always a favorable sign; word-of-mouth praise is the best acclaim.

Look for framers who are members of the Professional Picture Framers Association (PPFA) and shops that have one or more certified picture framers (CPF) or master certified picture framers (MCPF) on staff. Both designations are awarded to PPFA members who have studied and passed written and hands-on tests proving their skills in the major segments of picture framing and indicating their working knowledge of things like mediums, preservation, mounting, matting, frame construction, glazing and canvases. These certified framers are also schooled in determining when they should help you locate a specialist or conservator about your project. A well-trained framer knows his or her limitations. Admitting to

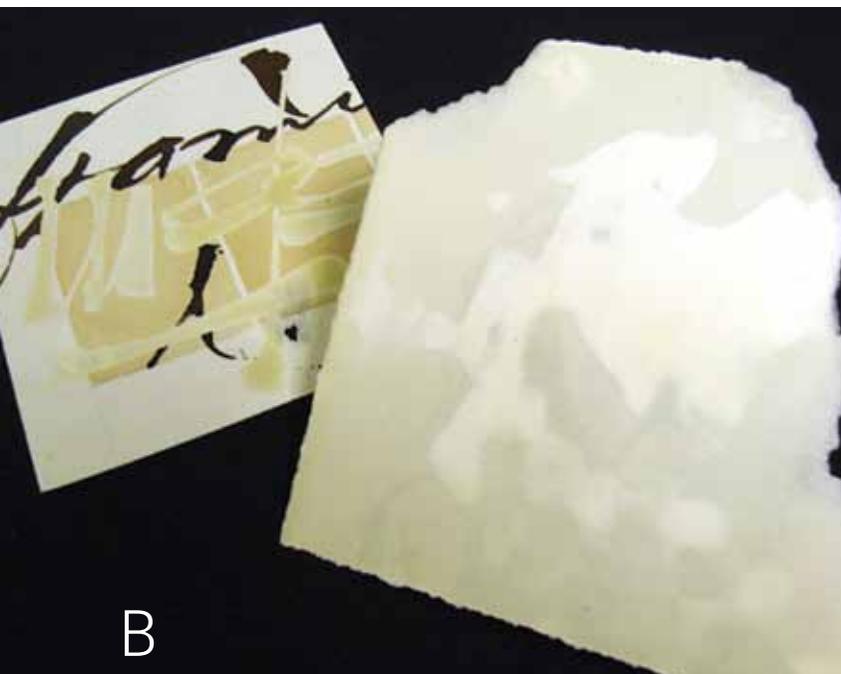
these doesn't indicate that person is less of a framer, but that he or she is honest.

When you enter the showroom, look around at the framed samples displayed on the wall. Most framers specialize in something—tabernacle frames (picture frames that suggest architectural frames around doors or niches); multi-angled frames (non-rectangular polygonal frames); hand-carved, closed-corner, gold-leaf frames; needle art frames; memorabilia displays; unusual matting

Integral to the Painting



Max Ferguson knew he wanted the frame for his piece *Girl With Vermeer* (oil on panel, 18x12) to reflect the 17th-century Dutch period of Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman With a Water Pitcher*, seen in Ferguson's painting. He then hit upon the idea of framing his piece with a replica of the frame that's on the actual Vermeer. To this end, Linda Suskind of APF Master Framemakers in New York City photographed the framed Vermeer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "She explained to me," says Ferguson, "that she couldn't measure the Vermeer frame with metal devices because she might get arrested. I wrote back that I was disappointed that she wouldn't do jail time for me." Of course, Ferguson fully appreciates Suskind's efforts; he considers the custom frame she helped create an integral part of his painting.



B

techniques—and these are all indications of a framer’s skills.

As mentioned previously, framers aren’t allowed to alter your art in any way. If you want a piece to be cropped to a square format, you should do that before you meet with your framer. If you want your framer to mount your art to a backing board, he or she will need to do so before you begin your artwork. Framers cannot trim original art or apply fixatives or lacquers to it; if one offers to do so, that framer may not be right for you.

Your framer shouldn’t use screw eyes or saw-toothed hangers; dust covers should be of higher-end materials like Tyvek or blue-gray, neutral pH paper—not brown or black kraft paper. Art should never extend behind the back of the frame, which would indicate that the rabbet (recessed area of the frame in which the art rests) is too shallow. This is a common problem with stretched canvases and deep-cradled panels.

Don’t select a framer solely because of a 50-percent-off or buy-one-get-one sale. Those are great if you’re framing things yourself and can cash in on a good deal, but your framing professional is an art caretaker. Would you go to a doctor who gives a 50-percent-off special? Truly advantageous sales may be good, but pay attention to what you’re getting.

Are there ways to bring down framing costs?

All too often, artists approach framing as an afterthought or think of framing simply as a stressor that eats up money. The truth is that a frame can sometimes make or break a piece of art. Custom framing is just that—custom—and it should be equated to the purchase of fine furniture. Quality, hardwood moulding for frames is often imported and generally only higher-end framers will have contacts for and samples of real gold-leaf and hand-carved frames (See Design experts, page 55).

Frames may be made of hardwoods, soft woods, medium density fiberboard (MDF) or polystyrene. Profiles and colors may appear similar when seen as corners or readymade frames, but you get what you pay for. You’ll save money if you opt for a narrower or smaller profile, but don’t go to plastic or MDF. Use a single mat rather than a triple mat with spacers, but don’t skimp on preservation mounting or select matboards that aren’t conservation quality. Regular



glass is less expensive than museum glass, but don’t forego ultraviolet (UV) protection.

Collectors expect correct frame styles for the art period of the framed piece (C). Western oil paintings in the style of the Taos Society of Artists (ca 1915) should have a period-appropriate closed-corner, gold-leaf frame, but for a contemporary cowboy painting, you may opt for a rustic barnwood frame at a fraction of the cost.

Framing for a series of paintings in an exhibition should be consistent. Thinking that the frame isn’t important, artists often bargain shop for this component, but in doing so these artists may unintentionally reduce the sales potential of their work. A cheap frame makes the art look cheap; the right frame increases the value of your work. When it comes to framing, don’t think solely with your pocketbook; if you’re planning on displaying your work for sale, consider your target market and invest in quality materials and workmanship. ■

C. Period piece:

This custom, hand-carved, gold-leaf frame was constructed specifically to suit the period of an original oil painting by Ned Jacob.

Meet Chris A. Paschke

Chris A. Paschke received certified picture framer (CPF) status in 1986 from the Professional Picture Framers Association (PPFA) and guild commended framer (GCF) status in 1997 from the Fine Art Trade Guild (FATG), based in London. She’s the recipient of the 2008 PPFA Award of Distinction for Leadership and the 2010 PPFA Vivian Kistler Recognition for Innovation Award. Her books *Creative Mounting, Wrapping and Laminating* and *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook* are available at her website, designsinkart.com.