

Preservation, preservation, preservation

In an often price sensitive market it's all too easy to shy away from 'selling the difference' between regular and conservation framing. But doing so will save a customer much more than money in the long term. Here, we explain why you should be selling the virtues of conservation framing and give you some useful advice on how to achieve success in this area.

Firstly, what does conservation (or preservation) framing actually mean? Well, the art of conservation framing should aim to stabilise an article preserving its current condition by anticipating and accounting for future hazards in the design and implementation of a framing regime. It should not be confused with the work of restorative professionals who use their skills and time to improve the condition of articles as a prelude to the conservationist who then preserves their work, or the work of presentation framers who enhance the immediate appearance of an item.

Sounds complicated, pedantic and technical? Well yes it should, as conservation framing is a skill within our trade that demands the highest levels of skill, knowledge and currency in what is one of the most specialist fields of our industry. It may help to think of the conservation framer as a consultant, artisan and partner in the framing process rather than just a craftsman offering a generic service.

In the spring/summer wedding season, you may find you get a sudden influx of framing requests that present opportunities to demonstrate good conservation framing practice. Customers may bring in wedding photographs or keepsake items like headdresses and veils or even a handful of confetti for framing. They will want something beautiful to display on their wall, but few will have considered the effect of light, dust, insects, and age on their treasured family possessions.

To help you maximize this opportunity and present yourself as a conservation framing specialist we will look at three areas that are essential to sales success in this expert field.

Technical knowledge

Choosing the right materials is vital. Firstly try and explain to your customer the value of using acid free products when framing. If an acidic product comes into contact with paper, photos, textiles or other similar items, the acid can migrate, causing permanent damage and decay. This is why it is so very important to use good quality acid free and archival materials for the preservation of your

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treasured memories. If you don't use true acid free materials you will find that your artifacts and photos may discolour or disintegrate more quickly than they would naturally .

Larson-Juhl's sister company, Conservation By Design (CXD), offers a comprehensive range of high quality conservation storage and display products, including the Timecare® range. A wide variety of products are available, including mountboards, mounting strips, adhesive and even cotton gloves.

We can't hope to cover the whole spectrum of framing materials but here is some advice on mountboard, one of the most ubiquitous materials in the conservation framer's arsenal.

Lignin, otherwise known as groundwood acid, is the chemically unstable substance which binds cellulose fibres in the material used for some mountboards. It is essentially destructive in the long term as it is sensitive to light, affected by heat and in time breaks down into an acidic attack on surrounding materials. Mountboard is often manufactured from fibres containing lignin, which is released when the board is cut. In standard board the only protection against the migration of the acid is the protective paper on the back of the board and even this breaks down over time leaving the framed article vulnerable to acid attack.

The Fine Art Trade Guild introduced the 'Five Levels of Framing' to help professionals advise on the best materials to use. In order, they are Minimum, Budget, Commended, Conservation and Museum. Larson-Juhl offers a wide selection of mountboards suitable for Conservation Level framing, including Larson Juhl Artique, Solidcore and Cottoncore boards. Timecare® Heritage Museum mountboard complies with FATG Museum Standards of framing for items which require the very highest level of protection.

You should also be up to date on the myriad features and benefits of other materials in your workshop. The various glasses used to protect from UV, the construction of protective frames and even be able to offer assistance based on information given on the environment in which the frame will be hung. Larson-Juhl supplies Tru Vue® glazing products developed specifically for preservation framing, which block at least 97% of UV energy, reducing fading and other damage caused by light over time and provide superior visibility of artwork with less than 1% reflection.

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When it comes to conservation framing, it's not just the mountboard and glass you have to consider, but also accessories such as the tape you use. Larson-Juhl offers a range of conservation tapes from CXD which meet the FATG Standard for Conservation framing. The Heritage Archival pHotokraft™ (HAPK) Tape and Gummed Tyvek® Tape are available in various sizes and can be used for a range of conservation and framing applications including hinging artwork to mounts, hinging top and bottom mounts, dust proof sealing and producing portfolios for protecting artwork.

Technical skills

Assuming your knowledge is up to scratch, your practical skills need to match them too. Here are a few tips on the best way to frame artwork to Conservation Standards.

- **Step 1** - When mounting a picture, the mount should be cleanly cut without undercuts and with just enough overcut to hold the picture firmly in place.
- **Step 2** - A conservation quality barrier should be placed between the back of the artwork and the backing board. For best protection avoid attaching artwork to the back of the mount.
- **Step 3** - At Commended Level and above, hinges should always be made from archival gummed paper tape which is fully reversible and hinges attached to the back of the artwork should be torn and not cut. Hinges should be dampened with distilled water and then attached to the back of the artwork no longer than 5mm. Conservation quality T Hinges are always recommended since they cause the least damage to artwork when removed.
- **Step 4** - The windowmount and the undermount should always be the same size and hinged along the longer side using a gummed conservation tape with a water-soluble adhesive. By placing a paper-weight on the middle, it prevents the artwork moving and the "T bars" can then be stuck over the hinges on the top edge of the artwork about 1mm from the edge of the paper.
- **Step 5** - Glass with high UV protection is recommended for all valuable items, as this will help to prevent damage caused by UV rays. The frame must give sufficient clearance inside the rebate to allow for expansion and contraction. Glazing should not touch the artwork. The frame, once secured with framers points, tacks or similar, should be sealed with gummed paper tape.
- **Step 6** - Dust and dirt should be removed and the glass cleaned and polished.