

The Accidental Artist

Tips for Selecting Framing

By Marsha Rinetti

Intimidated by hundreds of frame samples? Ever disappointed in expensive custom framing? Some simple tips can simplify framing selection and increase your satisfaction with the end result.

Original art is often pricey. Family photos are priceless. Both are often irreplaceable. They should be preserved, protected and enhance with proper framing. As a starting point, consider the physical requirements based on media and materials.

Oil (or giclees) on canvas are the simplest to frame. From the customer's perspective, it only requires selection of a frame. No glass or mats are needed.

Watercolor, pencil, pastel, etchings, charcoal, and fabric art are usually matted and framed under glass. The glass protects the piece and the matting provides an air pocket to prevent moisture damage. Reproductions or documents on paper, including giclees; prints; photographs; certificates; and maps, are also matted and framed under glass.

Once you understand the physical framing requirements, the fun begins—making your selections!

Paintings on canvas are stretched over an unfinished wooden frame (stretchers) to hold the canvas taut. Ideally the inset around the rim of the frame (the rabbet) should be deep enough for the stretched canvas to sit flush with the back of the frame.

The frame should enhance the art. Be daring. All paintings in the same room do not need the same color or style of frame. Sometimes that is an effective presentation, but sometimes it is boring. Matching the framing and/or the matting to the décor of the room is likely to diminish the beauty of the art you have so carefully chosen. If the art is appropriate for the space, then giving it the best presentation possible will work with your décor.

Selecting a frame is like trying on clothes. An outfit may look attractive on the hanger, but it's best to try it on to be sure it is flattering. Isn't it our goal to buy clothes that make us look our best? You may like plain black frames, but think about what will look best on the art. Perhaps subtle shading on the frame will pick up colors in the painting. Or, a pattern on the frame may echo painting's composition or patterns. A gold frame will often brighten a painting. Going against the expected is worth a try, such as framing a classical painting in a contemporary frame. The framing area is a dressing room where you try different moldings on the painting before buying.

Helpful Tip: To “try on” the frame, lay the art flat. Place a molding sample on the corner of the painting closest to you. Cup your hands together, and peek between them. Adjust your hands to block out the unfinished edges of the molding sample and the raw edges of the painting. You have the right view when it appears to be a slice of a fully framed painting. This will give you an idea of how the molding would look on the painting. Often people will change their mind about which molding is best once they try this trick.

There is not one “right” choice when selecting a frame—but there are an infinite number of “wrong” choices. The frame should not compete with the artwork, it should enhance it. A poor choice can actually diminish the perceived value of the art. You will know when you hit the right one. Quality frame shops offer free consultations with framing professionals. Their expertise can save you time, money, and regret.