



By Kimberly Biesiada

There is only one place where a framing retailer can take classes led by renowned industry experts, visit over 100 vendors to shop for the full gamut of materials and equipment, and foster connections with fellow framing professionals from around the world: The West Coast Art and Frame Expo and The National Conference.

Thousands of attendees gathered in Las Vegas from Jan. 26-29 for the 21st annual Expo. For the first time, the Expo was held at the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino, which boasts a state-of-the-art convention facility that includes a 95,000-square-foot exhibit space, registration rotunda, open-air patio, and 40,000 square feet of dedicated educational space. The layout made it easy for attendees to walk the show floor, where they could find every product needed in the framing business—from moulding, matboard, and artwork to cutters, joiners, printers, software, and much more.

The excitement was palpable on the floor, in the classrooms, and throughout the halls during this four-day event, the largest and most comprehensive in the industry. The success of the show is evident in the high number of vendors and buyers who make the WCAF Expo a can't-miss event year after year.

“There is only one show that is a must if you want to saturate yourself in the fine art reproduction, decor, and framing markets: The WCAF Expo,” said Gary Barker, national sales manager at Digital Technology Group. “We continue to exhibit every year because the quality of the show is unmatched. We find the buyers are eager to learn through the education opportunities offered here, and they come to invest in their business with new products and technology. For our business, the WCAF Expo sets the standard for excellence in what a trade show should offer exhibitors and attendees alike.”

THE EXPO

Truly an international show, the Expo welcomed attendees from 47 countries across five continents. Those attendees could meet with and buy from over 130 exhibitors, most of whom have exhibited at the WCAF Expo for 10 or more years. There were plenty of new faces on the floor, too; the Expo welcomed 22 first-time exhibiting companies this year, further expanding its offerings.

“The WCAF Expo was tremendous—easily the best show in years,” said Josh Eichner, executive VP of Framerica.

“We saw quality attendees ready to buy as well as designers and specifiers in search of our new and exciting profiles and finishes. We wrote a lot of orders on the upgraded show floor and enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with our industry friends. Framercia believes in the show and understands its benefit. We can’t wait to go back next year.”

Craft Inc. kicked off its 70th year in business at the WCAF Expo. There, the company showcased its new SpringLOCK line of security hangers along with its best-selling product lines. Sales Manager Adam Ruthowski said the move from the Paris Las Vegas Hotel and Casino to the Rio was “exactly what this show needed.”

“The closer proximity of classes to the trade show floor allowed for more foot traffic from the attendees,” he added. “From the first day to the last day, we were very busy with educated buyers.”

Exhibiting companies were able to connect with current and potential customers, hear feedback on their products, and convert leads into sales—all in one place. Studio Moulding’s products were met with high praise from buyers, said Jeff Hebblewhite, director of sales for the company.

“This year’s WCAF Expo went extraordinarily well for Studio Moulding,” he said. “We were pleased to see so many old and new friends during three very consistent days in our booth. The Expo provided an invaluable opportunity to showcase our entire line in an environment connected with engaged customers.”

Attach-EZ enjoyed similar success. President and CEO Pat Kotnour said buyers were plentiful and motivated. “We

sold out of just about everything we brought with us,” she said. “What made it even better was getting to lead a sold-out class—it was a lot of fun.”

Meeting with vendors, seeing new products, and ordering samples were among the top reasons attendees gave for coming to the show. For many retailers, the industry event is the one time of year when they can foster valuable new business connections face-to-face.

“The WCAF Expo gives us the opportunity to see new products and talk to vendors,” said Maralee Johnson, owner of Johnson’s Custom Photography in Flora, IL. “Although many of the items can be purchased online, it is so helpful to actually see things in person. We have also found many products we didn’t know existed.”

Johnson, who has been coming to the show for over a decade, said she discovered products like Pro Tapes’ UGlu Removable Adhesive Tape. “It has worked perfectly in a number of situations already,” she added. She also learned new uses for her Attach-EZ equipment.

“It’s a great way to keep on top of things in the industry and to get new ideas and products to implement in your business,” Johnson said.

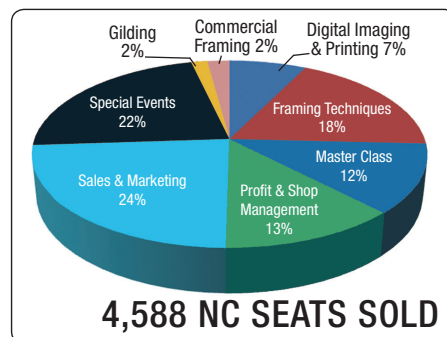
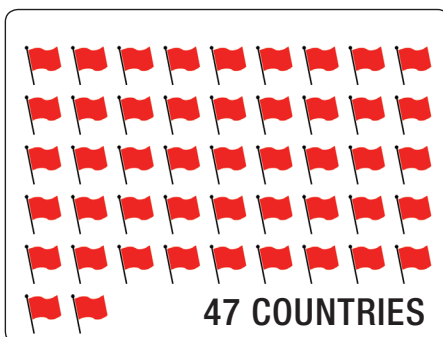
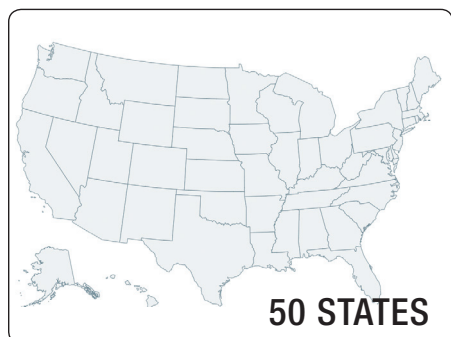
David Leingang, of Carden Custom Framing in Bismarck, ND, attended the show as a newcomer to the industry. Having recently bought a 30-year-old framing business, he was eager to learn from vendors and peers. Leingang went home with industry connections, design ideas, and a new Epson SureColor SC-P5000 printer.

The biggest lesson he learned? “To look outside the box and start to update the way we do things and the products we supply our customers,” he said.

“The WCAF Expo sets the standard for excellence in what a trade show should offer.”

Gary Barker, DTG

ATTENDANCE BY THE NUMBERS



MAMMOTH MOULDING SAMPLE

☆ Framera ☆

Framera's new booth design featured a larger-than-life frame sample that made a big statement on the show floor. This 104" x 187" behemoth was impossible to miss, and was bold, exciting, and fun—everything we've come to expect from Framera.



JAY GOLTZ UNPLUGGED

☆ 5 Real Secrets to Making More Money in the Framing Business ☆

Goltz, an industry luminary and perennially popular instructor, isn't known for holding back, and his new keynote session was no different. Goltz was honest, frank, and insightful as he revealed his path to boosted profits. Attendees came away with an action plan to get their businesses on the right track to lasting success.



LIVELY IN-BOOTH EVENT

☆ Crescent ☆

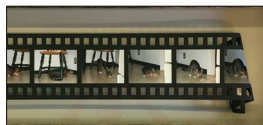
To celebrate the Crescent Rewards program, retailers mingled with peers and enjoyed food and drinks during a special show event hosted by the company. Attendees said it was a great way to cap off a busy Tuesday and share their successes with the free app, which helps retailers earn rewards with every Crescent matboard.



UNFORGETTABLE DINING

☆ VooDoo Steak ☆

Set on the 50th floor of the Rio, this hotspot is beloved by locals and visitors alike and quickly became a favorite of WCAF attendees. From the breathtaking rooftop views to the prime steaks, this restaurant is one we'll be returning to in 2021.



AWARD-WINNING DESIGN

☆ PPFA Competition ☆

Framers flexed their creative muscles by competing in the 2019-20 International Framing Competition. Renate Eschmann and Christopher Soltis's PRINT piece and Christine Hasenmund's OPEN piece blew the judges away, earning first place in each category.

BUZZWORTHY SESSION

☆ 60 Minutes to a More Profitable Website ☆

This new breakfast session, sponsored by Crescent and led by Matt Weber, national trainer in the Grow with Google program, was met with rave reviews. It was clear why Weber is sought-after by businesses around the globe as he covered specific website enhancements retailers could make immediately to multiply their sites' value and effectiveness.



ROCKIN' NIGHT OUT

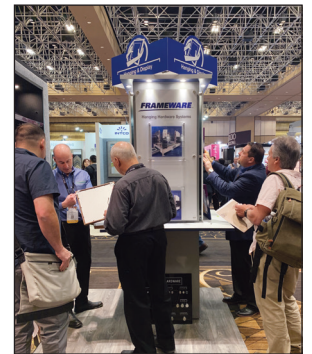
☆ PFM 30th Anniversary Party ☆

We may be biased, but the PFM staff weren't the only ones having a blast at the magazine's anniversary party, which celebrated three decades of serving the picture framing industry. From a sumptuous spread of food and beverages to a caricature artist, social media photo wall, and a live entertainer who performed hits by Elvis, Frank Sinatra, Willie Nelson and more, this sold-out event was one for the books.

OPEN-CONCEPT DESIGN

☆ Fletcher Business Group ☆

Visitors to the FBG booth got up close and personal with the equipment on display. The frame joining and cutting experts created a well-thought-out open booth concept and an interactive kiosk area that allowed customers to see and feel their latest products before buying.



TEAM SPIRIT

☆ Wizard ☆

From bright-green, Astroturf-like flooring to overhead pennants, everyone who stepped into Wizard's booth caught the team spirit. The creative design was a favorite among attendees.

WCAF EXPO HIGHLIGHTS

BIG ANNOUNCEMENT

☆ Omega Moulding ☆

During the show, the Omega Moulding team announced that the company has purchased the assets of Max Moulding of Los Angeles and Atlanta. The happy news meant new product lines and amazing show-only deals for customers.



NEW PANEL FORMAT

☆ Successful Retailing Panel ☆

PFM's annual Successful Retailing Panel, a longtime conference favorite, introduced a fresh format this year. After an in-depth interview between Jay Goltz and Loren Feldman—CCO of 21 Hats, former editor at the New York Times, Inc., and Forbes—business owners were chosen from the audience to take center stage and share stories of their successes and pitfalls.



PINK IS THE NEW BLACK

☆ World Art Group ☆

As a global leader in art publishing, World Art Group always brings plenty of swoon-worthy artwork to showcase in their booth, from traditional to contemporary pieces. We've fallen for their signature magenta hue, too, which adds energy and sparks of creative inspiration to the shopping experience.



FABULOUS FIELD TRIPS

☆ Photo Walks ☆

Ever dreamed of shooting frame-worthy landscape or low-light photos? Attendees did just that on a series of exclusive offsite tours to top destinations like Valley of Fire and The Museum at Count's Kustoms. Experienced photographers and beginners alike captured stunning images while learning from professionals in the field.



Session topics ranged from framing techniques, design trends, and retailing strategies to marketing, social media, and more.

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Running in conjunction with the Expo is The National Conference, the industry's leading educational program, which offers innovative seminars and hands-on workshops from experts in their field. The conference featured over 30 new offerings this year, most of which were sold to capacity.

With so many sessions to choose from, retailers are guaranteed to walk away with profit- and efficiency-boosting ideas they can implement in their business immediately. Sara Payne, owner of Artisan Custom Framing in Mill Creek, WA and first-time conference attendee, took sessions that focused on business and technology, including "Jay Goltz Unplugged: 5 Real Secrets to Making More Money in the Framing Business." Goltz's session was Payne's favorite at the conference; she plans to align her pricing strategy with what she learned there.

"The knowledge I gained was powerful, and I want to continue to grow in my business," Payne said. "I never want to be stuck only knowing one solution to a problem. The National Conference gave me so many new ideas."

With all the technological and marketplace changes in recent years, business veterans have as much to gain as newcomers by attending the conference. After more than a decade of experiences at The National Conference, Melissa Nielsen, owner of Imperial Frame Gallery, Inc. in North Palm Beach, FL, considers her annual trip to Las Vegas an essential investment in the continued health of her business. Her standout session of the year? "Improving the Profitability of your Business," led by Wayne Baker, MCPF.

"If you care about your business, invest in yourself, your employees, and your business! Attend!" Nielsen said.

Attendees could also choose from a lineup of special offsite sessions. Among the most popular offerings were guided tours of Las Vegas Market, led by Ginger Hartford, CPF, and John Ranes II, CPF, GCF.

Another hot pick among attendees was "Great Frame Shops with Great Ideas," led by Jared Davis, MCPF, GCF. "His use of visuals and his experience with just getting to tour so many different shops is invaluable," said Maria White, manager of Scanlon Gallery in Ketchikan, AK. "Seeing cool things that other shops are doing sparked a lot of ideas."

Among the ideas White plans to use in her own business is the use of magnets when framing artwork. Beyond staying up-to-date on technical and design advancements, White said attending the industry's most comprehensive educational event is also a useful trust-building tool she uses with customers.

Claudine Bogart, owner of Frame Depot in Grand Junction, CO, was similarly inspired by the innovations framing retailers are making that set them apart from the competition. Bogart, who has been attending the show since its inception 21 years ago, said that "Seeing all the cool things we can do is energizing."

"I brought two new employees that are new to the industry; they both learned a lot and are still excited about what they learned," she added. "I am loving the ideas they are presenting now that we are back home."

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

The WCAF Expo and The National Conference will return to the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas Jan. 24-27, 2021, with The National Conference starting Jan. 25.

"The creativity, desire for excellence, and passion for the industry from both attendees and exhibitors alike never ceases to amaze me," said Deborah Salmon, trade show director. "It is so rewarding to be part of an event that assists and inspires attendees to take their businesses to the next level. Even in this highly connected world, nothing beats the growth and networking opportunities only available at an industry event. Our team is already working on new ideas and topics for WCAF Expo 2021." **PFM**



Attendees chose from over 20 hands-on workshops that covered everything from fabric wrapping to gilding.