



Courtesy of Situ Art Lighting

PICTURE LIGHTS: A BRIGHT IDEA FOR BOOSTED HOLIDAY SALES

By Kimberly Biesiada

With the winter holiday season fast approaching, many custom framing retailers are busy ordering stock, refreshing store displays, and marketing the concept of framing as the perfect gift for friends and family. One useful way to boost profits during this time is to promote accessory, or add-on, items to your customers.

Picture lights fit perfectly into this idea; designed to enhance the presentation of framed artwork, they come in a

variety of sizes, styles, and finishes and add a “wow” factor to all types of pieces, from traditional oil on canvas to modern digital prints. This month, we spoke with some of the industry’s leading suppliers to learn more about what to look for when buying a picture light, which profiles are popular in today’s market, and how framing retailers can entice their customers to invest in lighting.

COMPARING PICTURE LIGHTS

From size to bulb type to power source, picture lights can vary widely. The product that’s right for you will depend on your framing design, the type of art being framed, and your customer’s preferences.

It’s important to consider the kind of light a system is using. Historically, incandescent, halogen, and fluorescent bulbs were used in lighting systems. In today’s market, many systems instead use light emitted from an LED (light-emitting diode). LEDs are energy-efficient and do not emit ultraviolet rays that can fade or damage artwork; a big advantage over its predecessors. While early models earned a reputation for emitting cool, bluish light—less than ideal for illuminating something like a painting—LEDs have become more sophisticated and no longer present the same issues with color.

Today, LEDs offer myriad benefits when used in picture lights, said Jordan Minges, president of Situ Art Lighting in Naples, FL. “LEDs allow us to do a few things. The first is artwork safety; we can do things that are UV- and infrared-safe.



● Picture lights are often purchased in a finish that matches the frame, blending into the presentation. Courtesy of House of Troy



● Picture lights come in a range of styles. Courtesy of Concept Picture Lights

You're able to get a better quality of light across the board without any of those downsides. The second thing is that they've enabled us to make fixtures that are literally fractions of the size of what they used to be. To us, that's the biggest deal. Things are moving throughout life to more streamlined designs; we're trying to make everything as small as we can. People want that in their lighting as well. And LEDs are absolutely what enables that."

Another factor to consider when comparing products is how they are powered. Most picture lights fall into one of three main categories:

Plug-in — Like a household lamp, this type of picture light can be plugged into a regular outlet, meaning it can be repositioned fairly easily down the line if desired. **Direct wire** — These lights are hardwired into a home's electrical feed, resulting in a clean, permanent look. Often requires an electrician to install. **Wireless** (rechargeable) — Lights that use battery power are easy to relocate and can be good solutions in places where other power sources aren't available. No visible wires add a clean look that's similar to direct-wire lights, but batteries must be replaced.

Each type has its advantages; wireless lights may appeal to customers who loathe the idea of running a cord to an outlet, while customers who plan to have their light on daily may be better served by a plug-in model.

"Everything is a compromise," Minges said. "You can't have wireless without recharging or changing the batteries. You can't have a plug-in without the outlet in the wall. It's always about understanding your customer and what set of compromises they want to make."

While sizing is not an exact science, a good rule of thumb is to find a light that is roughly one-third to one-half the width of the artwork. Lights should be positioned at a 30-degree angle to the art to minimize glare.

STYLES AND FINISHES

Much like picture frames, picture lights are manufactured in different profiles and finishes to suit both traditional and modern tastes. While popular colors have remained fairly steady over time—you won't find huge demand for fire-engine-red lights—some manufacturers have noticed an uptick in requests for certain products in recent years.

Black picture lights are growing in popularity, said Sandra Wallace, vice president-general manager of American Lighting Brands, Inc. Several lighting brands fall under the company's umbrella, including House of Troy in Hyde Park, VT, which manufactures picture lights. The company's nickel and gold finishes remain all-time favorites.

In terms of profiles, styles old and new are enjoying popularity; it all comes down to the customer's taste. "We have a lot of frame shops that see mostly traditional artwork and really push our traditional lights," Wallace said. "But in different areas of the country, we see really sleek, slim-lined, modern styles. What's important is knowing your clientele: what kind of people are you catering to?"

There are also two schools of

thought when it comes to the visibility of the light fixture itself: those who want a light to blend into a frame, effectively disappearing from view, and those who want a more noticeable light that becomes part of the framing.

"Almost all our customers want something discreet," Minges said. "They want it to match the frame. That being said, it gets down to style and design [...] By going with something that matches the frame, you have a discreet option. By going with an accent piece, you have something that's of high contrast and changes a little bit of the feel of that piece of artwork."

Like Wallace, Minges said he has seen "a big pickup" in black fixtures, while classic finishes like brass and antique bronze remain best-sellers.

SELLING PICTURE LIGHTS

When you think of picture lights, a traditional, oil-on-canvas painting might come to mind. While lights are certainly still used for that genre of artwork, just about anything that can be framed could benefit from the proper illumination a light fixture provides, from mixed-media works to prints on metal.



● Black picture lights have been rising in popularity. Courtesy of Situ Art Lighting

Murari Sharma, owner of Concept Picture Lights in Gaithersburg, MD, has seen his lights being used over framed maps and lithographs as well as paintings. Much like framing retailers, picture light manufacturers also see an increase in orders in fall and winter as the sun begins to set earlier in the day and the weather turns colder, sending people indoors more often.

"I've been doing this for 20 years, and it's like clockwork," Sharma said. "Once the time changes at this time of year, sales jump up like crazy. Then in the spring, when the time changes back and people are spending more time outside, sales go back down. It's very cyclical."

This is good news for retailers looking to boost their profits around the holidays; customers walking in the door are more inclined to invest in lighting now than they would be in, say, the middle of summer. In terms of generating interest, Sharma recommends displaying an example of a lit, framed piece in your shop. Even more effective than that, he said, is showing a customer what their specific piece would look like with lighting before wrapping it up for them to take home.

"If they can figure out a way to put [the project] under a picture light

at that time, that piques a lot of interest from the customer," Sharma said. "Especially because no light versus having a light—there's a world of difference. People notice that right away."

Sharma added that it is "extremely common" to see repeat customers; once they invest in their first picture light, they will often want more for other artwork on their walls.

Another benefit of adding picture lights to your repertoire? They're often a last-minute purchase, according to Wallace. She echoed the importance of having an in-store example, which often prompts customers to realize a light would make their own piece stand out.

"It makes it more personal if they actually see something illuminated and realize, 'You know what? It's not really expensive. I could afford this,'" she said. "It is definitely an impulse item."

House of Troy offers small displays with sample chips that showcase their different finishes. The kits also serve as an easy reference guide for retailers to calculate what size light their customer needs based on the size of their art. Situ also offers digital resources for retailers on its website; tools include a size calcula-



● Small, discreet fixtures from Situ Lighting

tor and filters to narrow down a few top choices within your desired style.

Minges, who also recommends having an example in your store, said he's seen a technique that has proven highly effective for one of his retail customers; they lend wireless lights to clients they trust, letting them use it on their artwork at home for a week before returning it. "That's been an excellent sales tool for them," he said.

Just like any other framing product, there is an investment required before you can successfully sell picture lights to your customers. If you are looking to grow your profits as you gear up for the holiday season, these fixtures could be the perfect solution.

As Minges put it; "I think the biggest thing is to decide how much you really want to push the product. We have some very small framers who sell three, four, five times as many as larger framers. And to us, that's a customer who has their sales presentation dialed in. Framers absolutely can sell a lot of art lighting—we see it. But you have to want to." **PFM**



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