

# LET'S FRAME IT!

*In past articles for this wonderful magazine, we have shown glorious fabrics, fabulous lighting, and elegant and fun furniture finds in "Pamela's Picks". However, a very significant element in successful interior design is art!*

By: Pamela Hughes

And most important to a work of art is how it is framed. Just about everyone has art of some sort, so let's talk about framing, and the value and beauty a good frame adds to any piece of art. But first, let me share with you an adventure which brought me to this column's topic.

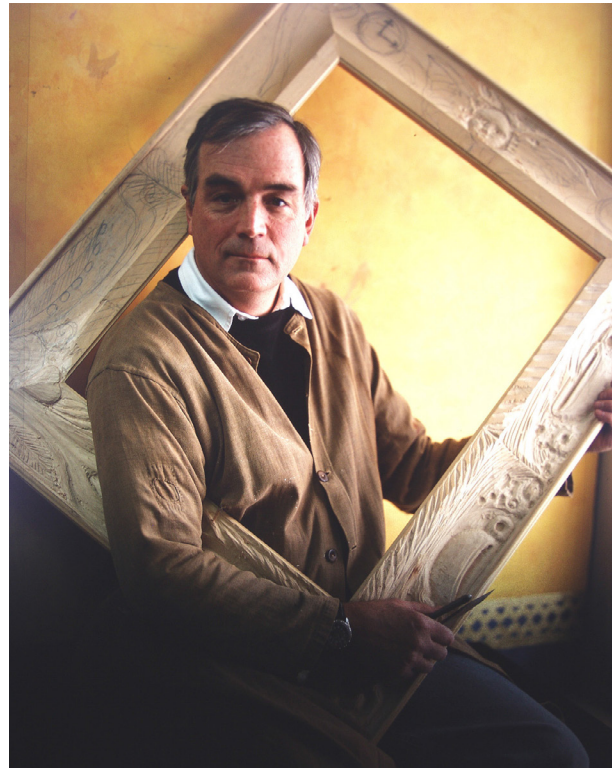
It was difficult to leave Sarasota and fly to DC rather than spend some well-deserved time at the beach. But I did, and it was for a good cause. I had been asked to assist The Prince of Wales Foundation in their endeavor to preserve traditional artisan crafts (such as gilding, wood and stone carving, wrought iron and stained glass making) not only in Great Britain and the U.S., but around the world.

One of The Foundation's specific goals is to teach the ancient craft of gilding to disadvantaged children through a robust international series of workshops and classes. Part of my "entrance exam" to work with The Foundation was to take an intensive two-day course in Water Gilding. The course was taught by one of the world's foremost gilders and frame historians, William B. Adair of Gold Leaf Studios in Washington, DC. He is also the founder of The International Institute for Frame Study, and is one of the leading forces in providing education and a skill set in the art of gilding to young people around the world through The Foundation's programs. It is an admirable task.

And what a fun course! I actually started with a rough frame and produced, at the end of two days and much work, a wonderful gold leaf frame! Throughout the course, which was attended by several of Britain's top frame makers and gilders, I learned much about the art of framing.

I'll pass on some nuggets of wisdom: First of all, the frame is an extension of the artwork. It should always be subservient to the art. It should be synchronous with the time and style of the artwork. When a frame is allowed "to sing", it is when it is used on a mirror.

When framing a portrait, the width of the frame should try to match the width of the head. Otherwise, the head could look too large or small.



William Adair, frame historian and artist, of Gold Leaf Studios, holding the beginnings of a frame design with sketches and early carvings.

The frame should be well-tailored and proportional to the work of art. This is achieved by the size and shape of the moulding, the texture and detail of the moulding, and the color (gilt, paint or wood).

The frame should catch and reflect light (called "luminosity"). Gold is used frequently as the color of moulding as it reflects light so readily, and is neutral as a color.

In climates with lots of bright light, frames should often be soft and muted and not brightly gilded. Brighter frames work better in darker, Northern climates where there is less light to reflect.

ARTS & COLLECTIBLES

Also in bright climates, we need to protect our artwork from the sun. For prints on paper, we should use acid-free materials and ultraviolet filtering glass which reflects 97% of the UV light. The back of the artwork should be sealed to prevent moisture infiltration. It is also important not to hang valuable artwork in direct sunlight.

With regard to matting for paper pieces, mats should be weighted slightly on the bottom to counteract the optical illusion of being top-heavy. This means the matt dimension on the bottom should be slightly larger than the dimensions on the top and sides. Traditional matting techniques use weighting in a subtle way. For contemporary pieces, mats can be oversize, even to three times the size of the artwork with massive weighting on the bottom.

For contemporary and modern interiors, the frame should reflect the architecture and should be sleeker and without excessive ornamentation. The frame is still important for these pieces however, and the interest must be found in subtle detail, shape, and color.

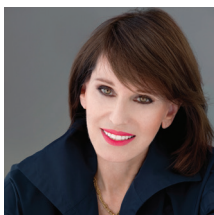
Many wonderful contemporary frame designs of today are based on the work of modernist artists such as Willem De Kooning and Franz Kline, from the Bauhaus era in the 20's and 30's through the 1960's.

Picture lights used over valuable artwork should have filters so as not to "burn" or damage the top portion of the painting.

Period paintings should have a frame of an historically accurate period as well. However, there is one very famous artist who did not follow this rule and benefited greatly from it. Picasso! What Picasso did was use antique frames on his, at the time, very contemporary paintings. These antique frames added greatly to the value of his work because collectors could hang his paintings in their Old Masters collections and they looked great! The frames were all old and of an historical period so they all worked together. This gave him instant success. What a smart guy.

So, I guess that means that some rules can be broken, but most of us aren't Picasso, so I tried to learn a few.

What a great way to spend the weekend. I learned so much, and hopefully will be able to help others with my involvement. ✈



Pamela Hughes is president and owner of Hughes Design Associates, one of the premier interior design firms in the US, with offices in Florida and Washington, DC/VA. Pamela and her firm work throughout North America and the Caribbean creating luxury residences of incomparable style and beauty.



The outermost frame is a Siamese Arched Top Tabernacle Frame, circa 1460. This frame is surmounted with anthemion and rosettes. This rare polychromed and gilded frame is also emblazoned with family crests and a Latin inscription invoking the blessings of grace from the mother of God. This most likely indicates that this frame once contained an image of the Virgin Mary. Now in the collection of William and Mary College, Muscarelle Museum, this rare historic artifact will be hung empty, as a work of art unto itself. The inner frame is a Florentine Tabernacle Frame, circa 1550. A rare walnut and gold frame from Tuscany, this frame is flanked by carefully carved columns and an elaborate entablature with fragments of gilding left in the crevices. The innermost frame is an Emilian Drawing Frame, circa 1660. This little walnut and gold leaf gem was designed to house an old master drawing. The pediment and antependium are designed to invoke a sense of grandeur to an otherwise simple drawing.



Engaged arched Siamese frame with arched tabernacle, carved with gilt, circa 1460.