

FRAMING WITH FABRIC: A STAND-OUT DESIGN OPTION

By Abby Fosco

“The most beautiful design element you can incorporate in a picture frame is fabric, because fabric is appealing to everyone,” says Frank Chavez, owner of Frank’s Fabrics. “Fabric provides a unique warmth and appeal to the finished design.”

In the framing industry, creating stand-out designs is key to garnering success and generating profits for your frame shop. Without unique and distinctive designs, you run the risk of fading into the background behind your competitors. Fabric matting is a surefire way to help your designs stand out from the crowd.

As Frank Chavez, owner of Frank’s Fabrics, puts it, “80 to 90 percent of picture framers do not offer fabric mats. If you offer [customers] fabric mats, you’re offering something that many don’t have.”

With this in mind, it’s easy to see that learning how to create and sell designs with fabric mats will separate you from many other framers. “From a competitive standpoint,” says Tim Franer, owner of Tim Franer & Company, “using fabric mats will differentiate your frame designs from your competitors’ designs by taking an average framing project to the next level.” It’s about more than just good business sense, though: the creative side of a framer’s brain will benefit, too, with hundreds of available colors, textures, and sizes resulting in endless design possibilities.

STOCK UP ON FABRICS

Keeping a supply of fabrics in your frame shop



has a multitude of benefits, explains Larry Neuberg, owner and president of Framing Fabrics. “Fabric brings enormous perceived value to the frame in its final stages of delivery. There’s a richness that fabric lends that paper mats don’t necessarily deliver.”

Neuberg adds that “the richness and perceived value helps a frame design look more expensive and more upscale.”

The expensive look of fabric puts it well within the category of upscale design options. Offering custom fabric wrapping is not only good for your customers—they will have another beautiful product to choose for their framed artwork or object—but it’s also beneficial for your bottom line, as fabric commands a higher sales ticket than some other mat options.

Chavez notes, “You can make more money using fabric mats than with most other types of mats. Nothing is as easy to use or

In this frame design by Tim Franer, the suede material adds richness with its smooth texture. The continuous hand-wrapped fabric is wrapped on a 3" swan scoop liner using a brown flexible fillet for the liner lip. Continuous wrapping is applied by using one piece of material, providing seamless joints in each corner.



The Dynasty collection by Framing Fabrics includes a set of 44" wide, 100 percent pongee silk fabrics. Colors range from neutral tones to bright and deep jewel tones.

more beautiful than a custom wrapped mat."

To get started with fabric mats in your frame shop, it's a good idea to pair up with a trusted fabric supplier rather than simply buying from a commercial fabric store. Companies like Frank's Fabrics and Framing Fabrics test their products to ensure quality and value, and they also provide retailers with samples of their fabrics, which allows you to learn the look and feel of a supplier's products and decide which would best suit your frame designs—without first having to commit to a full order.

"We make corner samples with our fabrics that framers can design with, and they can keep it on a corner caddy by their design center," says Neuberg. "You can tailor the selection according to your clientele, and you can pick and choose what corner samples are best suited for your customers."

It's also a smart idea to keep corner samples in your shop because it's important to remember that not all fabrics are created equal. Chavez notes that when designing with fabric, "You can't just use any type. Some are resistant to adhesion; some are too fuzzy, causing lint; some are too stretchy, and so on. If you have our samples, you can pick what's most

suitable." On average, a set of corner samples costs about \$40-50, while the cost of fabric sample books depends on the suppliers' selection.

There is also a "sense of security and reliability" when purchasing from a trusted supplier that isn't guaranteed with a commercial fabric store, according to Neuberg.

Chavez agrees. For example, after ordering a specific fabric that you really love, he explains, "If you come back and want the same fabric, how will you find it again at a commercial store? If you get it from us, you can simply call us and order another yard. Also, our prices are wholesale. You won't find that in a retail store."

Using trusted manufacturers also lets you take advantage of cut yardage deals. Suppliers like Framing Fabrics and Frank's Fabrics provide the benefit of buying fabric by the yard, which saves money and avoids waste. "You do not have to buy anything more than what you need," says Neuberg.

EXPAND YOUR DESIGN HORIZON

Many framers are hesitant to design using fabric matting simply because they haven't yet learned the technique. Chavez contends that working with fabric is far easier than many people believe.

"Framers are intimidated by wrapping fabric mats, but this perception that it's difficult is totally wrong," he says. "I've spent 40 years convincing framers that this is a false perception. At trade shows, I demonstrate how easy it really is, and they are able to witness the process firsthand."

However you decide to learn the how-tos of custom fabric wrapping, you will open the door to a new realm of design possibilities for your shop by doing so. When settling on which fabrics to keep in stock, think timeless rather than trendy. As with any framing project, the goal is to create a design that complements and enhances the art. Neuberg says that neutrals such as beiges, creams, tans, and whites



These designs by Tim Franer showcase a variety of fabric mats, such as a triple fabric suede mat (top), three continuous wrapped linen liners (bottom left), a hand-rubbed finish burl wood frame incasing a 5" rust suede mat (bottom middle), and four continuous hand-wrapped linen liners (bottom right).

always “complement artwork far better” than more brightly colored fabrics.

“I’ve been doing this a long time, and it’s indisputable that natural, neutral colors are always the most popular,” he says. Neuberg adds that while brightly colored fabric mats have their place in design, the neutral side of the spectrum consistently leads to a pleasing aesthetic. Neutrals also tend to add richness, which can’t always be achieved with a brighter shade.

In addition to color, texture is another key feature to consider when picking the right fabric mat for a framing job. For example, Chavez says, a framer may choose a silk fabric because they’re framing an expensive lithograph. Chavez relies on his own experience and design intuition, rather than fixating on the trend of the moment, when adding to his company’s fabric collection.

“Recently, someone sent me a fabric that looks like flannel—it has a soft look to it,” he says. “We don’t have anything like that, so I’m

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Many framers are hesitant to design using fabric matting simply because they haven't yet learned the technique, but Frank Chavez contends that working with fabric is far easier than many people believe. Pictured is a frame design using a trusted fabric from Frank's Fabrics.

considering adding [that type of fabric] to the line."

BOOST YOUR SALES TICKET

Once you've ordered your chosen fabrics, the best approach to presenting them in your frame shop is to hang design samples on your wall. Seeing is believing, and customers who can look at the framed examples around the shop and see the beauty of custom fabric-wrapped matting will be much more easily convinced to invest in a similar upscale design.

The inherent perceived value of fabric will be apparent to the customer right from the get-go, making the consultation process easier on the retailer.

"Customers will love how the samples appear and will likely request fabric mats," says Chavez.

It's truly a win-win situation: when a customer chooses fabric matting for their framed artwork, they are getting an elegant, unique piece that will garner attention for years to come. At the same time, the retailer benefits from a boosted sales ticket. With the right supplier, design inspiration, and selling approach, adding fabric mats to your frame shop is both a smart and profitable decision. **PFM**



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