

Things You Need to Know About Framing Your Needlework

By

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So you have finally finished the needlework you have been working on for months (or years!) and no doubt you have thought about its final presentation. Is it going to be a cushion or a piece of furniture? Or perhaps a framed heirloom to pass down to a family member?

This article is about framing, and hopefully by the time you've finished reading you'll be well informed about what questions to ask your framer, and confident that they'll take care of your needlework in the same manner that you would.

How do you choose a framer?

It's important to know that not all frame shops are alike, even though they might all look the same from the outside. Dig a little deeper and find out who exactly is going to be working on your needlework. You may be surprised to know that your local framer/ex-carpenter might not be the best choice.

1. Meet the framer who is going to be handling your needlework and notice their appearance. What are your first impressions? Are they clean and tidy?
2. Are their hands clean?
3. When discussing framing options, do they handle your needlework respectfully, or do you feel uncomfortable? Trust your instincts.
4. Do they touch your needlework with their bare hands, or do they put on cotton gloves?
5. Is their shop and workshop clean and tidy?

These are small details, but consider how they treat your needlework in front of you as a guide as to how it will be treated once you're not there. All these things are a good indication.

Questions to ask your framer

Are you a qualified picture framer?

Most people don't know that framers can become qualified in their field. A qualified framer has taken the time to study the handling of art and the many different techniques suitable for framing it. The range of artworks, different types of media, textiles and associated framing techniques are many and varied. There is no such thing as "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to framing.

The easiest way to know if your framer is qualified or not is to look for the post-nominals after their name on their business card – MCPF (Master Certified Picture Framer, PPFA), CPF (Certified Picture Framer, PPFA), CGF (Certified Guild Framer, PFGV) and GCF (Guild Certified Framer, FATG). You can rest assured that these framers will care for your needlework and frame it correctly.

BEWARE: Do not be deceived by Guild Memberships. If a framer tells you that they are a member of a guild, and they point to a certificate of membership on their wall or decal on their window, that DOES NOT mean that they are qualified.

It means that they have paid an annual fee to become a member of the guild, and have received the certificate of membership and decal in exchange for the payment.

Can I see some examples of lacing and pinning?

OK, so let's say that for whatever reason your framer is not qualified. That does not necessarily mean that they won't frame your needlework correctly. A good framer will be able to show you exactly what they will do to your needlework.

The first step in framing your needlework is to stretch it.

Lacing and pinning are the only two techniques suitable for stretching needlework in order to preserve it. They are both fully reversible and inert, meaning that the process is not permanent, and glue, staples, acidic products and MDF are not included anywhere in the framing package.

- Glue is permanent and becomes embedded in the needlework fibres, possibly causing discolouration.
- Staples will cut the fibres and can rust.
- Standard "acid-free" matboards will become acidic over time, and will eventually leave acid burns on your needlework. Calcium carbonate is added to boards made from wood pulp (which contains acid and lignin), to enable them to be sold as "acid-free" at the time of manufacture. Only boards made from 100% cotton or alpha-cellulose products such as linen or flax are suitable to preserve your needlework, because they are *naturally* acid-free.
- MDF is highly acidic, and should not be included in any framing package, ever!

Your needlework should be laced or pinned onto a white, acid-free foam core board or mat board. I prefer to use 3mm or 5mm thick Bainbridge Alphamat Artcare Foam Board for pinning and lacing, or 100% cotton Bainbridge Alphasag for lacing. A layer of Pellon wadding may be added for padding.

What you DO want to see.

Examples of pinning:





Example of lacing:



What you DON'T want to see.

Examples of gluing (these two have been glued onto sticky board):



Examples of stapling onto MDF:





Example of lacing onto MDF:



Other things to look for:

- Have a look at the back of other works of art in the store. Has the framer used MDF in many of the framed pieces? If they have, it's a pretty good indication that using this highly acidic product has become a part of their framing "habit".
- Check the weight of the finished frames in the store. If the backs of the frames are covered with brown paper, you might not be able to see whether MDF has been used or not. If the frames feel unusually heavy for their size, there is a very good chance that a wood backing, such as MDF or Masonite has been used.
- Ask to see finished needlework frames they might have made for other customers. Check the weight, but also take note of the thickness (depth) of the frame. Needlework frames done correctly are often quite thick, because of the many layers inside - the glass, matboard(s), needlework stretched over 3mm or 5mm foam board and a backing board. If a needlework frame is thin, the needlework has probably been glued or stapled flat onto a backing board. Lacing and pinning are not flat processes.
- Is there a nice space between the needlework and the glazing product, or is the needlework sandwiched up against the glass? Needlework should never be sandwiched up against glass.
- Have they used a quality wire hanger with D-rings on the back of the frame, or have they stapled a piece of white cord to use as a hanger? This is another good indication as to whether or not your finished frame will be a quality product.

The price of framing.

The price quoted for your framed needlework is another great way to tell whether your needlework will be preserved for future generations to come or not.

You could take your needlework to one framer, choose exactly the same coloured matboards and frame, and they might quote, for example, \$100. Take it to the next framer, and the quote could be \$400. Are you getting exactly the same product? The answer is "Probably not". The difference between the two is most likely the unseen; and all the things I've mentioned above.

Why not lace your own needlework? Download the next document "How to Lace (Stretch) Your Needlework".