



PUSHING THE RIGHT DESIGN BUTTONS

By Peter Beck

Peter Beck of the Wall Street Gallery, winner of the 2017 PPFA International Framing Print Category, drew inspiration from a close-knit team of framers.

The Wall Street Gallery in Madison, Conn., has been a successful frame shop on the Connecticut shoreline and pillar of the local arts community for 40 years. Owned and run by Jim Reinhart, CPF, the WSG has been in business since 1974. The shop offers all the traditional corner samples, but what makes it so unique is its constantly growing line of hand-finished mouldings. At any given time, there are a variety of moulding ideas being worked on in the woodworking shop. A close-knit team consists of framing veterans, dedicated fitters, artists, and two friendly shop dogs.

Peter Beck has been a valued part of the WSG team since 2012. For the past 15 years, Beck has been honing his technique to become a masterful framer. Having worked for several frame shops from Rye, N.H., to Hartford, Conn., he has been continually striving to improve his picture framing. His previous experience in different shops has led him to become an excellent craftsman. The Wall Street Gallery is where he has taken his creativity and design to the next level. Working with his mentor, Reinhart, has allowed Beck to combine his knack for precision and order with a new level of creativity and an ability to step outside of the traditional frame.

The challenge for the 2017 PPFA Print Competition was to frame seven distinct, vintage buttons. The buttons on Beck's winning frame design were found by Reinhart



The winning combination: an original, handcrafted frame, understated elegance, and harmonious composition.

at Tender Buttons in New York City, a shop dedicated solely to selling unique and vintage buttons. With the buttons chosen, Beck then had to determine the best way to highlight and complement them without the design being overwhelming.

The buttons, made of bone, look natural and earthy, with muted brown colors and simple tribal-like designs. Knowing that the buttons are dark, Beck decided a lighter fabric would make them pop but still chose colors derived from the buttons to create a harmonious blend between the subject and the background. The raw silk wrapped spacer was incorporated to add depth, reiterate the rectangle of the frame, and further draw the eye inward to the buttons. Juxtaposed against the repeated rectangles of the frame and spacer, the seven buttons are united within an



The addition of a custom beveled liner gave the depth needed to accommodate the buttons.



The frame, milled at the shop, is an original Wall Street Gallery design.

embossed oval, a subtle shape for the eye to follow.

For the frame, Beck considered several different options: tribal motifs, rubber stamping, incised and carved patterns, effects created with bleach, and lighter and darker brown colors. With the WSG's experience of having entered competitions over the years, the most challenging aspect is walking the fine line between exciting the judges and overwhelming the judges and/or artwork.

Beck chose to steer clear of more excessive and busy frames, aiming for a subtle, understated frame that would capture the essence of the buttons versus an obvious reiteration of the button's patterns. Beck chose to reflect the chunky, masculine nature of these buttons with a heavy wooden frame—an original WSG moulding designed by fellow framer Justin Brander. Rustic and hand-milled, the moulding helped highlight the nature themes in the piece. By using a WSG original moulding, Beck was able to customize the tones of the frame to match the buttons and modify the profile to accommodate the depth.

The frame was milled from raw oak on a table saw and sent through a shaper to give it a custom WSG-designed profile. The 3/4", 1-1/2" deep frame was then



A closer look at the fabric mat and silk wrapped liner.

clamped to another piece of wood to bring it to shadow-box depth to accommodate the buttons. After the frame was cut and joined, it went back to the table saw for a

back bevel cut for the side wall, completing the profile. The beveled cut added depth to the frame while making it appear less massive; the bevel also gave the illusion that the piece was floating on the wall.

After sanding, the frame was applied with two different aniline wood dyes. The inner and outer edges and side walls were dyed with Ebony while the inner channel was dyed with English

Brown Oak. The dye was rubbed with a damp cloth to add a subtle highlight to the inner channel and allow more of the wood grain to show through. Afterward, the frame was sealed with a satin acrylic spray, waxed, and then buffed for completion.

The top mat was cut with a normal bevel and wrapped in Gold Dust from Frank's Fabrics, then set on top of the liner. The liner was milled out of raw wood with an inward sloping bevel, then wrapped in 100 percent silk Pewter from Frank's Fabrics. The fabric on the liner is cooler-toned, but ties in to the middle button, which is black and white. The weave of the fabrics mimics



Beck chose a subtle look when framing the buttons, aiming to balance colors and composition without distracting from the subject.

the texture and striations in the buttons. The bottom mat, embossed with an oval, was also wrapped in Gold Dust.

Next, Beck wanted to position the buttons in a way that was visually pleasing. The shapes of the buttons played a large part in their arrangement. With five round buttons, one diamond-shaped, and the other hand-



Wall Street Gallery's Jim Reinhart, seen here in the workshop, has served as a mentor to Beck.

shaped, Beck came up with a balanced design to incorporate the two differently shaped buttons. The five circular buttons were grouped together in the middle with the diamond and hand buttons above and below. The center button, half black and half white, creates a horizon line for the whole composition.

"I wanted to bring them all together with an embossed oval mat, and that board is what I used to mount the buttons," Beck says.

Using a perfect mount board, also called PSX, he cut an oval opening in the board. Keeping the top release paper on the oval cut mat, he then applied fabric glue on

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Beck (from left), Justin Brander, and Reinhart show off the winning frame design outside Wall Street Gallery.

the mat's bevel. Giving the mat some time to set up, he then added another piece of PSX and removed the release paper on both boards, joining them together. After the

boards were together, the fabric was lightly placed on the board and then placed into a vacuum press.

The buttons were attached with hemp and nylon cords, which were sewn through the board and attached on the back part of the mat. Nylon gaskets of 1/8" were placed between the buttons and the mat to create the illusion of floating. To protect the whole package, Beck chose Tru Vue Museum Glass for its optical clarity and anti-reflective qualities.

Beck's goal was to create a thematically cohesive piece that would showcase the talent and artisanship of the gallery. Winning the print competition was a huge validation for his hard work. The folks at the Wall Street Gallery are always challenging themselves with new ideas and techniques and taking every opportunity to grow as framers.

"I am blown away with the creative minds of the picture framing artists that I work with," says Beck. **PFM**

Peter Beck has been framing for 15 years in various locations from New Hampshire to Connecticut, currently sharing his talents with the Wall Street Gallery in Madison, CT. When he's not framing, Pete enjoys rollerblading, spending time with his family, and cheering on his son at basketball games.



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