

Using Colour Contrast in Design

Contrast plays an important role in frame designs. Whether you use a high or low contrast, achieving the right balance is crucial to the overall look.

The degree of contrast in art, framing, or room décor will impact how dramatic or subtle the presentation is. A true black and white color scheme will have the strongest degree of contrast possible. Various color combinations also create high, medium, or low contrast. After black and white, complementary colors produce the highest degree of contrast. Complementary colors are those directly opposite each other on the Color Wheel, which is the arrangement of colors in a circle in the order of the spectrum. Examples of complementary pairs are red/green and purple/yellow. Pastel blue and dark brown is another pair that is rather high in contrast, but still not nearly as strong as black and white.

In framing, there are four main categories to consider when looking at contrast:

- How much contrast is there within the color scheme of the art?
- How much contrast should there be within the frame design, from one component to the next?
- How much contrast should there be between the art and framing?
- How much contrast should there be between the framing and the room where the art will be displayed?

Contrast Within the Art

Before you start choosing framing materials, take a minute to carefully analyze the art. Some questions you can ask yourself are:

- How broad is the range of color from light to dark?
- Is there a light source in the art, creating strong highlights and shadows?
- Are the colors in the art clear and defined, or did the artist mix colors, thereby minimizing the contrast?
- If the art has a high contrast color palette, chances are a high contrast frame design will

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enhance it. Lower contrast in the art will usually reduce the need for contrast in the framing.

Contrast Within the Frame Design

A frame design consisting of a black frame, white mat, and black fillet would be high in contrast. You can control the appearance of the contrast through the proportions you use.

When highly contrasting colors are used adjacent to each other in a frame design, the results are typically very dramatic. Using the same colors, but changing their placement, can alter the appearance of contrast.

Contrast Between the Art & Framing

When framing art with strong variations in color, a high contrast frame design will generally be a good solution, as opposed to a low contrast design. Since the art should be the focal point of the completed frame design; avoid creating such a strong contrast that the frame overshadows the art.

When art with lower contrast is being framed, reduce the contrast of the frame design. It is probably best if the framing displays slightly less contrast than the art because you want the eye to rest on the art, rather than the frame.

Contrast Between the Framed Art & the Room

Most framers focus on enhancing the artwork to be framed, rather than the room it will inhabit. However, with all of the moulding and mat choices we have today, it is possible to enhance both most of the time.

When a low-contrast frame design is placed into a highly contrasting room decor, it could look faded and out of place. If a highly contrasting frame design is placed into a soothing, low contrast decor, it may be unsettling and too powerful for the room.

A framer's objective is to make the art look its best. Part of that comes from the ability to relate the framing to its environment. If your beautiful framing clashes with the room, the art won't look its

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best. Keeping in mind that framed art should be an accent within the room; you don't want your frame designs to be so perfectly matched to the decor that they just blend in.

In order to create the most appropriate frame designs for your customers, you should find out as much as you can about where the piece will hang. When asking about the color scheme, also ask if there is high or low contrast. If your customer doesn't understand what you mean, ask if there are very light colors mixed with very dark colors or if the colors are all light, all dark, or all medium in value.



Creating Frame Designs

Once you have studied the art and reviewed the room decor with your customer, you can be more confident and more effective in creating a great frame design. There isn't a single "correct" way to use contrast. But depending on the art, the room where it will be displayed, and your customer's personal taste, you can strive to create the best look for each situation.