

A Tea House Frame

STYLISH & SERENE



The design of the winning frame blends the look of a contemporary frame with that of a miniature tea house.

What a difference 10 years can make! Almost a decade ago, when Boris Smorodinsky and his wife, Marina, bought Striving Artists in Chatsworth, CA, from the previous owners (who were retiring), the company was an ordinary frame shop mostly selling "poster specials" in metal frames.

Back in 2006, Boris and Marina brought unique qualifications to the business. Boris got his first camera at 13 and developed a lifelong passion for photography. His Ph.D. in Engineering allowed him to quickly understand existing framing materials and technologies and implement new ones. He has been involved in digital imaging since 1990, and has deep knowledge and skills in color management, offset printing, and fine art reproduction and publishing. Marina's degree in journalism, experience in design, and her keen eye for style and detail are all driving forces at the design counter.

"We transformed this shop," Boris says. "Marina and I had a steep learning curve. We studied, we struggled, we tried time and again, we made mistakes. We are so proud of what we have achieved with our hard work and continuing education." But neither the owners nor the company's long-time production manager, J.M. Gallo (or just plain J, as he calls himself), could

have imagined that a time would come when they would be crowned first place winners in the Print Category of the PPFA International Framing Competition at the WCAF Expo in Las Vegas this past January.

None of Striving Artists' achievements would have been possible without J, who has worked at Striving Artists for more than 20 years, says Boris.

**BORIS SMORODINSKY AND
J.M. GALLO OF STRIVING
ARTISTS, WINNERS OF THE
2016 PPFA INTERNATIONAL
FRAMING COMPETITION
PRINT CATEGORY, DREW
DESIGN INSPIRATION FROM
A JAPANESE TEA HOUSE**

"My first interest in art framing came when I was put in charge of the showcase displays in the front lobby of my high school," recalls J. "I was assigned the challenge of creating visual representations of the current events of the school, much like making a shadow-box."

While in college at California Institute of the Arts getting his BFA, J took a job at a local frame shop and began learning design and light techniques in framing. He became immersed

in quality education of custom framing when he worked for previous PPFA President Gene Ausili, CPF, at his shop, The Picture Show, in Valencia, CA. "Under Gene's mentoring, I learned much of what I needed in order to take the leadership role at Striving Artists as production manager," J says with pride.

Boris and J regularly take the knowledge and experience they have garnered over the years and put it to

the test in framing competitions. The PPFA Framing Competition is the culmination of the year-long PPFA chapter competitions in which framers test their creativity and knowledge to showcase great design ideas to their industry peers. Each entry exhibits a framer's individual flair while adhering to the highest levels of preservation. Boris and J needed to keep the three different areas of judging in mind as they designed their winning tea house frame: visual impact and overall impression, design and creative elements, and technique.

This year's Print Category piece was actually a set of four pieces entitled "Little Birds," by Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF. The 10"x10" originals are mixed media of gesso, ink, and Chinese watercolor. For the contest, these four images were sized to 3¾"x3¾" and printed with an aqueous inkjet printer on 65# Brockway Felt Finish, a warm fine art paper. Each framer was required to cut the four images apart prior to framing, and all four images needed to be displayed in a single framing presentation.

Upon seeing the artwork for the PPFA Print competition, J was reminded of a previous conversation he and Boris had with Chris, then the president of PPFA's Pacific Southwest Chapter, in which they discussed Japanese scrolls and how they were designed with large borders of fabric weighting the top and bottom. Boris and J first decided



Applying the fabric inlays and floating the artworks to create the scrolls.



Using a Dremel tool to carve faux bamboo rods from poplar dowels.



Bonding the scrolls to the fabricated faux bamboo rods.

to convert the four images into miniature scrolls in a Japanese style, thus elevating them into tangible three-dimensional objects rather than two-dimensional images.

The inspiration for the tea house frame came from J's study of the Japanese martial art of Jodo, or Jojutsu, which uses a short wooden staff and is often called "the way of the stick." J's Jodo group meets for training at the Shoseian Tea House in Glendale, CA. Although the Shoseian is not traditional Japanese architecture, the serenity of its environment inspired J to present the competition scrolls in a tea house design. Boris concurred with his idea.

Boris and J started researching tea house architecture, which varies from simple wooden structures to extravagant constructions. Typical features of a Japanese tea house include many windows and sliding doors made of wooden lattice and covered in translucent Japanese paper. This led to a design in which a box frame would have glass side walls. J says, "Serenity was the emotion we wished to convey, so we felt that less facade and more light was the key." Such a choice best supported the visual impression of a miniature tea house rather than something that looked like a traditional shadow-box style frame.

In preparing the art to be made into scrolls, Boris and J started with natural bamboo for the rods. They soon realized that to achieve the desired balance of

this element, without drawing attention away from the art, they had to produce their own faux bamboo rods to control the aesthetics. J started with $\frac{3}{8}$ " poplar dowels and carved them with a Dremel tool. J says, "Once I balanced the location of the nodes, I needed to stain the rods, both to look organic and to work with the color scheme. I used three layers of stain: a dark walnut base, then a honey-oak blend, and a green wash on top before putting on a sealer."

The potential for light to come in from the sides prompted the use of the Jewel silk fabrics from Frank's Fabrics. Their specific texture picks up light from various angles and lent a nice organic nature to the piece. Rather than overlapping the fabrics, J inlaid them, thus eliminating any cast shadow. The resulting smooth transition from one section of fabric to the next supports the illusion that each unit is a continuous scroll.

The beauty of these four artwork prints from the perspective of conservation is that they are small, flat, and printed on a reasonably firm substrate. That made handling quite easy. The real work was in the preparation of the panels on which they are attached. Each scroll panel is made of a layer of Jewel silk bonded to 1-ply rag board. The preferred adhesive in this case was pH-neutral fabric adhesive from Frank's Fabrics. This was used to give the fabrics a firmness before cutting them



Constructing the ceiling and floor panels of the tea house from 8-ply rag and silk fabric.



Checking the gap on the double stacked moulding that creates the roof of the tea house.



Attaching the scroll with filament to the backing, which is also constructed from 8-ply rag and Jewel silk.

into sections for inlay. Once each inlaid piece was cut, they were assembled like a puzzle on top of a 2-ply rag board. The artworks simply fit over the finished panel with a 1-ply rag barrier between.

The roof is the signature element that really gives this project the appearance of a tea house. What made mimicking this concept possible was Omega Moulding's Lucia Collection in Walnut (83349), which was used for the tea house roof. The new design perspective, as well as the combination of classical elements and clean lines, created a modern twist on this furniture-finished moulding profile and made the choice obvious. Double stacking this profile created a beautiful replica of the traditional style of a Japanese tea house roof.

Everyone at Striving Artists is very proud of the company's achievements, not just in this last competition but over the past decade. Under Boris' leadership, the company transformed from a dedicated framing shop to a full service custom framing establishment that also features fine art reproduction and printing. The 2016 PPEA Competition prize is only the latest of more than 20 awards won by Striving Artists. Happy hospitality, interior design, and retail clients across the U.S. and abroad know Striving Artists Art and Framing Services by its trademarked slogan: "We frame anything that can't walk away!" **PFM**