

AUTOMOTIVE INSPIRATION

The 2016 Larson-Juhl Design Star winner incorporated a mat and frame that replicated a tire tread, echoing the theme of a retro Volkswagen print.

By Micah Paul Bolton
with Katrina Magowan



From a low angle (below), the chrome middle frame (Harlow) shows off its reflective finish in contrast to the image above, where the frame appears to be the art.



When we entered Larson-Juhl's 2016 Design Star competition, our objective was to take the "custom" part of custom framing to the next level. After hand applying more than 1,500 individual pieces to just one of the three mouldings used in the design, and having a portion of another frame hand-painted to mimic the featured art, I can say it feels as if that goal was accomplished.

For me, it all began with an obsession—an obsession with design and fabrication. I'm always using unique tools and techniques from other industries and applying them to my work at The Studio Shop in San Mateo, CA. I am not formally trained in regards to design and fabrication; I focus on one technique or skill and devote every second to mastering that skill. I believe it's this obsession that's been my most valuable trait when challenging myself to try something different. I don't believe in talent. Get obsessed, then work for it. Tirelessly.

When first considering a design to submit to Larson-Juhl's 2016 Design Star competition, I knew I wanted it to have a local, San Francisco Bay Area flavor, since we're located right in the heart. I'd done a tire tread motif frame before, and it was well received, so I began my search for an automotive themed print that would also speak to our locale.

As I was perusing my print options for the Art on Paper Category contest design, Katrina Magowan, who works at The Studio Shop with me, came up to the counter and took a look. She and I were both drawn to the same VW print. The majority of the art on the bottom of the print is in cooler tones, except for the tread, which is orange. We wanted to highlight that by creating an all-tread frame.

As it turns out, Katrina was born in San Francisco and lives just a few hundred feet from the beach in Half Moon Bay. The icing on her story—her family owns Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze on Pier 39! It was then I knew she needed to be involved with this project. This was the story I was looking for to support my thoughts behind a triple stack moulding combination, which would include a mirrored moulding right in the center, a portion of the design Katrina was especially keen on. We specifically wanted

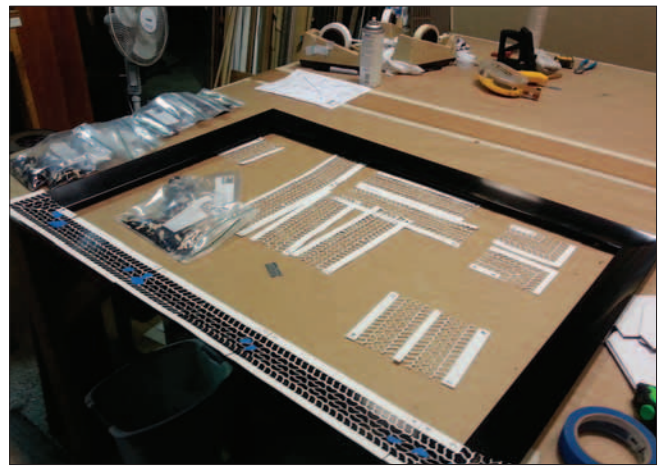


A close up of the tread shows all the intricate details of the pattern as well as the subtle etching on each individual piece, achieving the authentic look of a real tire.

to use the mirror frame in a way that highlighted its reflective nature; when one looks at a chrome bumper on a car, it reflects everything. I tried to emulate the feel and texture of the print as much as possible so that it seemed like a natural transition between the art and the frame.

The obvious choice was to extend the art past the frame so that it reflected back and continued the image. This is when Katrina's art skills came to mind. Another aspect I'd considered for this frame design was a moulding painted to match the art—and Katrina could hand-paint it. She earned her BFA from the California Institute of the Arts, and, when sharing my idea of a portion of one frame matching the art, it was kismet. She agreed to paint the edges of the teal Confetti Collection moulding, which was the innermost frame, to coordinate with the background of the print. Between her skills as a fine artist, and her history in the Bay Area, it really felt as if we were capturing a moment of her life—and a bit of her personality—into a frame design.

The build of the frame began three weeks before the 2016 Design Star deadline. As part of the guidelines for the competition, all designs had to be framed using only Larson-Juhl mouldings. After first chopping and joining the inner Confetti frame, I focused next on the Harlow mirror frame. This moulding needed to wrap around the Confetti frame, as opposed to sitting on top. Both mouldings needed to sit at the same height so everything painted on the outside edge of the inner moulding would reflect onto the Harlow frame's mirror finish. Lastly, the third and outer moulding came into play. I selected a frame from Larson-Juhl's Tate Collection and planned to sit it directly on top of the mirrored moulding. The finished



With over 1,500 pieces cut and laminated with adhesive, it was time to apply them. A paper template of the design on top of the frame kept the pattern precise.

piece then measured 27¾" width, 37¾" height, and 2¼" depth.

That was the easy part—now it was time for me to consider the tire tread design for the top panel of the outermost frame. I had to translate the exact dimensions of the Tate frame into Adobe Illustrator. These dimensions had to be extremely precise; if they were off by even a fraction it would throw off the entire design. As for the tire tread itself, I wanted to create a design that would somewhat match the era of the vehicle featured in the print. To do that, I did quite a bit of online research and found lots of inspiration.



Lining up both the painted Confetti and Harlow mouldings was very important in creating the desired optical illusion. If either frame was too high or low, the effect would have been lost.

I created the tire tread pattern and began drawing it digitally onto the Tate frame template. The longer legs of the design on the frame were relatively simple, but the corners proved more of a challenge. I had to rotate the pattern and tweak it, while simultaneously merging the pieces together until a seamless design was achieved. Ultimately, to me, the corners became one of the most beauti-

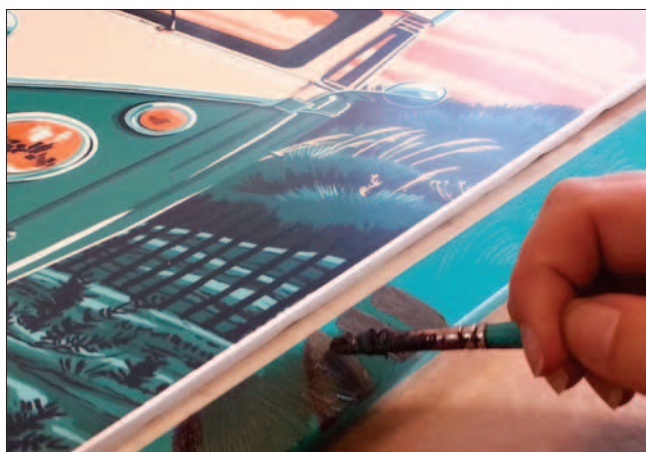
ful components of the design because they are completely random. The process of mapping out the frame dimensions and digitally overlaying the tread took six hours due to the complexity of the piece.

Once the design was in digital format and ready for the laser, it was time for me to select a material for the tire

tread pieces and think of a way to adhere all of those elements to the frame without having to hand glue each of the more than 1,500 pieces. Ultimately, I opted for a 1/8" matte black acrylic, which has a nice texture and finish that resembles a new tire "feel." Then, I thought of using a 3M adhesive, which I'd used in the past with good results. They offer an inexpensive film that is used in the technology industry and specifically for smartphones; it's really thin, strong, and easy to use. When it came time to apply the adhesive to the tread pieces, I sanded the back of the black acrylic to give the 3M film something to "bite" onto. I then cold-laminated the film on to the back of the acrylic. Once the pieces were cut on the laser, all I had to do was peel and stick them to the frame.

At this time the question arose: "How do I apply over 1,500 tire tread pieces to the frame while ensuring they're all perfectly aligned?" The answer? Very carefully! I used the digital version of the frame and tread pattern and created a paper template of the entire frame, including cut outs of all of the tread elements. This paper template was then laid atop the actual Tate Collection frame. At this point, it was all about peeling and sticking. After a couple of days spent meticulously attaching what seemed like an endless amount of tread pieces, and finished with Museum Glass, the design was finally complete.

At this time, there was only a week left until Larson-Juhl's Design Star submission deadline. Up to this point, I'd done very few collaborations with other designers or



Katrina layered several different colors of acrylic paint to match the palette of the art.

artists; I'll admit that I like to have control of a project from beginning to end. Needless to say, handing the project over to Katrina with so little time left was a bit stressful. I didn't provide much guidance in relation to what or how she painted the outside edge of the inner Confetti frame. I asked her to do what she thought would look best and

told her it was her thing. She took the ball and knocked it out of the park and kept the project on schedule.

My jaw hit the floor when I saw her finished, hand-painted component of the design. I absolutely loved how she was able to extend the colors in the image onto the frame to add the beach and water theme of the Bay Area that we were both passionate about including. It instantly became my favorite part of the project, and to know she

had a personal connection to the piece, growing up in the Bay Area and practically living on the beach, was especially satisfying. I couldn't wait to see our collaboration come together—I fit the frame on the spot!

I consider myself incredibly lucky and am so grateful to work with an amazing team at The Studio Shop. Janet and Carl Martin, The Studio Shop owners, always

support my ideas and are willing to let me explore them. This project wouldn't have happened if it weren't for them. Their dedication and passion to this industry is unrivaled. **PFM**



With all three mouldings and the artwork assembled, the theme came together in one cohesive composition.

Micah Paul Bolton, of The Studio Shop in San Mateo and Burlingame, CA, has been framing since 2001 and has worked at multiple West Coast shops. He specializes in unique projects for high-end clientele and has won over 10 design and fabrication awards.



Katrina Magowan is an artist and framer at The Studio Shop in Burlingame, CA. She graduated from the California Institute of the Arts and studied at the RI School of Design.