

AN INSPIRED TABERNACLE FRAME

A Personal Approach

BY FRANCINE HACKEROTT

THE LARSON-JUHL DESIGN STAR WINNER HAS LONG BEEN FASCINATED BY HISTORIC FRAMES, AND HER DESIGN DRAWS FROM BOTH PERIOD DESIGN AND PERSONAL INSPIRATION

At The Frame and I in Prescott, AZ, we encounter a lot of antiques, fine art, and collectibles. Determining which projects merit a historically inspired frame is an agreement to be reached with each client, but anytime a piece lends itself to a historical frame style, it's my responsibility to suggest that option. It's important for customers to be open about their intentions for the finished piece. I've found that's the best way to determine the value (whether emotional or financial) of the project. Often, before we ask customers to commit to a total project, a small sample is made so they can see the color, design, or shape more easily. That way, they feel great about moving forward with it.

Prescott is influenced in many ways by Mexican culture, so we see plenty of Catholic and iconic artwork that lends itself to unique designs. We also have a size-



The first part of the process was having the frame immediately surrounding the mirror. This was important for sizing, to fit the mirror. Next, came the two vertical columns to the left and right of the inner frame and then the entablature and pedella, at the crown and base of the frame.

able population of Buddhists and get the opportunity to suggest historically inspired framing for their antiquities, including Thangkas, mandalas, and artifacts. Prescott also has many world travelers among its retirement-aged population, so we frequently suggest period framing on the art they collect from around the world.

Selling historically based framing that's appropriate to the art doesn't require a practiced sales pitch so much as a willingness to suggest it and a belief that the client will value

it. The worst case scenario is that they go with a regular custom frame. But if I suggest a replica period frame to a client, I rely on my knowledge of history and the strength of my craftsmanship to help sell them on the



This is a top view looking down on the frame surrounding the mirror and the vertical columns.

project. Using this approach, I frequently get the opportunity to build uniquely shaped frames, varying from Craftsman-style frames to cathedrals, octagons, and arches. Our store always tries to have examples of these custom frame shapes as models on hand to show clients. Everyone working here has at least a little art history background, which also helps with ideas when a client brings in something historical to frame.

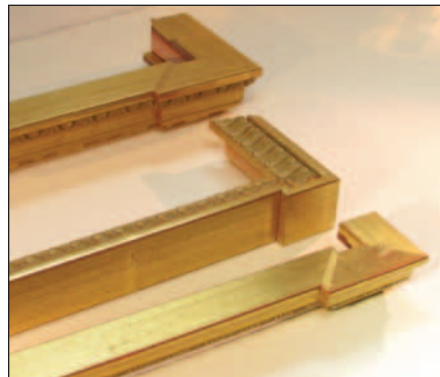
Whenever we complete a unique frame design, we make sure to capture images of the end product before it leaves the store. This allows us to promote historically inspired framing, as well as any other creative designs, on our website and print advertisements. In turn, this brings in more of that type of business. The more often we work on these types of projects, the more proficient we become and that means we become more profitable. I hope this inspires you to pursue similar framing in your shop, if you haven't already been doing it.

The elements of architecture have always intrigued me since taking art history in college. The ornate opulence and symbolism in cathedrals and churches is poignant to me. I was moved by tabernacle frames when studying the fascinating history of picture frames. Their use as portable altars, their spiritual beauty, and their architectural intricacy inspired me to create one. After talking with owner Ida Kendall, I created one for Larson-Juhl's Design Star competition.

The design came from studying photos of antique tabernacle frames. Fortunately, I found a schematic I could use for a reference. These frames were typically

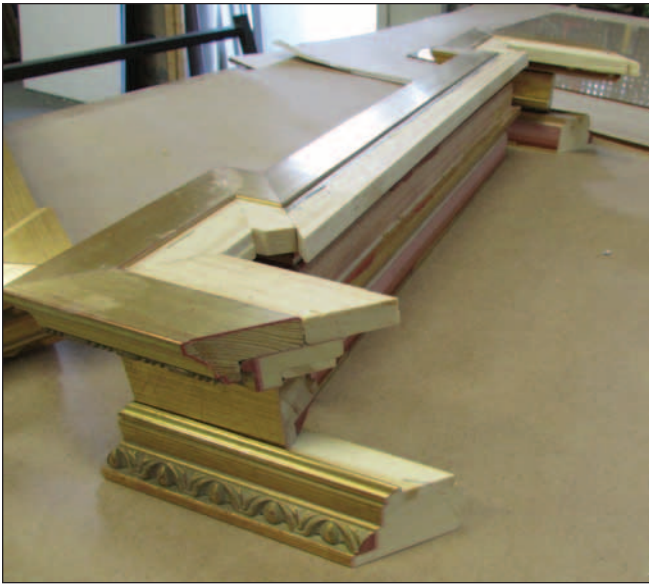


Three individual mouldings make up the entablature or crown of the frame. It is complete at this point, with the exception of filler mouldings on the back



The predella prior to trimming the back edge, showing the filler moulding to set the columns on. (Inset) The back of the predella after all the pieces were cut flush.

gilded, so I selected water-gilded mouldings for this project. Larson-Juhl's Senelar line, with different profile shapes and decorative patterns, fit the bill. I carefully considered the placement for each profile based on the reference materials. First, I chose the most ornate profile in the Senelar collection for the columns. I needed a plain profile for the entablature (crown) and predella (base) of the frame. I discovered that the non-ornamented side of the moulding was the appropriate width for a plain panel. By turning the same moulding on its



The predella prior to trimming the back edge, showing the filler moulding to set the columns on. (Inset) The back of the predella after all the pieces were cut flush.



side, it also provided a consistent finish that harmonized perfectly with everything else.

After making those, it was time to determine what size to make the frame. Many of the antique tabernacles were intentionally kept small for portability, but they were sometimes gigantic installations as well. The size of the mirror I decided upon was a standard 11"x14" for practical reasons--and because it was in proportion with the moulding.

Rather than starting with a drawing, I dove right into cutting the frame. I felt like working from a drawing would box me in, so to speak, so I started from scratch, which allowed me to manipulate each piece as I went. Working with the mouldings as if they were pieces of a puzzle helped me decide where to cut each piece based upon the ornamentation. I started with the interior frame, followed by the columns. Then came the entablature and the predella.

I used standard shop tools to build the tabernacle frame: a table saw, miter saw, brad gun, staple gun, bar clamps, and glue. Altogether, the project took approximately 20 hours from conception to completion. With practice, I'm sure it would take less time since the logistics of stacking the frames would already be determined. If a customer commissioned an identical frame, it would retail for approximately \$1,800. I also made the mirror by hand using gelatin and sterling silver leaf on clear glass. Then, I painted on the reverse with a sienna acrylic color that matches the color of the bole used under the leaf on the mouldings.

Unusually shaped frames like this are a specialty of mine. I've made replicas of arts & crafts and Kent-style frames. Mat carving is another skill I've honed throughout my career, and I used it in conjunction with Kent frames. I also enjoy making multi-angled frames such as octagons, stars, and shields.

I find that tabernacle frames uplift and inspire me. They are like a house and a halo for whatever they present. It's been a dream of mine to build one, and being recognized for it now has been a wonderful experience. ■

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Francine Hackerott, of The Frame and I in Prescott, AZ, won Larson-Juhl's 2015 Design Star competition with the frame featured in this article.