

Picture Framers Guild of Australia Incorporated

In Pursuit of Tasteful Design

“Taste is elusive and non-definable. It is a feeling, an effect that must be analysed in individual situations.”

When framing, instead of specifying design “rules”, it is more a matter of discussing “ideas” that are relevant in most framing situations.

Idea One - There are no real framing design rules.

The human eye is constantly evolving. The framer must adapt to the gradual changes in architecture and design. The success of the framing is dependent on many factors such as the setting, where it is hung on a wall, room colours, room style, cost considerations, material resources, customer preferences etc. Rules can never cover the creative possibilities and practical limitations on each framing job.

Idea Two - Some frame designs are obviously better than others.

Idea Three - More people can agree on what is wrong with a frame than what is right.

A good design starts with having a pair of eyes, which possess some common sense to discard obvious design pitfalls.

A common design pitfall would be that the frame does not relate in any way to the picture. For instance;

- A regal American Indian surrounded by gilt curlicues
- A delicate watercolour still life framed in a 10cm wide rough distressed timber, or
- A sparkling silver leaf moulding around a dark somber print.

Idea Four - Tasteful design emerges from a storehouse of materials.

A full range of frame moldings, matboards and a knowledge of decorating techniques are needed by the framer to give the customer the variety and service required to produce a great design.

Idea Five - Colour is a major element in design.

Apart from sloppy workmanship, nothing is worse than a poor use of colour. There are two main aspects for using colour in creating a framing job.

- Colour is introduced as a pure complement to the print itself. Everything about the colour of the mat(s) and the frame relate directly to the print. The mats are no bolder than the boldest colours in the print; or the mats are more subtle than the most subtle colours in the print.
- Colour can also be used to “break all the rules”. Colour can be used as the major feature of the total framing job – for pure decoration, as shock, for dramatics or to seek attention. In this way the print is no longer the most important part of the unit. This aspect of colour is primarily used in commercial work. Interior designers often wish to fill a particular wall space in a particular way, using framing as decorative accessory. For this element of design the framer needs an understanding of colour and colour relationships to ensure the total effect is tasteful.

Idea Six - In general the eye requires some “resting place” between the print and the frame

The use of mats, liners, inserts etc. all act as building blocks in the framing of a painting or photo portrait.

Idea Seven - Customers want individuality

Most people do not want to be boxed into one rigid decorating pattern that doesn't allow room for a mix of family antiques, mementoes or an exciting contemporary piece of furniture. However, a few aspects to keep in mind are;

- A old traditional picture can be framed in either a traditional frame or a modern frame. While not every frame moulding will work it is worthwhile considering a more contemporary moulding for a traditional picture, while
- A modern abstract picture or photo-realism picture usually requires a sleek, modern frame.
- An original Rembrant or any type of quality artwork from a definite historical period always demands that a similar period moulding be chosen. This is framing with dignity, logic, and professionalism.

Idea Eight - Frame mouldings and mats will look thinner once they are made.

The corner samples a framer uses are only an indication of the finished product. There are no magic formulas for calculating how wide a frame or mat should be, it is up to the eye to judge each individual situation.

- It is better to choose a frame moulding that is too wide than too narrow. Few things looks worse than a distinguished print squeezed into a poorly defined space. When in doubt, add rather than subtract.
- Tiny pictures generally look better in extra wide mats. This gives definition, attention and clarity to a small picture, particularly an etching, watercolour or a similar delicate medium.

Idea Nine - To make a more interesting frame design, vary the widths of the elements within it.

- Avoid choosing a frame and liner which are the exact width.
- When using more than two mats avoid a rigid “stair-step” approach. The eye merely bounces along such equal dimensions, rather than flows from one resting space to another.

Idea Ten - Fun frames don't have to be tasteful

A little bit of wackiness is essential in all of life's pursuits including the pursuit of framing design. Be open to everything!

While there are hundreds of design considerations possible the framer's job is to be adaptable, remain in control of the design situation, compromising along logical lines and suggest better alternatives.

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