

Frame Design



by Tim Franer, CPF

Beyond the Ordinary

Creating a frame design for a truly prestigious medal involves using more than a double mat, piece of glass, and a frame. Framing notable certificates and awards provides a professional framer the opportunity to showcase his or her creative design and handcrafting skills and therefore requires something special. So when a French Legion of Honor medal and certificate recently arrived for framing, it was obvious that it needed more than a standard frame design and materials.

The prestige of the medal required some extra thought, and this resulted in a number of questions during the design process. These focused on such issues as

to whether to use paper or fabric matting, how to configure the layout, what glazing to use, and what frame style and finish would work best. Here is how this project evolved.



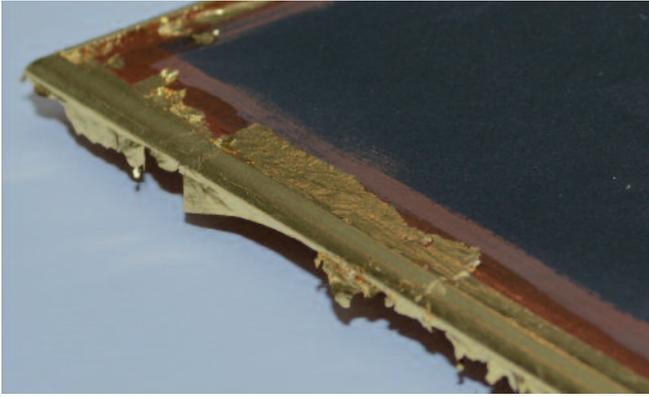
A 28"x32" 22k Laurel Leaf Concerto French finish frame was designed and hand crafted to complement the French Legion of Honor award. The medal is removable from the back of the frame for special occasions. The certificate has a custom gold leaf frame floating in the bottom window opening. Each opening is customized with a special fabric, with wooden liners hand covered with continuous silk and cotton fabric, with each window incorporating a Flexible Fillet from Frank's Fabrics.



Giving a Legion of Honor medal a frame it deserved meant creating a design that went far beyond the standard treatment

Know What You're Framing

The first step was to understand what was being framed. For this project, a little research was in order. The Legion of Honor, or *Legion d'Honneur*, is France's highest order, and it recognizes military and civilians alike for their bravery or honorable service to the country. It was obvious this certificate and medal was in



An 11-3/8"x8 1/4"x1/4" wooden frame was created to surround the certificate. It was coated with gesso, primed with red clay, and 23k leaf was applied to match the outer frame finish. The certificate frame was then mounted to 1/2" black foamboard to create a floating effect.

a class of its own, and the frame design should be the finest it could be to reflect this stature.

Beginning Stages

The next step was to review the two items to be framed. The 11-1/2"x8 1/4" black-and-white Legion of Honor paper certificate was boring to say the least, but it did have the signature of Francois Hollande, the president of France, along with those of other officials of the French government. To verify the authenticity of the certificate, an official embossed seal was stamped on the lower left of the document. Other aspects included a 3/4" laurel leaf pattern and ribbon border around the outer edges that featured a reproduction of the medal at the top of the certificate. The second item was the 1 1/2"x4 1/2" medal itself, containing the beautiful colors of the metal, a red moiré pattern ribbon, and inscribed wording.

The Design Process

At this point, it was time to establish the design elements. One request by the client was to have the medal accessible so it could be worn for special black-tie occasions, so removability needed to be part of the frame design. It was determined that both items would be displayed in a single frame with an opening on the back for access to the medal. Using the laurel leaf pattern from the certificate in the outer frame would also provide a nice style touch. This led to selecting a closed corner, 22k gold leaf, hand-finished frame to elevate the design to the highest level.

To determine the size of the frame, an exact layout was designed on scrap matboard. The opening for the medal was placed at top of the layout, while the lower



Silk fabric is applied to the face of the top wooden liner. The fabric is sagging in each window opening. This helps when fitting and wrapping each corner, preventing tear-outs. Silk is very thin, and fabric glue can bleed through if too much hand pressure is applied. A wide, soft hair brush is used to burnish the fabric lightly until it is evenly applied. This fabric-covered liner was raised about 1-1/2" off the table to help the wrapping process.

part would be used to exhibit the certificate. To give the design an elegant touch, a continuous silk fabric would be applied to cover the wood liner borders. A wood liner was designed and digitally cut for each window opening, providing customized dimensional elements to enhance the overall presentation.

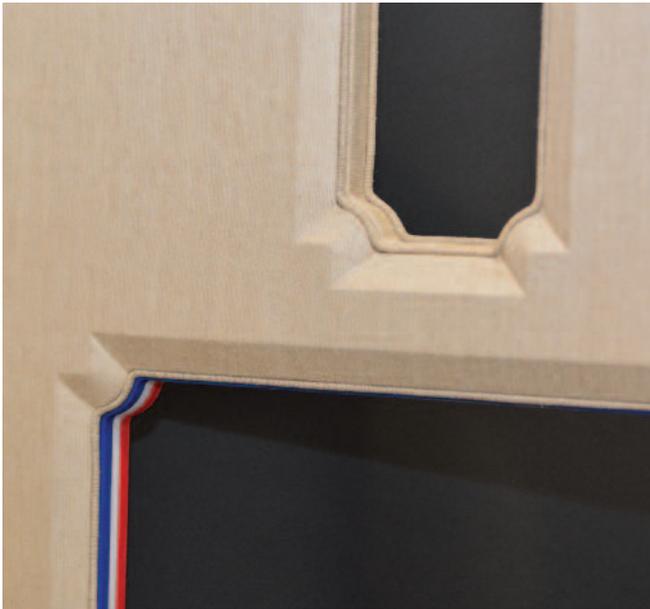
To accent the certificate, the window opening was designed to have depth and visual breathing room on all sides. A 22k gold leaf finished-corner fillet would also be placed around the outer edges of the certificate, coordinating with the outer frame's finish.

The Layout

The layout for this project was drawn on paper first and then cut to the exact size on a sheet of matboard. The border widths were chosen to create a balanced look, since there were two openings of different sizes. This layout created a lot of white space that almost took control of the overall appearance. To eliminate this, various border widths were selected. The top border was 2-1/8", the bottom 4-1/4", and two side borders each 4-1/8". The reason for a smaller top border was that it provided a better balance with less space at the sides of the top window. The larger side and bottom borders help bring the eye down towards the certificate. The blue, white, and red also help draw the eye lower, supporting a more balanced look. The key was pulling all the elements together in a way that created visual closure with the large laurel-leaf frame.

The Outer Frame

The outer frame was 22 1/4"x26 1/4" and the profile design was selected to complement the laurel leaf pattern in the certificate. The 2 3/4" finished corner frame was hand-finished with a 22k gold leaf Concerto French finish. A



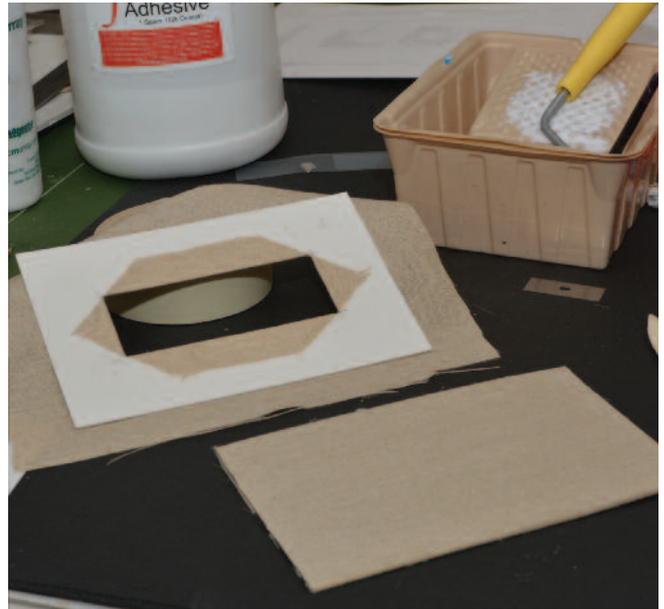
Silk-covered Flexible Fillets were cut and spliced on 45-degree angles, then attached to eliminate any visible joints.

1½” rabet depth was designed to incorporate various wood liners and to allow space for the magnetic door that provides access to the medal. This moulding pattern and the 22k gold leaf frame set a benchmark that every framer should strive for.

Fillet Frame and Certificate

To give the certificate a more upscale look, a 22k gold finished-corner fillet frame was added. In creating the fillet frame, a prefinished fillet was cut with a reverse angle to make a small frame when the four pieces were glued together. After gluing and clamping it in a frame vise, several coats of gesso were applied to the completed fillet frame to seal each corner to prevent gaps or openings in the joints. A raw umber undercoat, Dux gilding size, 22k double gold leaf, and shellac were also applied. A wash was put on last to match the outer frame finish.

To fit the certificate in the finished fillet frame, it was dry-mounted to a 4-ply matboard that was 4” larger than the certificate. This matboard was marked to fit the opening of the fillet frame. When the certificate matboard was cut with a straight line mat cutter, crop marks were placed on the face side of the certificate board. Next, the certificate was placed face-up under the mat guide and the crop marks were aligned to cut a reverse bevel edge on all four sides. The cuts had to be made starting at least 1” before the crop marks and ending at least 1” after the crop marks. The drop out was a perfectly cut certificate.



A paper window mat covered in silk will be glued over a silk-covered metal plate (shown below the paper-covered mat). The medal is attached by a magnet to this plate. The outer paper-covered silk mat has an opening 1/8” larger than the medal itself. The silk-covered paper window mat is used to realign the medal when it is re-inserted into the frame.

The Wood Liners

Wood liners come in various sizes. They were selected for this project for several reasons. The flexibility of board thicknesses, for example, provides a variety of unique design features. Wood liners also provide a very smooth surface that allows fabric to adhere nicely, especially in beveled areas. It is hard to achieve the same effects with mat and foamboard. Wood liners come in sizes as large as 4’x8’ and ¼” to 1” thick, providing unlimited options for the creative thinker. For this frame design, the top mat, or wood liner, was 22¼x26¼”x3/8” with two specified openings, one for the medal and the other for the certificate.

There are several notable features in the openings in the top liner. The angle of the bevel is 25 degrees, and each corner is rounded. This creates a nice custom touch that helps take this design to another level. The certificate openings consist of three 16”x22-1/8”x¼” wood liners, all cut in the same design and opening size. Together, they total ¾” thick, which provides a shadow-box-type format for the certificate. Each was covered individually in blue, white, and red, the colors of the French flag. The order of colors is important, as this matches the French flag.

Covering each ¼” liner edge was tricky. When covering a flat surface with rounded corners, the fabric has a tendency to split as it is applied. With a little patience,



A 22-1/4"x26-1/4" milled wooden frame was made to hold all framing components inside the outer frame. After priming, each cut-to-size leg was hand-covered in black moire fabric, then joined using brass screws to make a hand-covered frame. The back of the frame shows hand-covered moire silk fabric, brass screws for attachment, the smaller frame that aligns the silk-covered structure, and a custom black knob for removing the medal.

however, wrapping these corners can be perfected and the result is worth it. After the three liners were wrapped, they were glued and screwed together as one 3/4" liner that was attached to back of the top liner.

The medal opening has one 10"x22-1/8"x3/4" wood liner. It was covered with silk fabric and attached to the back of the top wood liner. After the top liner was covered in silk, a Flexible Fillet was placed around the inside edge of the beveled window openings. The Flexible Fillets were covered in the same silk as the wood liner to give the design a coordinated look. Once the fabric wrapping was complete, the medal liner was glued and screwed to the back of the top wood liner.

Certificate Window Opening

The certificate window opening has a few enhancements, such as the blue, red, and white hand-covered fabric wood liners, and the certificate also has a 22k gold leaf fillet. To give the certificate a floating effect, a 1/2" spacer was glued to the back of the certificate to raise it above the silk backing it is mounted on. These additions make the certificate presentation stand out, with the floating effect and the spacing around the certificate enhancing the design.

Medal Window Opening

After the medal window was covered in silk and Flexible Fillets were added, the next step was to construct a removable backing so the medal could be accessed. One option was a hinged opening; another was to use a magnet system. After careful review, a magnetic system was selected. This required the attachment process for the medal to be changed. The original method involved using two long needles, like prongs. When stuck through a dinner jacket, it would leave holes. To fix this, the spikes were replaced by a 1/2"x1"x1/16" magnet. This would allow the client to place the medal where desired, with a corresponding magnet inside of the garment to hold the medal in place.

Creating a magnetic backing for the medal window in the frame required cutting a piece of tin. Next, the tin was glued to a piece of matboard of the same size. Adhesive was applied, and silk was mounted around both sides of the medal-and-matboard backing. The magnet was then adhered to the fabric-covered tin plate.

One of the challenges of taking the medal in and out of the frame was alignment. To help make this easier, a small mat was cut with an opening that was 1/8" larger than the medal itself. This mat was covered in silk and glued to the medal's silk-covered backing board. Since this board had metal, a small magnet was embedded in each corner of the rabbet that the backing board sets into. These would hold the backing board in place. The magnets are neodymium and are very strong.

Glazing and Hanging

Since this project needed to be transported, breakage was a major concern. Tru Vue Optium Museum Acrylic Glazing was selected to protect and preserve the medal for a lifetime. A metal cleat system was then used to hang this piece because it is strong and makes taking the frame off the wall easy. Overall, the design made a professional and attractive presentation that provided the accessibility the client desired. **PFM**

Tim Franer, CPF, has framed artwork for heads of state, corporations, galleries, and fine homes for more than 40 years. Tim consults with industry leaders to define color and design, and is a speaker and educator on art, design, and framing. Tim is an instructor of seminars and workshops throughout North America, Europe, South America, China, Russia, Australia, and New Zealand.