



Adding a custom antique black finish can provide a perfect finishing touch for Dutch frames—as well as many other profiles

An antique black finish adds a real sense of authenticity to this reproduction Dutch frame.

A Ripple Frame

Throughout my 40-odd years of frame making, people have always wanted a great antique black picture frame. I can go back to 1967, when my late partner, Henry Rothman, and I were making antique black picture frames out of very simple modernist mouldings from a local mill. I also remember getting my first lengths of pre-gessoed Braque mouldings from Abe Munn when his shop was in Chelsea. We had bought the Braque mouldings for gilded picture frames, but the gesso was so smooth and beautiful (because it had been extruded) that I had to try it with an antique black finish. That led me to putting antique black finishes on all of our contemporary shapes. And finally, that brought me back to Dutch/Flemish profiles, which traditionally have been done with ebonized wood finishes.

The Dutch key corner frame, whose construction was covered in the January issue, is a perfect profile for applying an antique black finish. This particular profile is a similar 4” Dutch moulding frame with ripple ornamentation.



Dutch profile with compo ripple ornamentation added.

The first step in creating this finish was to cut and join the frame and apply the gesso. In this case, we started with a pre-gessoed Dutch moulding, part of the Concerto line. At Goldleaf Framemakers, we also spray on most of our substrate. In this case we sprayed on red clay. You can also substitute burnt sienna casein paint for this step if you prefer. After that, to seal the clay (or paint), you can apply one or two coats of good old Bulls Eye Shellac, using a 70 percent shellac, 30 percent denatured alcohol blend.

At that point, you are ready to paint the frame. The paint I use is black Supersaturated Rosco paint thinned



The gessoed Dutch moulding, cut and joined, after the compo elements have been applied.

Finish

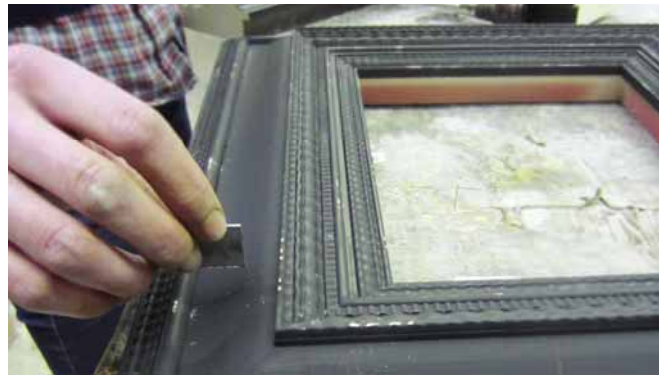
By Marty Horowitz



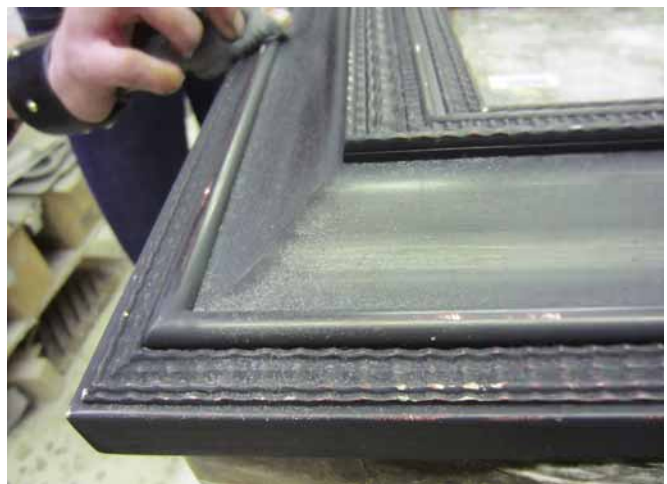
The frame after the red clay undercoat was sprayed on and a thinned shellac sealer was applied.



Once the frame is prepared, black supersaturated Rosco paint is brushed on..



"Cracks" in the finish created with a razor blade are one of many aging techniques that can be used to create a more historically accurate look. You can also replicate wormholes with awl or ice pick and add small scrapes and dents with a rasp.



The tops of each rail should then be rubbed with steel wool to bring up the red color from underneath.

with water (50 percent water, 50 percent paint). This paint, as with all the Rosco caseins and supersaturates, is used predominately for set design. But then a lot of materials used in the picture framing business aren't made for frame making but come from artisans in the theater and sign painting or from fine artists and printmakers. In this case, the supersaturated paint works well because it absorbs light and provides a great dead black finish.

After the frame is painted, it is then time to distress the surface of the moulding. You need to replicate wormholes, chips, dents, and the natural cracking of the gessoed surface by using an awl or ice pick, a rasp, and a razor blade. The next step is to abrade the paint surface with steel wool to bring out the beautiful red clay color from underneath. My preference is to use Liberon steel wool because there's no oil in it. Once that is complete, you need to seal the frame again with shellac.

After the shellac has dried, the frame should be glazed with asphaltum. This product comes from the printmaking craft and is traditionally used as a resist for etching copper and zinc plates in intaglio printmaking. In frame making, you use asphaltum as a glaze to add depth and a warm glow. Before applying it, first mix the asphaltum 50/50 with mineral spirits or naphtha. Brush this mixture on the surface and then pull it back with a cotton rag.

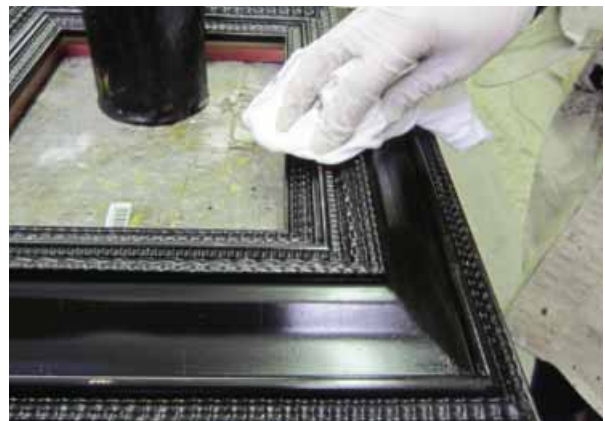
Once the asphaltum has dried completely, the next job is to add a couple hundred years of age to the look of the frame. This is done by mixing up a warm wash made from Rosco Iddings Deep Colors casein paint. The base for the mix is raw umber. To that you add about 10 percent burnt sienna and just a touch of white. This mixture is then thinned with water so that it's just a little bit thicker than translucent in color (70 percent water, 30 percent paint). Brush the wash on and then tamp it with cotton waste or cheesecloth if cotton waste isn't available.

After that's dry, pull most of the wash off the surface using steel wool and black patinating wax. When the wax is firm, buff the surface with a cotton rag. Then, to add another hundred years to the look, hit it with dust—a mixture of rottenstone and pumice. This mixture should be the same color as cigarette ash. Buff the frame again, and you've got it!

The best thing about this finish is that it looks great on many different types of frames, but it works especially well on Dutch ripple frames, where it provides a very authentic period look. ■



After the paint is applied and the distressing is done, the frame is then sealed with shellac.



Asphaltum is then applied to the frame with a cotton rag.



A warm wash made from casein paint is then applied and tamped with cotton waste or cheesecloth until dry. A little more steel wooling, then black patinating wax is applied and buffed. A little rottenstone and pumice dust adds the final touch.



Marty Horowitz has held high-level positions at many New York City frame manufacturers, including Kulicke Picture Frames. He formed Rothman & Horowitz with Henry Rothman in 1980 and, in 1988, Goldleaf Framemakers of Santa Fe. He first pursued gilding as part of his artwork. His work has been exhibited in numerous group shows, and several of his pieces are in museums. He has participated in the Seattle Art Fair and the Chicago Navy Pier Show and has shown at the the Linda Durham Contemporary Art Gallery and Peyton Wright Gallery in Santa Fe.



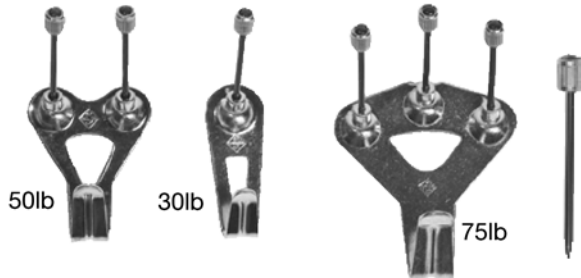
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