



Frame design

rules, guidelines & standard practice

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Frame design

- Design is arguably the most important aspect of framing, but there isn't much written about it.
- Many framing books skim over frame design.
- Design rules/guidelines are too general to apply to specific pieces or so specific that they only apply to certain scenarios - exceptions can easily be found.
- What does this tell us?



Ian Kenny Framing

Frame design

- Do framing design rules, guidelines & standard practices hold true?
- Do frame designs that don't follow the rules ever work?
- Different, but easy to execute, design ideas that provide inspiration.

Images kindly provided by Greg Perkins, Ian Kenny Framing & Handmade Framing & Gallery.



Greg Perkins

On a double mount will a strong coloured bottom mount of over 5mm overwhelm the artwork?

- Shouldn't the proportions of all elements increase in proportion with the size of the artwork?
- The dominating effect by the bottom mount can be overcome by increasing the white space around the artwork.



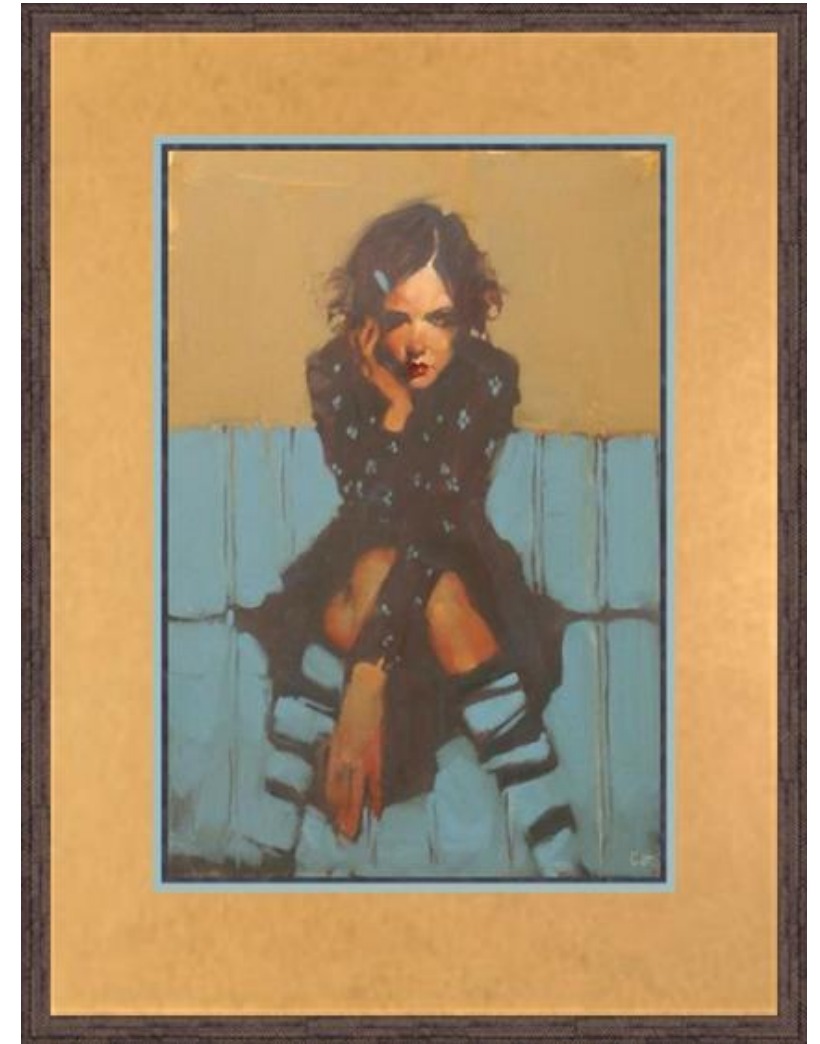
On a double mount will a strong coloured bottom mount of over 5mm overwhelm the artwork?

- The amount of a strong coloured bottom mount which should be displayed depends on the balance and proportions of the artwork and other aspects of the frame design.



Mounts that don't quite match the colours of the artwork will distract & look wrong?

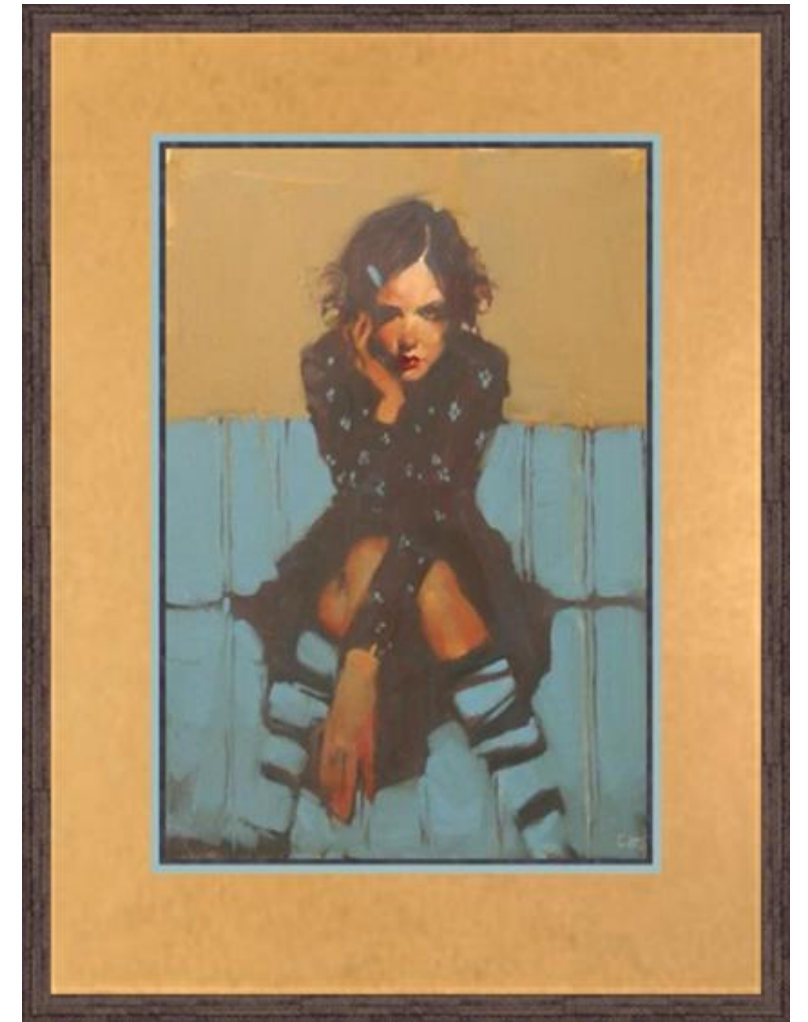
- In the picture on the right the mount that matches least (top gold) is furthest away from the artwork.
- The non matching blue mount is separated from the blue in the artwork with a matching black bottom mount.
- The black bottom mount matches very well in colour & texture.



Greg Perkins

Mounts that don't quite match the colours of the artwork will distract & look wrong?

- The separation & distance of the 'none matching' colours from the artwork means they work.
- Were the mounts straight against the artwork we would see that they were wrong.



Greg Perkins

We should use colours that match the colours of the art work &/or neutral colours?

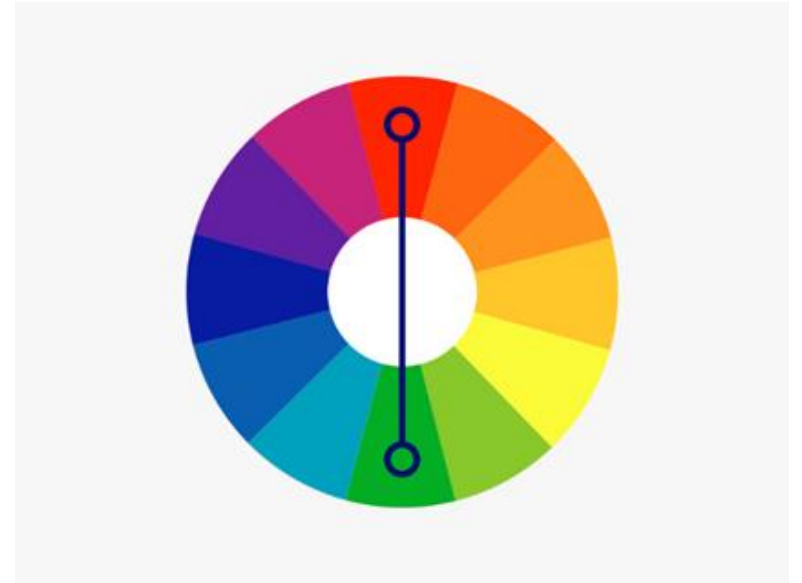
- In the picture on the right both neutral & matching colours have been used.
- The neutral black top mount really enhances the blue of the shirt.
- The gold bottom mount matches the gold in the object.
- The design is balanced by using a black and gold moulding.



Ian Kenny Framing

We should use colours that are as close to the colours of the art work as possible &/or neutral colours?

- Colour and design theory suggests we should be able to use contrasting colours.
- This works well in other areas of design.



We should use colours that are as close to the colours of the art work as possible &/or neutral colours?

- Can contrasting colours work in the right circumstances?



Matching texture in the artwork, as well as colour.

- This can be as simple as the matt finish of a mount board or more definite like the colour pattern or detail of a moulding.



Greg Perkins

Matching texture in the artwork

- A monochrome treble mount brings out the pink in the artwork, perhaps more than if pink had been used in the mount.
- The moulding matches the texture of the squiggly pattern in the artwork.
- This part of the artwork would be less noticeable without the moulding.



Greg Perkins

Mount colours should not be stronger than the colours of the image?

- The three colours of this treble mount match the artwork but the dark blue & brown are stronger.
- The stronger colours are spaced away from the image with as little of the brown shown as possible.
- The softer light blue separates the stronger mount colours from the artwork.



Colour Harmony

- The rules of colour harmony tell us that too many colours in a design make it uncomfortable to look at.
- Often using more than two or three colours in a frame design makes it appear imbalanced.



The bolder the artwork is
the stronger the colours in
your design can be.



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Any paper that is visible is part of the artwork.

- I often match paper & mount colours.
- Neutral colours work well for top mounts.
- They are less likely to dominate the artwork
- Customers with conservative tastes or those considering décor often feel more comfortable with a neutral coloured top mount.



Many framers decide on mount choice & then choose a frame to match the artwork & the mount.

- I always make an exception when a moulding's texture or colour pattern matches the artwork so well that it's hard to consider any other option.



Many framers decide on mount choice & then choose a frame to match the artwork & the mount

- In this piece, the moulding matches the central rock in both colour and texture.
- It looks like the moulding was made for the picture. So I worked backwards and chose the mount to match the artwork and the moulding.



Sometimes a piece of artwork provides us with lots of colour options.

- Eliminate options that aren't an exact match or balanced throughout the artwork.
- A number of different coloured mounts can provide balance by highlighting colours in different parts of the artwork.



Sometimes a piece of artwork provides us with lots of colour options.

- We don't have to find our colour matches with mounts.
- We can use neutral mounts & emphasise the artwork's colours using the moulding.



Should the stronger colours in a mount/frame design be close to the image?

Does placing them further out distract the eye?

- This would suggest that matching the artwork's colours with the mouldings, rather than the mounts, is a bad idea.



Why are double mounts standard but double frames are not?

- Here's a simple example of a double frame design.
- The colours and proportions are similar to those of a double mount i.e. a wider more passive top colour and a narrower brighter bottom colour.
- The stacked mouldings have made this design different - it stands out far more than a single moulding and a double mount would.



Why are double mounts standard but double frames are not?

- Is matching the colours of the artwork using the mouldings rather than the mount a bad idea?
- You won't find many colours more likely to distract from the artwork than this orange.



Why don't many framers experiment with depth?

- When I select new moulding chevrons I choose those with deep rebates that allow a wider range of design options.
- This design incorporates two shadow mounts so all the elements are set back.
- The varying depths & the consistency of the double mounts create balance.



Why don't many framers experiment with depth?

- 'The use of spacers is a necessity when framing somethings that's dimensional, but rarely used when framing a print or photo. Visually, spacers can add depth or enhance the perspective in the art'- Greg Perkins.



Greg Perkins

Why don't many framers experiment with depth?

- Here the artwork has been spaced away from the undermount.
- The window mount is set higher than the artwork creating a double shadow effect, enhancing the perspective & drawing the viewer's eye.



Greg Perkins

Why don't many framers experiment with depth?

- Stacking mouldings is another way to introduce depth - the eye is lead into the picture more than if a single moulding had been used.
- With this example two different profiles of the same range have been stacked. The bevel of the first increases the effect of drawing the viewer into the image.



Why don't many framers experiment with depth?

- The Mouldings stacked for this frame are both the same colour, size and profile.
- What would have been a plain, simple frame now has an added element of interest & all-important width.



How is balance defined & achieved?

- ‘Balance encompasses the main components of the framing design, the frame & the mount all working together without any one part overwhelming the other or the artwork.’
– David Wilkie GCF
- All components should be focused around the central point.
- The weight of colour - a white mount is light & a stronger colour heavier - a wide cream mount has the same weight as a narrow black mount.



How is balance defined & achieved?

- Each aspect of a design has to be balanced in relation to both the artwork & every other aspect of the design e.g. the colour weight of the artwork needs to be balanced by the colour weight of the mount & frame.
- All aspects need to work together to focus the viewers eye on the central point.



How is balance defined & achieved?

- The medals & their ribbons are the strongest element - they could detract from the photograph.
- The text could easily be lost against strength of the medals & the photograph.
- The subtle grey mounts complement the photograph & highlight the medals without overwhelming the text.
- The moulding matches the colours & tone of the photograph helping to restore balance.



Sometimes a single mount is the appropriate option

- Little details like a thicker mountboard or a V-groove can add interest without detracting from the simplicity of the mount.



In conclusion

- Many of the commonly thought of rules of framing design are only relevant in specific situations.
- Some rules do hold true, but they are vague, generalistic & have possible exceptions.



In conclusion

- What should or shouldn't be done depends completely on the individual piece of artwork.
- As soon a new aspect of the design is introduced the rules change, because the size, colour & texture of that new component effects all the others.
- Balance, proportion, contrast & repetition are all relevant to one another & are achieved by the right combination of elements.



In conclusion

To get the design recipe right we must have the right tools:

Fresh ideas –

- social media provides wealth of information
- Framing books, old & new
- Framing magazines



Greg Perkins

In conclusion

Make time to play:

- Try out different ideas with mount & frame colours, textures, proportions & depths.
- Don't be afraid to emulate other framers' designs.
- You can't play in front of customers - you need to be free to make mistakes.
- This 'playing' is called 'research & development'.



Any questions?



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