

# A 'Must Attend' Event

## 2013 West Coast Art & Frame Expo and National Conference

By Amy Sudol

**T**housands of industry professionals gathered at this year's West Coast Art & Frame Expo and National Conference, and the atmosphere was overwhelmingly positive. Undeniably, the crowd of leading vendors, suppliers, and retailers from around the world discovered a wealth of information that will fuel business growth for the year to come. New trends came to light, innovative products were introduced, and design ideas flourished at the show, held January 27-30 at the Mirage Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. Yet again, the WCAF Expo received rave reviews, a testament to its status as the leading industry event. Collectively, the scores of new products, innovative design trends, and educational seminars offered a

firsthand look at what's to come in the art and framing industry. As William Bounds of William Bounds Custom Framing and Gallery in Burlington, WA, said, "The National Conference and Trade Show is a 'must attend' for anyone in the art and framing business!"

A 'must attend,' indeed. "The annual WCAF Expo and National Conference is the premier industry forum," said Deborah Salmon, WCAF Trade Show Director. "It's the only event that brings together retailers, manufacturers, suppliers, art publishers, and other industry professionals to cultivate common interests and catch up on the latest news, with the ultimate goal of succeeding in business."

As with last year, the number of international participants grew exponentially. Attendees from 30 countries,



*There was solid interest in new equipment at the show, including at the Fletcher-Terry booth, which also included AMP saws and joiners, part of the expanding line that resulted from the recent merger of the two companies.*



*Moulding manufacturers, such as Omega, unveiled numerous new profiles at the show, focusing on helping framers create new designs.*

including the Czech Republic, the U.K., and South Korea, offered new and refreshing viewpoints, portending future areas of business opportunity. "This year's show exceeded what we had hoped for," said Bernard Ruhl of Peterboro Matboards in Peterborough, ON.

"The international component was very strong, as we had visitors from over 20 countries." And the man who could have won a "farthest distance traveled" award, Glenn Vardy, managing director of the Frames Now! retail chain in Australia, said, "The Expo and Conference update and validate our framing expertise and ensure we are current with new products and trends."

While sales were made and new alliances were forged, the Expo kicked off the new year by underscoring a wide-

spread wave of optimism for a more favorable business climate and casting a bright light on what the industry can expect to see in the months ahead. It also provided a look at some of the trends shaping the current design and business climate. New developments in mouldings and frame design were also evident in the proliferation of acrylic frames, modern designs, and fresh-looking reproductions of traditional styles.

Touring the booths, it was apparent that the forecast for this year includes the effective use of color. The array of colorful mouldings brought many exhibits to life, drawing attention and helping to boost sales. And if the overwhelming interest in fillets at the Expo is any indication, framers can also look for an increase

in their creative use to dress up frames and elevate framework with “upscale” designs.

“Attendance was strong, the mood was decidedly upbeat, and retailers were buying and looking for new products to feature in their stores,” said Cliff Sanafe, president of Frametastic! Added Jennifer Williams of Wall Moulding & Associates, “We had another successful show this year, with very positive response among current customers and new contacts.”

Many companies stood out for their progressive, new offerings. Max Moulding, for example, launched the Encore line of refined silver plated photo frames designed in Milan by a prominent architect and designer. Similarly, FramERICA showcased more than 200 new moulding products at the show, providing retailers with a broad selection of new framing looks.

All of the artwork on view at the show could have easily filled up every frame on display—and then some. Many leading art publishers, importers, and wholesalers showcased the best of their collections. The range of artwork included lithographs, giclees on paper and canvas,

photographs, and paintings, with an increasing number of print-on-demand images and digital works printed on alternative substrates. Both U.S. and international publishers were represented, with thousands of new releases introduced at the show.

There were a number of notable new products introduced covering all aspects of matting and mounting. These included Encore’s foamboard line, Flech Paper Products’ matboards and mounting boards, and a broad array of adhesives. Attach-EZ’s Patricia Kotnour also offered a DVD instruction demo covering 3-D mounting for objects, including jerseys, military medals, books, and more.

With an assembly of leading equipment manufacturers, the Production Pavilion provided a demonstration platform for CMCs, miter saws, and other production

equipment manufactured by such companies as AMP/The Fletcher Terry Group, D&K Group, FramERICA, Frameware, and Ultramitre. Citing the growth potential of production framing, Jim Parrie of Millennial Technologies and Consulting, said, “The interest in the framing industry is gaining momentum as disparate

manufacturing companies cross over because of bigger margins and low barriers to entry. Sign making and volume printing are among the areas that these large manufacturers find appealing.”

While some exhibitors were targeting bigger framing businesses, others were expanding their appeal to smaller ones. Craft Inc., a high volume metal stamping company whose focus is typically on large-scale manufacturing, focused on attracting smaller, independent framers and had hundreds of visitors in its booth. Its demonstration taught framers how to make easel backs using high quality materials at very low cost. “Framers were pleased to see that we



*Framers were able to find a variety of exhibitors offering everything from equipment to art to unique frame products, inspiring new ideas that could be put to use once attendees returned home.*



*Attendees and exhibitors were able to enjoy a cocktail reception in the registration area.*

still manufacture in the U.S. and that our website details our line of hard-to-find hardware with no minimum purchase requirements, a bonus not typically offered to smaller companies,” said Sales Manager Adam Ruthowski.



Picture Framing Magazine's *Successful Retailing* breakfast panel this year focused on the role of art in today's frame shop. Panelists were (from left) Derek Vandeberg, *Frame of Reference*; Constance Henshaw, *Encore Products*; Robyn Pocker, *J. Pocker*; and Lonnie Lemco, *World Art Group*.

A majority of exhibitors also had special offers for attendees. Equipment and service discounts, free shipping and catalogs, and volume discounts on art were offered to encourage on-site sales. Prize drawings were popular as well. Retailers who took advantage of special offers were able to save a significant amount of money—a bonus for those who enjoy meeting suppliers face-to-face and making their purchases at the show.

There were also a number of special events that provided design inspiration for retail picture framers, including two major frame design competitions sponsored by Tru Vue and Larson-Juhl.

Seven winners of a previously held contest sponsored by Tru Vue called Champions of Conservation were invited to compete for WCAF Best in Show, highlighting the role of conservation grade glazing products in frame design. The contest rewarded four of the most creative entries for their outstanding visions. Among the Best in Show winners was Mira Bishop from Oliver Brothers Custom Framing in Beverly, MA. Bishop framed a portrait drawn on a napkin more than 30 years ago. To maintain a strong focal point for the artwork, she worked with Prisma frames by Bella Moulding to create a minimalist monochromatic design, floating two seamless acrylic frames. Bishop added a seamless gilded moon-gold fillet to add a sophisticated classical appeal.

Sharing the limelight was Cliff Wilson from Framed in Tatnuck, Worcester, MA. Wilson's piece celebrated Isaiah Thomas (1749-1831), a champion of freedom and a

conservator of history. Wilson's entry featured a multi-hinged frame functioning like a book that can be opened and closed, allowing viewers to see both sides of the document and limiting light exposure on the frail document.

Bishop and Wilson shared the Grand Prize, winning a trip to New York City, including a behind the scenes tour of the Metropolitan Museum.

Larson-Juhl, a world renowned manufacturer and distributor of quality moulding supplies, sponsored a widely received contest modeled after HGTV's *Design Star*, entitled "Design Star: Framing Edition." From the initial contest categories to the winning design

concepts, the selection of designs offered a good gauge of developments that will build momentum in the coming year.

A crowd of more than 300 joined a distinguished panel of judges for the unveiling of the winning submissions. Contest categories included creative frame design, marketing, and shop design. Meg Glasgow from The Gallery at Finer Frames in Eagle, ID, took the prize in frame design and went on to win the grand prize for Best in Show. As the winner, Glasgow will work alongside Larson-Juhl to design a new moulding collection to be unveiled at next year's show. "We were pleased with the quality of the entries, all of which were said to offer motivation and inspiration to the framers in attendance," said Greg Perkins, Larson-Juhl Customer Programs Manager.



Mira Bishop of Oliver Brothers in Beverly, MA, won the Best in Show Award in Tru Vue's *Champions of Design* frame design contest.

The motivational and inspirational forces were felt throughout the entire show. Philip LaMarche, owner and president of Gryphon Moulding, said, "The positive vibe on the show floor was intoxicating. I came away excited and motivated to start designing new collections of moulding for the upcoming season."

The workshops and seminars offered by the National Conference are a huge draw every year, and this year was no exception as the number of classes topped 100.

“Combining the trade show with the Conference not only makes sense but also helps attendees be efficient with both their time and their resources,” said retailer William Bounds. “Rob Markoff’s class on insurance, hosted by Capax, was extremely valuable to me. I returned ready to make more informed decisions for my business insurance needs.”

A large percentage of attendees took advantage of a wide spectrum of interesting and practical topics offered by the National Conference, including series on framing fundamentals, gilding, mat cutting, sales and design, management, technology, and production. More than 4,500 seats were filled over the four-day course of workshops and lectures.

The first classes to sell out offer a good indication of some of the most popular topics. Tim Franer’s workshop “Filets Made Easy” introduced new techniques for measuring and cutting filets that save time and give a perfect cut without the use of measuring tape. This workshop was presented by Frame Square Industries. Bonnie Palizzi’s “Put the Custom Back in Custom Framing,” sponsored by Crescent, offered insights into creative design ideas with an emphasis on matting and framing with textures—a hot trend in home furnishings.

Larson-Juhl again sponsored the highly popular seminar entitled “Guidelines for Great Frame Design,” based on Greg Perkins’ best-selling book of the same title. Perkins highlighted the principles of using logical guidelines to create appealing frame designs for customers of all types.

Both the lecture and workshop entitled “Profiting from Prisma: A Guide to Seamless Sales” were filled. These classes, sponsored by Bella Moulding, paired experts Nellie Siegel and Mark LeBeau for a discussion of and hands-on

practice using Prisma seamless acrylic frames to create designs that stand out from the crowd and provide profit from a new spectrum of picture framing.

Technology’s evolving role in business is of paramount importance to anyone whose work is supported by computers and the Internet. The Technology Series featured 11 classes with a focus on using digital technology to manage business and increase sales, and printing digital art in house.

An industry expo of any kind wouldn’t be complete without Profit and Management sessions, and the National Conference’s series was well attended. Wild Apple Graphics sponsored a well attended and perennially popular seminar entitled “The Goltz Standard: Pricing Strategies,” taught by PFM Business Editor Jay Goltz. And in “Things Your Accountant Won’t Tell You,” Ken Baur pointed out that few businesses combine retailing and manufacturing like a frame shop and tailored his session to cover profit margins, pricing, and salary costs specifically for retailers.

Throughout the three-day trade show, exhibitors from all areas of the industry expressed optimism for renewed success in the coming year. Jeff Tolchin, Classic Collec-

tions’ key account manager, said, “This year’s event was a very refreshing turnaround. It was great to see that all types of buyers, whether galleries, framers, or big box visitors, had a positive attitude about 2013.”

This year’s expo represented the fourteenth year of the show, held in partnership with *Picture Framing Magazine*. The monthly magazine is an invaluable resource, carrying key Expo and Conference themes forward and offering the latest in new topics. Content includes practical articles by industry experts, including many National Conference instructors, and advertisers representing the most influential businesses in the industry—and trade show exhibitors. The



*Meg Glasgow, from the Gallery at Finer Frames in Eagle, ID, took the Grand Prize for her Bel Air frame design (above) in Larson-Juhl’s Design Star: Framing Edition competition. The award was presented by Larson-Juhl CEO Drew van Pelt (left) and President Dave Calhoun.*



magazine's website, [www.pictureframingmagazine.com](http://www.pictureframingmagazine.com), offers a convenient online informational source for the industry, including the online Buyer's Guide and a bookstore featuring leading reference books on framing. Top sellers include *Guidelines for Great Frame Design* by Greg Perkins and *The Complete Guide to Shadowboxes and Framing Objects* by James Miller.

The Expo team has already begun planning next year's Expo and Conference, heeding comments and suggestions with an eye toward improvements wherever they can be made. To date, all submissions have been favorable—an indication of a successful and enjoyable experience for all.

Las Vegas continues to be a huge draw and will continue as the site of the WCAF Expo and National Conference in 2014. A trip to a new hotel, the Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, is on the horizon, as the show makes a new home where management ensures that guests "Experience Everything You Love About Paris." The Paris Las Vegas is among the finest Las Vegas hotels, with all the amenities at the base of a 50-story, half-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower. Live entertainment includes a ride to the top of the tower, cabaret music, and fine dining. With a state-of-the-art conference facility in the heart of the Las Vegas

strip, the Paris Las Vegas will provide an exciting venue for the growing WCAF Expo and National Conference.

The 2014 Expo will be held January 20-22, with the Conference held January 19-22. A host of benefits will be offered to early responders. Registering early guarantees open access to the most popular Conference classes. Creative marketing and innovative advertising ideas will be shared with all sponsors who commit early. Favorable rates will also be provided to those who reserve their hotel early. Booking a booth soon secures the desired space allotment as well as strategic placement within the Expo center.

Once again, the PPFA annual convention will also be held concurrently with the WCAF Expo. The trade organization's offerings include CPF and MCPF certification exams for picture framers.

Trade Show Director Deborah Salmon said, "At this point, our conference planners, exhibitors, educators, and sponsors function like a well-tuned orchestra. For professionals across all industry lines, it is an event not to be missed. Whether new to the business or a seasoned professional, there is something for everyone. We hope you will be able to join us in Vegas in 2014." ■

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