

4-Week Short Course: Professional Framing For Photographers With Instructor John Siskin

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Lesson #3: Selecting Your Frame

Frames are made out of a variety of materials, and, as with anything else, some of the materials are friendlier to photographs than others. In addition to considerations of image stability we have very important considerations of taste. I know that my house will not fit with a frame that looks like it came from the palace at Versailles.

I also understand that my goal is to make my client happy. I learned this many years ago when I sold furniture; frequently people bought pieces that would have fit into the palace of the Sun King quite nicely. Regardless of the taste of a client, they are entitled to have a photograph that will last for many years.



3 Roses in a Gold Frame
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Another problem that comes up is how to either choose a frame for a client or help a client choose a frame.

One of the things I like to do to control the choice is to pre pick the frame corners that I will show the client. For instance I don't show a moulding I have trouble actually getting, even if I like the moulding.

Today we're going to talk about materials first and go on from there.

My favorite moulding products for my own stuff are metal.



Frame Corner Display
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There are several reasons for this, first it is easy to get matching product, nice if I'm doing a show. Second metal is a very subtle look that will serve to visually set apart the art from the wall, while not drawing attention to itself. A metal frame does not have the warm hand crafted look of a wooden frame, but it does provide a better archival environment than a wood frame. The reason is that wood produces chemicals, which, over time can interact with your image. Metal doesn't do this.

Metal is easier to ship because it is so simple to assemble and requires no special tools (a screwdriver is not all that special). Metal is also easier to order, all you need to consider is the mat size. If I need a frame for an 11x14 photograph mounted in a 16x20 mat, I will buy a pair of 16 inch metal pieces and a pair of 20 inch pieces. I will buy a hardware frame kit and I'm ready to go. Well, I also need glass, but we'll get there later.

Metal frames are available in various colors and styles. Nielsen has more than twenty different colors and an even larger number of styles. You can visit their on line catalog at Nielsen-Bainbridge.com. They have an interesting array of other products, also. I have to say that I find the online images of their products a little unsatisfactory. Another online supplier of



Black Satin Metal Frame
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metal framing products is www.pictureframes.com. Valley Moulding has metal frames, but I can't find them on line. This is why it is so important to have a selection of frame corners or a local supplier! Although I usually use the satin black finish, I am now considering the dark grey finish. Wow what a change.

Metal frames are pretty easy to assemble.



Metal Frame Detail
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The corner hardware fits into an area on the back side of the frame. You get two right angle shaped pieces of metal for each corner, one has screws on it. The screws hold them in place. We will see this in greater detail next week.

There are more wood frames than the mind can comfortably imagine. But, for purposes of understanding how they affect our photographs, let's put them into a few categories.

Solid wood, the ones I've seen, are hardwoods: teak, mahogany and oak. Like all the wood frames, these need to be sealed with a barrier layer, paint with an acrylic base. You could also tape up the glass and mats into a package to protect the art. Tyvek or Mylar or J-lar or frame sealing tape would be good for this. Otherwise the wood will out gas and damage the photo. I should point out that I've had a couple of teak frames for about 20 years that I think are among the most attractive frames I have ever used. From an aesthetic point of view I really like a simple solid wood frame. Next let's look at laminate frames.



Teak Frame With Vintage
Cyanotype
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These are wood frames covered with something else like Formica. The wood is the support for the frame and it is laminated or adhered to a cover or a veneer. There are a huge number of possibilities. You can even have wood covered with wood; the frame is cheaper wood than the wood veneer. All of these are more likely to outgas than most solid wood frames, however if you seal them



Tomato Soup in a Laminate
Frame

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they will work well. I have seen these sorts of frames in museums. The key here is taste. Since you can make anything with this process, you can make things that are unattractive, very unattractive. You can see samples of these products as well as solid wood products at ValleyMoulding.com and PictureFrames.com. There are a lot of places on line to check these products out. Hopefully you can find some local suppliers also.

There are also frames made out of plywood or pressboard or other manufactured wood. These are very bad. The glue used to hold the wood particles together will create problems for your photograph. Really it is best to just stay away from these products. If you see something you just have to use, try to seal your artwork, glass and mats with tape, as I mentioned above. We'll do that next week.

I wanted to point out something about sealing the wood frame before we leave the subject: you have to wait about a week for the sealant to dry and stop off gassing. So if you are in a hurry you'll want to use tape. If you do be sure to include you backing board in the package. If this is confusing we'll be identifying everything in the frame package next week.

You can just stop after taping the edges and call it a pass? partout (pronounced something like pass partu). This is a nice way to display your work if you do a nice tape edge. I'll go over the technique next week.

Now we need to talk about purchasing a wood frame. Things are a little trickier than with metal frames. When you order a frame tell the salesperson the inside dimensions. That is the dimension of the perimeter of your window mat. You want to tell the salesperson I need a 16 x 20 frame that means the matted artwork is 16 x 20. Then say "plus an allowance." You will almost always get this automatically, but it important to be sure, especially if you are using a custom size. The allowance is about 1/8 inch extra so that any small problems in measurement will not mean that the frame won't fit.



Pass? Partout Framing

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Now that you have ordered the frame size you should be aware that the pricing will be based on the outside dimension of the frame, that will certainly be larger than the interior dimension that you ordered. Of course

moulding is ordered by the longest dimension and that is the outside. The price is figured in "united inches:" long side plus short side times two. While we're talking about measurement of a frame, there is a lip on the edge of a frame; it holds everything in. The lip will cover a little bit of your mat; you'll want to keep that in mind.

When you order a frame you can ask for chop *or* chop and join. Chop means you get the pieces, but they are not assembled into a frame. Chop and join means that the frame is fully assembled; obviously this is a lot easier. There are a couple of ways to put a frame together from chop. We'll go over them in detail next week, but these are the highlights.



Framing Clamp
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Method 1: Glue the frame legs then put the frame corners in a corner or framing vice. Glue only the diagonal cut. Then you will put in some nails to strengthen the joint.

Method 2: Another method is to glue the joint and put it in the vice as before but put a heavy-duty staple or two across the joint.

Method 3: This method uses a small plastic insert to hold the frame together.

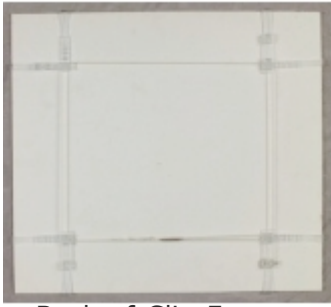
This method is simple and quick, but your frame legs need to be built to use this insert. All of these methods work, but we will want to pay special attention as the frames get larger. Remember a larger frame is a heavier frame. It is a real tragedy when artwork is ruined because a frame breaks.



Wood Frame Detail
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There are also frames made out of materials like plastic and resin. Like all plastic stuff we can pretty much predict that it will not be good for a photograph. Also there is no way to seal these frames to protect the image, as we did with the wood frames. I was hoping that the plastic clip frames would pass muster with the archival consultants I check with, but no.

In general I would stay away from strange materials, or any frame that has a lot of



Back of Clip Frame
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stuff glued onto it. Of course there are times when we make images for transitory purposes, so we can save special frames for these times.

There are aesthetic questions in addition to archival considerations. These decisions are every bit as important as any others we make in framing. The only problem is that there aren't any rules, only ideas of what does and doesn't work. So these are my thoughts, you don't have to do it this way. I would really like to hear your thoughts on what works well. Please put your thoughts on the Q&A part of this class. When I work with black and white images my ideas are pretty conservative: white mat, thin black metal frame. As I have grown older, one change I've made is to use a wider mat. I used to use a border between 2 and 3 inches, now sometimes I'll use a border of more than 4 inches.



Black Satin Metal Frame
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When I work with color images or with Cyanotypes, which are bright blue images, I will sometimes do more creative things with frames.

First I will look at more mat colors, particularly light greys. One of the other things I will consider about picking a color is to pick one of the minor colors from the image and use it for the mat. I generally like to use a density that will create contrast with the image. I want the image to separate from the mat, but I do not want the image to be at war with the mat.



Teak Frame With Vintage
Cyanotype
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In order to make this decision it helps to have frame corners and mat corners.

Unfortunately mat corners are getting hard to get from the suppliers and

manufactures. This is very bad. One thing that we can do is to save our scrap board and use it as we would a corner. You could even cut your own corners from the mat left over after you cut a mat, don't forget about centers of those mats.

Unfortunately this only gets you colors you have used, but it is better than nothing. If you have a method for getting corners let me know! We can get frame corners; these are a tremendous help to making a good framing decision. All you have to do is see one corner of your piece and multiply that look by four! As I mentioned earlier you want to control which corners a client sees. Don't show corners if the frame is tough to get or if the frame will cost more than you budgeted.



Frame Corners for Choosing a Frame

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I have already mentioned that I like simple metal frames, usually black satin. My goal is to make the viewer look at the photograph, rather than the frame. Having said that, there are exceptions. For instance, I like simple wood frames. I have also used laminated frames with white and black edges. There is an exception to all this simplicity and that exception is portrait images. Although I can't quite warm to the golden frames from Versailles, the silver frames do sometimes work well with portraits.



Charlie C. in a Silver Frame

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Sometimes a frame that resembles something from a Victorian painting can work well with a portrait. This is particularly true when the image is more painterly in its effect. I note that many people enjoy having images framed like this in their homes. Who am I to argue with the taste of a client?

Whatever you decide, you should think about upgrading your glass. Window glass only removes about 40% of the ultraviolet light falling on your photograph. All light, not just ultraviolet will damage

photographs. We are interested in ultraviolet for a couple of reasons: **1)** It is more damaging than other visible wavelengths and **2)** we can't see it. So removing UV won't affect what we see, but it will affect how long our image will last. There are several ways in which framing glass is treated to remove UV. There are coatings or the filter is included in the glass. Often the coatings will effect another problem with regular framing glass: reflection. You could be looking at the room lights or at yourself. You can get a

museum glass that will control both UV and reflection problems.

If you order glass in case amounts from Valley Moulding & Frame or another wholesale supplier, you will save a lot over single sheet prices. You will also have an incentive to do more framing. If you will be shipping your framed work you should use an acrylic product. These are also available with ultra violet protection, but because acrylic is a plastic product it may damage your photograph. Alas, some days you can't win.

I order two sizes of glass, 20 x 24 inches and 11 x 14 inches and cut it down as needed. Glass cutting is easier than it appears. Of course for all I know bull riding is easier than it appears. Here's how it works:

Step One: Clean the area you will cut.
Dirt will interfere with a clean cut.



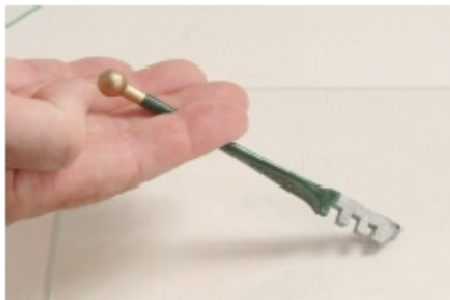
Cleaning the Glass
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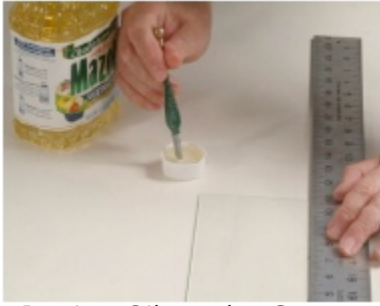
Measuring Where to Cut
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Step Two: Measure carefully, you don't need to make a line on the glass because you will be cutting against the T-square, but if you do mark the glass use a china marker or a Sharpie.

Step Three: Use one of the simple glasscutters with the ball on the back. They work!



Glass Cutter



Putting Oil on the Cutter
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Step Four: Put oil on the cutter, vegetable oil will work, use plenty!

Step Five: Put the cutter against the T-square, be sure that the cutting wheel move freely. Put mat board under the T-square if the side is hitting the cutting wheel.



Lining Up The Glass Cutter
With The T-Square
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Scoring the Glass
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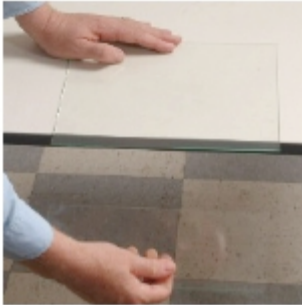
Step Six: Pull the cutter towards you in one smooth motion. It does not require excessive pressure.

Step Seven: Hold up the glass with your two hands on either side of the cut line. Slowly press

the glass apart. It will snap apart easily.



Cracking the Glass
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Snapping the Glass
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If you have a problem with this you can use the edge of a table to snap the glass apart. You may want to wear gloves.

Step Eight: Use sanding paper or a sharpening stone to dull the edge of the glass



Sanding the Edge of the Glass
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Step Nine: Practice, practice and be careful!

Your Assignment: Frames and Mat Corners

Have a good time. Send me some questions.

Thanks!

John

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John Siskin

