

Frame Design



by Greg Perkins, CPF

Unexpected Frame Choices

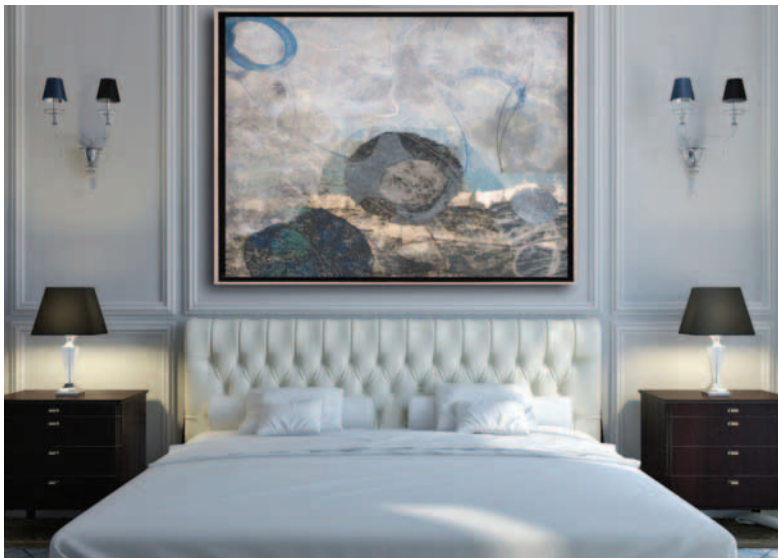
Habit, comfort, and familiarity can definitely influence how custom framers choose moulding for specific projects. Frame designers are prone to reaching for the same frame that worked well on a similar project. At the very least, they often choose frames that are predictable in terms of matching the style of the art. Consumers also make a lot of “safe” choices, such as repeating the frames they already have or matching mouldings to their woodwork.

There are no rules in custom framing. You are able to choose whatever mouldings you would like to use. Yet there are some

stereotypical choices people make just because they are accustomed to seeing it done that way. The most prolific of these stereotypes is the basic black “diploma frame.” Nearly every store that sells ready-made

frames seems to have some version of a black wood or metal frame with a facing paper and calls it a Diploma Frame. When consumers see them here, there, and everywhere, they believe that is what a diploma frame should be. Even custom framers fall into the routine of choosing black mouldings because that is what most people end up choosing—despite the fact that diplomas can look great in gold, silver, or even stained wood frames.

Another example is the use of narrow frames for posters. It is understandable if people want an



There is enough space on this wall where a wider moulding could have been used to balance this large canvas. Instead of doing that and making it appear jammed into the space between the mouldings, a narrow float frame was used. The unexpected twist is used to show a full inch of the black inside the float, rather than the typical 1/4" space. This makes the frame take up more physical space and adds to the visual weight because of the amount of black.

So long as there's a sound relationship between art and frame, unusual mouldings may just be the perfect design choices

inexpensive frame for a cheap poster that's poorly printed, but the difference between a poster and a print may have nothing to do with quality. Posters often include a printed border and some text that is intended to show when framed. Better quality posters deserve the same quality of framing used on any other print. Since many posters include their own border, a stacked moulding combination is a great way to customize them.

Many frame mouldings were designed to address a specific stylistic need. They may coordinate with a popular home furnishing style, a frequently used color palette, etc. It's important to remember the design intent doesn't mean the moulding can't be used other ways, too. You are a custom framer and have the ability to make unexpected selections. As long as there are logical reasons for making unusual choices, they can potentially be some of the more dynamic choices you make.



This is a piece from an antique American primitive quilt. A more expected look for the period may be a Birdseye Maple frame. This unexpected stacked combination of black and red lacquer transforms the textile into a more Contemporary or Asian look.

Many consumers think all the frames in one room have to match each other. It is up to you to let them know it is okay, and more interesting, not to use matching frames. In your frame shop, display a variety of frames hanging side by side and keep photos on hand from decorating magazines and websites so you can show your customers it is common to mix and match frame styles and colors.

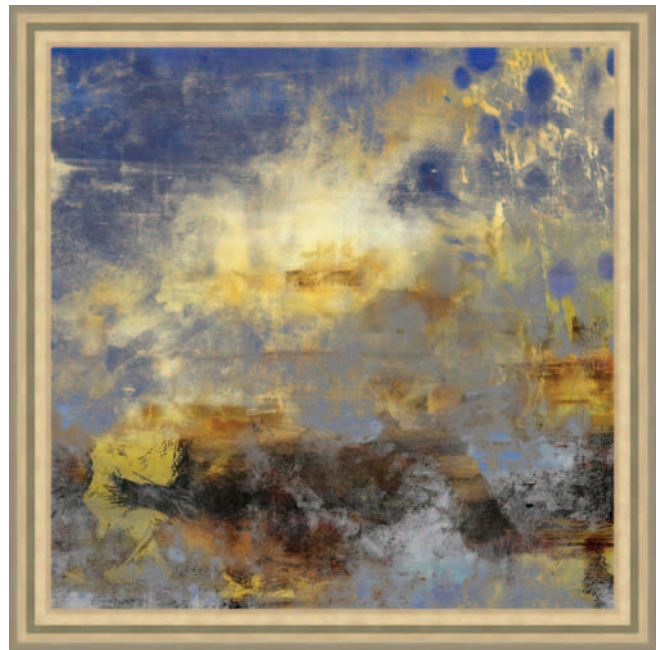
Moulding choices should depend on what is being framed. With anything of historic value, it is generally best to frame it in a period-appropriate moulding. For present day art painted in a period style, you can make it appear authentic if you frame it in conjunction with the period. You can also give it a fresher look by doing something more modern with it.

In galleries, original art is often presented with basic moulding profiles. Again, with so many consumers seeing high-end art framed with this “gallery look,” it is common to assume it should be framed this way. For gallery clients purchasing art for their homes, there may be better framing choices to bring out the unique look and personality of the art.

Logic is the key to success when making unexpected moulding choices. You can't haphazardly pick a frame and expect it to work. The logic has to do with the way a moulding relates to the art. That relationship may be in terms of color, a similar pattern on both, or perhaps a profile shape. When you find one or more of these common denominators, it means a moulding that is a different style from the art can still appear well-suited to it.



The ornate details of the centuries old buildings in this photograph are well-suited to the ornate frame selection (3a) surrounding it. Sometimes people acquire art that doesn't suit their typical overall style. A smooth, contemporary profile is a more unexpected choice, but the curves in the moulding profile (3b) mimic the dome and arches in the photo so there is a strong relationship.



I see many abstract canvases framed in very basic float or cap profiles, often in black or natural maple. In this case, a double stack with unexpected angular profiles catches the light, creating interesting highlights and shadows and relates to a broader range of tones in the art.



The wide moulding selected for this small piece of art is a great look, but it confines the image. It may seem counter-intuitive, but an unexpected solution for helping the wide moulding not seem so overpowering is to add more. Using a plain moulding inside of the ornate frame pushes the bolder ornate frame away from the art, giving it breathing space.



Sometimes the decision to make unexpected frame selections is situational, where the circumstances of the room dictate choosing a moulding you may not otherwise have used. The perfect

example of this is when someone has a large picture to be framed and the wall space to display it in is not much larger.

There may be other occasions when you simply want to create a unique design just because you can. So many people today are living in eclectic environments and that allows you more freedom in making unique frame design decisions. With some customers, your choices can be more adventurous, but with most people it will be much more subtle.

When you begin to create more unique frame designs than people typically see elsewhere, you may be able to attract a group of customers who are more focused on design than on price. Of course, this means you have to make it known to both current and potential customers that you are offering something different. This generally requires in-store framed examples on display to show your creativity as well as marketing to your existing customers and to potential new clients.

Each of your customers is unique. With some of them, you will succeed by telling them how unique the design you are recommending is and with others you may have to convince them it is the right choice, not an out-of-the-ordinary choice. To some minds, "unique" just sounds expensive. Some folks don't mind spending money to get what they want, while others want the good stuff but want to feel like it is a great value. They don't want to think they are being taken advantage of by being offered something more than



It's common and predictable to frame a pair of art images identically, but some pairs of images are so different from each other that matching frames may seem mundane. Such is the case with these two paper collages, where one is the negative (opposite) of the other. Choosing opposite colors for the frame and the fillet is both unexpected and fun, like the art.



Just say no to diploma frames. Why is it after spending thousands of dollars and putting in endless hours of studying that people will stick their diplomas in those cheap frames. Do the unexpected and show examples of diplomas framed with custom designs the graduates can be proud of.

you offer everyone else. It's up to you to decipher which type of person you are dealing with and get them on board with the designs you offer to them.

Again, the important thing with all of your moulding selections, unexpected or not, is a logical relationship between the art and frame. As long as there are common denominators, unusual choices just may be the perfect choices. ■

Greg Perkins, CPF is in his 42nd year in the framing industry. Starting out as a retailer, he has been with Larson-Juhl for the past 23 years. He holds the position of Customer Programs Manager. In addition, he is an author, contributing editor, industry educator and an artist.