

Frame Design



by Greg Perkins, CPF

Backward is the New Forward

For a few years, we have been hearing the phrases “40 is the new 30” and “orange is the new black.” I have another one to add to the list: “backward is the new forward.” Well, maybe not when driving, but at least when it comes to frame design! Whether working up a design for mats or mouldings, we all have our commonly used techniques. But there are other ways you can use many products in reverse to get a “backward is the new forward” frame design.

There is also a phrase, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” or another, “don’t reinvent the wheel.” Due to that way of thinking, it’s easy to be complacent about the way you do things and keep on doing what you have always done. That may work with your favorite family recipes, but when it comes to

design, you may miss out on something unique if you keep relying on old traditions. It isn’t about anything being broken but rather about offering your customers fresh ideas.

Moulding

Cut a Moulding in Reverse

When you reverse cut a moulding, the outside becomes the inside. When you do this, you get a finished edge that will serve as a decorative element within the design. If the moulding has a sloping outer edge, you will now have a sloping inner edge that will show inside a mat opening or liner. If it has a straight outside edge, it will become a straight inner wall. This can be an ideal solution for shadowboxes instead of using the standard mat strips. It is a wonderful way to



The inner frame was cut in reverse, providing a beautifully finished “box” to highlight this Asian coaster. The inner moulding has approximately 1” of rabbet space. The outer frame has about a 2” rabbet so it is capable of holding all of the contents within the frame.

elevate the appearance of your design. An outer frame will still be required, cut the usual way, to hold the complete framing package together.

Cut Fillet in Reverse

The finished portion of a fillet usually is intended to show inside a mat opening or inside the lip of a moulding. Because fillets do not have a rabbet, they can’t be used to frame art—unless they are cut in reverse and can then look like narrow frames. But they will still have a means of holding glass so they will require a second frame for that purpose. The difference between regular and reverse-cut fillets is very subtle, but they do project the art forward, rather than it being recessed behind a mat or frame opening, which provides a nice change.

Stacking Over a Frame

The most common way mouldings are stacked

Looking for new, fashion-forward looks? Try taking a new approach by using framing products in reverse



Rather than sitting behind the mat, this fillet was cut in reverse and it sits in front of it. When using this treatment, the fillet looks like a narrow frame, but without a rabbet it is still just a decorative accessory.



This art is placed into a shallow cap profile and that frame was then recessed into a floater with a slightly wider and deeper profile. This combination makes for a very dramatic deep space between the two mouldings.



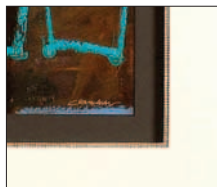
This frame is quite shallow. By turning a floater upside down and attaching it to the back of the frame, the depth increased to the necessary size to hold all of the contents.



The darker frame is attached to the front of the wider burl frame. The additional rabbit depth this technique provides wasn't needed here, but the appearance was desired. The dark frame has beaded inner and outer edges that are symmetrical and therefore look best when it all shows.



Although fabric and other patterned mats are beautiful, there are times when you won't want to see that much texture. On the other hand, just a hint of it showing under a plain mat can add just the right touch to create a more upscale look.



This look projects the art images forward rather than pushing them deeper behind the main mat. Each layer of mat has beveled outside edges, providing a finished look. Since this design pushes the art up against the glass, you will either need to use mat strips or, in this case, stacked mouldings to place the glass between the two frames so it is lifted away from the art.

together is with one fitting into the lip of another. For a different look, you can reverse that order and place what would have been the inner frame on top of what would have been the outer frame. Doing this can serve two purposes. First, it increases the available rabbit depth, and second, it provides a more dimensional look from the front. This can be a helpful technique when framing canvases with deep bars or objects but may also be used just for a unique look.

Unexpected Floater Frames

The original intent of a floater is to

drop a canvas in from the front so the entire surface of the art shows. Sometimes, we see a second frame placed around the floater to provide additional style or scale. For a change of pace, you can reverse the order by immediately surrounding the canvas with a frame and then adding the float around it. This may come in handy if the outer edges of the canvas are slightly bowed or are messy with paint. The deep recess between the first frame and the floater also bring a very dynamic look to the design.

Turn the Floater Over

Another alternative with a floater is to turn it face down instead of using it face up. When used in this manner, it can become an extender to turn a shallow frame into a shadowbox. This technique means you have the ability to sell far more of your frames as shadowboxes rather than just those frames intended for that purpose.



The inner frame surrounding the painting on canvas is sitting on top of the mat. The mat is linen and was mounted to foamboard so it is fully capable of being used without glass over it.



The color of this inlay mat was carefully selected to allow the moulding to show and to coordinate with it so, to a degree, it becomes an extension of the frame and appears more substantial than its very petite profile.



With the strength of the triple mat directing attention to the art, it is a nice extra touch to add a V-groove near the frame. This is just one example of something you can do to give the frame designs at your shop a different look.

Matting

Place a Fabric Mat Under a Paper Surfaced Mat

When you have a customer willing to spend the extra dollars for a fabric or patterned mat, you would commonly show the whole thing as your primary mat. But, by reversing the order, you can get a very sophisticated look that is perhaps more refined. It is interesting to see just a hint of the texture or pattern peeking out from a plainer mat.

Multiple Mats Stacked Up, Not Back

We are accustomed to using double and triple mats, with the accent borders showing behind or below the primary top mat. For a change, you can take a solid mat without a window and add layers of smaller mats in front of it, with the art sitting atop the pile. The outer edges of these pieces look best when they have beveled edges showing so the mat steps gracefully down from one to the next.

A Mat Around the Outside of the Frame?

It might be surprising but, yes, there is a way to place the mat outside the frame. If you are framing something

like a painting on canvas or a mirror, you usually don't have an opportunity to use a mat. One way you can do it is to choose a fabric mat that will stand up to the elements and not need to be behind glass. Mount the matboard to foamboard for extra rigidity. Measure from the outside edge of the framed canvas and add the desired border. You can place glue on the back of the frame and center it over the fabric mat, allowing it to dry in place. As an added precaution, you can screw through the foamboard and mat into the back of the frame. Once these steps are complete, place this package into the outer frame.

Add V-grooves Close to the Outer Edge

V-grooves are usually placed close to the mat window as a way of creating a bolder border near the mat opening to help keep the viewer focused on the art. If you already have a contrasting double or triple mat to solve that problem, you can do it backwards and place a V-groove closer to the frame. This can add a subtle detail to dress up your frame designs.

Do the Same with an Inlay

An inlay is another technique typically

only used near the mat opening. Try doing this one backward. When the frame with the best finish color or style is a bit narrower than you'd like but is a better choice than wider mouldings, inlay a similar mat color on the outer edge of the mat that can give the impression of a wider moulding. This only works when the narrow frame is substantial enough to support all the framing contents without worry.

Review

Most of these ideas take no more time than using them the usual way. The point is to have additional items in your arsenal to sell to your customers. Each one has a time and place. Hopefully, these examples will help you and your customers see the benefits of using them. **PFM**

Interested in learning more about frame design? Greg will be leading several seminars at this year's National Conference.

Greg Perkins, CPF, is in his 44th year in the framing industry. Starting out as a retailer, he worked at Larson-Juhl for 24 years and is now an industry consultant, focusing on frame design and retailing. In addition to teaching at The National Conference, Greg is also an author, contributing editor, industry educator, and artist. He can be contacted at gregperkinsconsulting@outlook.com or 770-842-2028.