

# METAL MAKES A COMEBACK

By Amy L. Sudol

**METAL FRAMES ARE EXPERIENCING A RESURGENCE AS MORE DESIGNERS GO WITH RETRO LOOKS AND INTERIOR STYLES WITH METAL ACCENTS**

**F**rame shops offer a gateway between clients and an ever-expanding universe of framing materials. Staying abreast of trends in interior styles and the latest products is a sure way to meld artistry with relevance to your customers' tastes to achieve designs that have real panache and sales appeal in today's market.

One of the current trends that framers have been seeing is a renewed popularity of metal frames. Metal as a design element in home decor hit a peak in the 1980s, with the inexpensive, easy-to-assemble, chrome-accented furnishings that were highly popular at the time. Today metal is experiencing a comeback as more designers go with a more retro look or punctuate different interior styles with metal accents. This has led to an increased interest in metal moulding.

New perspectives on metal frames are constantly emerging in the framing industry. As Mark LeSaffre, owner of A Street Frames in Cambridge, MA, says, "People are always clamoring for something new." And that something new in framing has become the latest styles, colors, and textures of today's metal moulding.

Whether retail or corporate, customers are availing themselves of the stylish accents that metal adds to any



*This trade show display of Larson-Juhl metal moulding highlights the many colors and the sophisticated look available to framers today.*

interior. "Metal should be celebrated for its inherent beauty," says Paula Jackson, designer at Larson-Juhl. "Whether brushed, polished, painted, or anodized, each style plays to its strengths as a decorative accessory."

Harold Milby, vice president of sales at Designer Moulding, also believes in the look of metal for metal's sake. "We have always played to metal's strength, accentuating the fact that it is metal and never trying to make it

look like anything other than what it is.” As his company has found new interest in these products, Designer Moulding has recently added new profiles and finishes to its metal moulding line. “New powders being produced today have different attributes than what has previously been available, things like unusual textures, translucent colors, and powders that are designed to look like anodized finishes,” he adds.

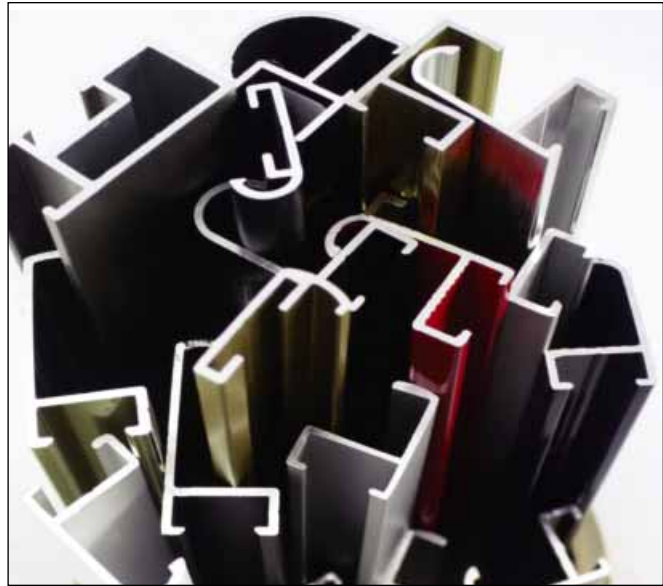
In the retail market, contemporary metal looks are showing up in eclectic interiors. Holly Stephan, vice president of Gil Walsh Interiors of Palm Beach and Martha’s Vineyard, says metals are increasingly used in the transitional look that is popular in home decor today. Blending the new with the old appeals to homeowners because they can use what they already have and add interest with modern accents. “The mass market relies on home decor websites and magazines for tips and trends,” she says. “The metal frame is a staple in the transitional design scheme, not least of all because of the array of choices that can suit any budget.”

The trend is also making itself felt in the corporate environment, where the use of metals is on the rise. For many businesses, the goal of creative design is generally to enhance an interior’s beauty for the purpose of attracting more customers. Stephan notes the popularity of metal in the hospitality and other industries. “Today, many restaurants and hotels lean toward a modern look because clean lines create a pleasing open and airy environment,” she says. “Sleek designs can offer an optimal venue for displaying contemporary art, creating a gallery feel. In a modern setting, metal moulding is the preferred choice.”

Dean DeLuccia, president of Frameware, says that he has seen an increase in the use of metal accents and moulding in the hospitality industry, particularly in the East, from Florida on up the coast. He has been supplying a rising number of restaurants, hotels, and beauty salons with metal framing supplies.

While silver, gold, and black are generally the most widely sold, DeLuccia notes an uptick in the demand for wider crosshatch silver mouldings, often as a designer’s choice for framing mirrors. One of the reasons for the growth, he says, is ease of use. “Metal is easy to clean, and you don’t have to worry about high humidity,” he says. In humid areas of hotels, such as an indoor pool or in open areas, corrosion can be problematic. “I know of framing jobs that have had to be replaced with metal,” he adds.

Where humidity is concerned, Mark Pfund, U.S. and international sales manager of Spectra Aluminum



*A variety of metal profiles and colors are available in Frameware’s Profiles metal moulding line (above). Black and metallics are among the more popular colors in Frameware’s standard metal moulding options (right).*



Products, sees surface mounting of images on acrylic or Dibond gaining popularity. “Metal lends itself to this application because it does not warp or shrink, and in climate changes it can be depended upon to start out and, most importantly, to stay straight and flat throughout the entire assembly, framing, and mounting process,” he says. He also adds that the ease of using security hardware with metal frames is another benefit for settings such as hotels and restaurants.

Because of the need of many contract framers to frame art in quantities, moulding that is inexpensive and easy to care for is a prime consideration. Nick Ward, framer for Harris Holt Framing and Art Services in Charlotte, NC, sees an upswing in the use of metal moulding for framing the large number of prints and photographs for the company’s corporate clients, which include professional offices and banks. Ward recommends metals because they are cost effective, durable, light-weight, and easy to assemble and because they fit well in contemporary settings.

In a similar vein, Artrageous!, which specializes in corporate art, framing, and installation in San Diego, has shifted its focus from retail to corporate sales, including a



Posters surrounded by metal frames, designed by Whispering Woods Gallery, enhance a Philadelphia-area high school hallway.

growing number of clients in healthcare and finance. While the company's frame designs depend on individual client objectives, most opt for the streamlined and contemporary. "We've had success using metal for more contemporary looks," says Barbara Markoff, co-owner and corporate art consultant. "Brushed metal is more popular than shiny while aluminum, nickel,

and German silver are the most popular. We're framing screen prints and lithos from the likes of Le Witt, Lichtenstein, Diebenkorn, Motherwell, and Calder in metal. For photography, we use metal on high-end photos and also on large blow-ups of vintage photographs and digital output."

At the higher end, Markoff sees a growing market for welded and finished metal. "Frames from A Street, Atomic, and Stinky Metalworks have beautiful finishes that make them innovative and exciting," she says.

A Street has been making welded steel frames since the 1980s, when they were rudimentary in style. As their artistry evolved, the company embarked on a mission to more formally introduce welded frames to the framing industry. "The excitement was unbelievable," says LeSaffre. Today, A Street crafts a range of frames for retail frame shops to contemporary galleries to art consultants who make selections for homes and public spaces. Targeting galleries and collectors, A Street is about to launch a new line of powder-coated aluminums with a narrow face and a sleek look designed to complement modern paintings, prints, and photographs.

Interior designers often use color to develop pleasing tones that trigger a favorable emotional reaction on the part of clients. The ability to match color perfectly with today's metal frames underlies the increasing use of colorful metal moulding in home and professional decor when color is meant to be a focal point. "Metal gives you the ability to add a pop of color to complement any decorative

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scheme,” says Jackson at Larson-Juhl. The baked-on enamel moulding colors are durable, can be matched exactly to current color trends, and can be added quickly to update an interior design palette.

Promoting good cheer on the part of clients helps steer Susan Gittlen of Whispering Woods Gallery in Bucks County, PA, towards colored metals. Contracted by local schools to frame student artwork, Gittlen chooses metal because, “Metal is priced right, and there is such a variety of colors. Brightly colored frames create an uplifting environment.” In addition to student artwork, Gittlen uses metal to frame school play posters that line high school hallways. Serving the education market has emerged as a constant source of revenue for her of late. “Because I can offer attractive price points, revenue remains constant and has even grown during the tougher economic times,” she adds.

Although hospitals, offices, and schools present an array of growth opportunities for framers, a savvy businessperson seeks opportunities wherever they arise. A Street Frames, for example, attributes its success through the recent economic downturn to serving a wide range of client needs. “Manufacturing everything from one piece to



*The Metals of Designer Moulding collection not only works well with contemporary images but is also manufactured in an environmentally friendly way, which adds to the profiles' appeal for many consumers.*

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100 is how we persevered,” says LeSaffre. For example, he was enlisted to create a 25’ metal frame for a California school, a frame to house a touch screen that will replace a blackboard—a new market beginning to open up to framers.

Metal moulding can also appeal to customers who like to know they are buying environmentally sound products. Designer Moulding, for example, demonstrates its commitment to environmentally safe production by recycling 100 percent of its scrap metal and using recycled aluminum in all of its painted and anodized matte finishes—a fact that appeals to many buyers. The company also uses powder coat paint in all of its painted finishes, which releases no fluorocarbons into the air like wet paint, and the company has also invested several million dollars into a new, high efficiency extrusion press.

Similarly, Spectra Aluminum also promotes the use of aluminum as an environmentally responsible alternative. “Aluminum’s inherently sustainable characteristics make it a green material, which most people find surprising,” says Pfund.

In today’s modern design environment, innovative materials like metal frames are flourishing more than ever.



*This colorful Larson-Juhl metal moulding helps enhance and complements this colorful artwork in a clean, contemporary design.*

As retail and corporate customers adorn their walls with artwork surrounded by metal frames, savvy framing retailers needs to offer clients these increasingly popular options if they want to stay up to date on frame designs that reflect the interior looks of today. ■

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