

Framing Black & White Photography

Black and white photographs have remained popular since their inception roughly 150 years ago. The ability of black and white images to fit many decorating styles has contributed to its increased popularity. As such, customers have become more open to alternative, more sophisticated framing designs for these items.

How to best frame a black and white photograph is a subject for much conjecture. Plain and simple to take nothing from the art, or more ornate to complement the subject matter? Add colour in the frame design to help draw the eye to the picture, or stick with a rigid two-tone approach to ensure dramatic elegance?

So where does that leave us? Well to be honest somewhere in the middle. The fact is that there is as much variety in black and white photography as in any other art form. Think of it this way, if we asked everyone to dress in the same way the look would suit a few but be terrible for most. However, there are some simple rules and techniques you should keep in mind when framing black and white photographs.

- Some framers believe a pristine white mount is best for all black and white images, on the basis that it does not detract from the picture itself. However, for pictures with a white focal point, a pristine white mount can be too bright and will compete with the image for attention.
- Another common mistake is to try to 'lighten' dark art by surrounding it with a light mount. In reality, a light mount border causes the dark colours in the photo to look even darker.



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- Mounts should be black, white or grey. Any other colour adds an element that isn't present in the picture. If you have a customer who insists on a colourful mount, a common suggestion is to go for a white mat with a small accent of colour as a second mount. However, this accent actually pulls the eye away from the photo. A better solution is to use the colour as the predominant top mount and place the accent of black or grey below it to work as a transition into the photo. With all that colour surrounding the photo it isolates the image, in effect, drawing attention to it.
- When it comes to the moulding, consider the era, style and location of the photograph. As in framing any art piece, each frame must enhance the style and mood of the photograph itself. Many framers believe you should stick to a narrow, basic frame for black and white photographs, but this may not co-ordinate with the subject of the photo. For example, a picture of an ornate piece of architecture may look better with a more classical moulding design.
- Elongation is often a good treatment for portrait photographs, images with vertical subjects or strong vertical lines. By making the top and bottom borders wider, it dramatises all those vertical elements.
- A mountslip which matches the moulding can create a strong, classic outline around the photograph. This helps pull the viewer's attention in from the frame to focus on the picture. Mountslips can also help enhance the customised appearance of the design, adding character and perceived value.

When any item is framed properly the frame design should add a sense of value to the finished product. So a good frame design will help a mediocre shot look good and an unimaginative framing job will bring even the best picture to the level of a cheap poster. Remember, just because the subject lacks colour doesn't mean the framer should lack imagination.

