

Glossary of Art & Framing Terms

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Most industries have their own unique language. The Art and Custom Framing industry is no exception. If you are unfamiliar with some of the more basic lingo, here are some definitions to help you.

4-Ply Mat

The thickness of a standard rag mat. It is also comparable in thickness to most other matboards.

8-Ply Mat

A double thick mat

Acid-Free Mats

The mats called acid-free have been purified to neutralize the acidity. Although this is good, this type of mat is not a substitute for rag or alpha-cellulose mats when you want to adhere to conservation standards.

Acrylic

Acrylic is an alternative instead of glass. It doesn't break as easily and is somewhat lighter in weight, especially in larger sizes. People often say Plexiglas when they should say acrylic. Plexiglas is a brand name.

Allowance

When frames are made, they are cut slightly larger than the size desired. This provides space so anything that is the actual size will drop into the frame.

Anti-Reflective Glass

A type of coated glass that greatly reduces reflection without distorting the art behind it.

Bevel

When the window is cut into the mat, the blade cuts at an angle, exposing part of the mat's core.

Bottom-Weighted Mat

When the border beneath the art is wider than the border above and beside it.

Bumpers/Bumpons

Rubber or felt pads that are placed on the bottom two corners of the frame. These provide an air space behind the frame and help keep the frame straight on the wall.

Burl

An irregular growth at the bottom of a tree. It is cut into thin veneer and applied to frames. Burl comes from a very small section of the tree so the pieces of veneer are short. On one length of frame moulding, numerous pieces of burl are laid end to end so seams are expected and a part of the look.

Burnish

A technique used with gold leaf to create a lustrous sheen

Canvas

A substrate used to paint or print on.

Cap

A frame moulding profile that is narrow across the face and deep from front to back. Caps are generally 1" to 1 ½" in depth.

Cassette

A frame moulding profile having a flat panel with raised edges at the front and back.

Clay (Bole)

A colored clay, applied in liquid form, to the moulding before it is leafed. When the leaf is later burnished, a portion of the gold rubs away, allowing some of the clay color to show through. This adds depth the frame's finish.

Clear Glass

The standard type of glass used in frames.

Closed Corner Frame

Frame that are assembled prior to being finished so the corners are seamless.

Compo

A composite substance that ornamental patterns are molded into to decorate frames.

Conservation Glass

Glass with filtering properties to block harmful ultraviolet rays.

Conservation Framing

The use of preservation materials and techniques to protect artwork.

Double Mat

A mat border made from two layers of matboard. The two layers can be the same color but are often different colors.

Distressed

To deliberately mar the surface of the frame moulding to give the effect of age.

Dry Mount

A process for adhering prints to rigid backings using heat activated adhesives.

Dust Cover

A paper backing used to finish off the back of the frame.

Elongated Mat

When the mat borders above and below the art are wider than the borders on either side.

Fabric Mat

A mat that has a fabric surface instead of the typical paper surface.

Fillet

A narrow moulding used as an accent. Fillets can be placed inside mat openings or in the lip of frames.

Finished Corner Frame

The same as a closed corner frame.

Float Frame

A type of moulding used for framing canvases. The art is set into the frame from the front so none of the surface is covered.

Float Mount

To place the art on top of the mat rather than in a window behind the mat. Sometimes the art sits directly on the mat but it is often raised off it to add depth.

Foamboard

A board used to mount prints to or used as a backing

Frame

When the four pieces of moulding are assembled, it becomes a frame.

French Mat

A traditional form of mat decoration, originated in France . A watercolor wash is applied within a panel and ink lines are placed around it. Some French mats are simple and others quite elaborate.

Gallery Wrap

When artwork continues from the front surface of a stretched canvas down the sides.

Gesso

A plaster substance applied to frame moulding to create a smooth base prior to applying the finish.

Giclee Print

A popular method used to produce fine art prints

Gilding

Applying gold leaf to the surface of the frame. The two primary types used are water gilding and oil gilding.

Glazing

A generic term used for covering art and mats with glass or acrylic

Hinge

A method used to attach art to a backing board. Most commonly hinging is used when framing works of art to conservation standards.

Laminate

The process of adhering a clear plastic film over something to seal it. Laminating films come in a variety of finishes.

Lap Lines

Gold Leaf comes in small sheets. When a frame is leafed, the sheets are intentionally overlapped to insure the clay underneath is not visible. This overlap can result in a deeper or brighter finish at even intervals down the length of the moulding. This is considered a sign of quality.

Limited Edition Print

When an artist or publisher creates a defined amount of prints and will print no more of that image. Edition sized can vary from several to thousands. Generally these will be signed by the artist and numbered, such as 1/1000, 2/1000, etc.

Liner

When a mat border is not used, it is often desirable to use a liner. Today liners are usually fabric covered frames but the original liners were gold leafed for use inside finished corner frames.

Lip

The part of the frame that holds the art and other framing contents in place.

Mat Border

Used to surround many prints, photos, certificates, etc., a mat border provides a visual resting spot between the art and everything around it, making it easier to view the art.

Mat Opening/Mat Window

A hole cut into the mat so the art will be visible through it

Moulding

Before a frame is made, the four sides are cut to size form a long length of moulding

Moulding Depth

The overall outside dimension of the moulding from front to back

Moulding Width

The overall outside dimension of the moulding from inside edge to outside edge

Museum Glass

The best glass available to protect the art from harmful ultraviolet light, while also reducing reflection

Non-Glare Glass

A type of glass that greatly reduces glare but also can cause a cloudiness or distortion, especially when it sits away from the art as it will with a double or triple mat.

Open Edition Print

When art prints are mass-produced and continue to be printed as long as there is demand for the image.

Paper Mat

The lowest quality of mat. It is more susceptible to discoloration and it can accelerate the deterioration of the art.

Preservation Framing

Another term for conservation framing.

Profile

When you look at the end of a stick of moulding, this is the shape you would see.

Rabbit Depth

The interior height of the frame where the contents will be placed

Rabbit Width

The amount of the frame lip that will overlap onto the contents placed in the frame

Rag Mat

The mat looks like paper but it was made from cotton fibers. Rag mats are recommended when you want to preserve art.

Reflection Control Glass

Another term for Non-Glare Glass

Reverse

A type of moulding profile where the inside edge is deeper and slopes down to the wall at the outer edge.

Reverse Bevel

When a mat is cut so the beveled edge does not show

Rottenstone

A fine powder used to antique frames

Scoop

A type of moulding profile where the outside edge is the deepest and slopes down to the inner edge.

Shadowbox

A frame moulding that is 1 ½” deep or more. Mouldings less than 1 ½” deep are generally called “Caps” but they can be used to frame objects that will fit within them.

Sight Size

On a completed frame, this is the size from the innermost edge on one side to the innermost edge on the opposite side. This size will be smaller than the actual frame size.

Single Mat

A mat border made from one layer of mat

Spacer

Spacer products are available to keep glass off the surface of art when a mat is not used. Foamboard strips can also be placed between layers of mat to create space.

Stacking

The technique of combining two or more mouldings to create one frame. Stacking has been used for centuries. Frames are usually placed side by side, adding to the width but you can also place frames one over the other to add depth.

Strap Hanger

A strong type of hanger that fits quite flush to the wall and can be used with or without wire.

Stretcher Bars

Pre-cut pieces that interlock to form the framework canvas is stretched over

Stretcher Frame/Strainer

Length of stretcher that is cut to size and joined like a frame.

Toning

Adding a finish to warm or cool the color below it.

Triple Mat

A mat border made from three layers of matboard. They can all be the same color or two or three different colors.

Variable Sizing

When an art image can be printed in a variety of sizes

Veneer

Thin sheets of wood that are adhered to frames, furniture, cabinets, etc. Veneers are generally used when large pieces are not available, such as burl, or when the wood is rare or expensive.

Wall Grouping

When you hang several framed pieces into a formation on a single wall