

# NOTES ON FRAMING

BARK FRAMEWORKS, INC.

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Preservation and aesthetics are the two important issues confronting framers of valuable art. At Bark Frameworks we feel that our first responsibility is to insure, as far as possible, that the artwork will be protected for many years. Of course, a well-made conservation frame can be as beautiful as any other. But if the frame does not protect the art, then it is not a good frame. In the paragraphs below is a more detailed description of our approach.

### AESTHETICS

We make a wide variety of frames of our own design—none are reproductions. Whereas for years we have specialized in hardwood frames, we now also craft frames in gold and silver leaf and in welded aluminum, brass, bronze, and copper. These metal frames can be patinated, achieving some remarkable finishes. Among the woods we use are maple (including curly and bird's eye), cherry, birch, oak, ramin, East Indian rosewood, bubinga (from Africa), Swiss pear, and purpleheart (a vivid purple wood from South America). We employ a wide range of wood stains, dyes, and finishes. Any kind of moulding can be made to special order. We make frames for paintings as well as for works on paper.

The frame itself is one consideration. The other topic to consider is the mat. The design of a mat, how it works with the art and with the frame, is a subtle issue. We mount silks, linens, and drawing papers, as well as using the tones and colors available in rag board. Our range of colors and textures is great. We have been designing frames for a number of years and we do it with care. We welcome the chance to design and make new frames.

## CONSERVATION

The major questions in properly framing works on paper are these:

1. How is the work attached to the back mat?
2. What kinds of mat board and backing material are used?
3. What kind of glazing is used?
4. Is the art work separated from the glazing?

The standards of conservation at Bark Frameworks are those generally accepted by professional paper conservators. Our answers to the questions posed above are:

### 1. How is the work attached to the back mat?

We use neutral pH Japanese paper hinges. A few different kinds of paper are used, selected for proper strength relative to the weight of the art work being hinged. We make our own rice starch paste, using a recipe prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Generally it is good practice to attach the art work at the two upper corners only. If the frame receives a shock or if the art work expands or contracts to a great degree it is better for the hinges to give way than for the art work to be torn or stretched. Sometimes more hinges are necessary and we may use other kinds of hinges in special cases. These exceptions could be discussed with you. (N.B. The tape called *linen tape* or *Holland tape*, which is commonly used by framers, is not of conservation standard for hinging art. Nor do we recommend using pressure sensitive tapes, even those advertised as “archival”).

### 2. What kinds of mat board and backing material are used?

We use only 100% cotton fiber mat board (known as *rag board*). It is usually buffered—made slightly alkaline—to resist the development of acidity. We use 4-ply (1/16 inch thick) rag board behind the art work and when we use a *window mat* over the art, it is of 4-ply, 8-ply, or 12-ply thickness. These mat boards are available in many tones and colors. We make as well silk, linen, and paper covered mats. When a mat is covered with one of these materials the mat board we use under the silk, linen, or paper is always 100% cotton fiber, not the wood pulp boards which are commonly used and whose acidity can damage the art. Behind the back mat is a backing board of *Fomecore*. One matting issue, which is not often mentioned, is grain direction. Papers (and mat board) are hygroscopic and with

changes in humidity will expand and contract across their grain. By accounting for this tendency when we select materials, we can minimize its effects: waviness and strain in paper, or broken hinges. There are a number of such considerations when using mat board. Insisting on acid-free materials is only the most basic one.

### 3. What kind of glazing is used?

Glass and acrylic glazing are used (*plexiglas*, *lucite*, and *acrylite* are all common brand names of acrylic glazing). We recommend glass with smaller art works or when the frame is unlikely to be shipped, and especially with works on light weight paper or with works which have a fragile surface, such as charcoal or pastel. Since glass does not hold a static charge as plexiglas does, it will not lift the paper or lift bits of drawing material as plexiglas may. The other advantage of glass is that it is not easily scratched. Its major disadvantages are that it breaks easily and is heavier than plexiglas. Under some conditions, non-reflective *Denglas* may be used.

Plexiglas has the singular advantage of being almost unbreakable. It is also light in weight, and has virtually no color, whereas glass is slightly tinted. But Plexiglas scratches easily and holds a static charge, as described above. Furthermore, in recent years the quality of acrylic glazing has fallen. Most sheets have black specks, scratches or other defects.

There are two kinds of special plexiglas which shield ultra-violet radiation. These are good to use when the art work will receive a significant dose of sunlight or fluorescent light. Certain colors are fugitive and will fade or change hue under such conditions and paper may be structurally damaged by light, especially at the ultra-violet end of the spectrum. The ultra-violet shielded plexiglases are called UF-3 and UF-4. UF-3 shields all ultra-violet but is tinted a slightly yellow green. UF-4 shields almost all ultra-violet and has no color cast. Regular plexiglas and glass allow roughly the same amounts of ultra-violet to pass through; only UF-3 and UF-4 appreciably absorb UV.

### 4. Is the art work separated from the glazing?

Ideally, the art work should not be in contact with the glazing material. If glass or plexiglas presses against the paper, wrinkles may be pressed into the paper. This is especially likely to occur in summer when humid air causes paper to expand. Ink or medium may stick to

the glazing and be impossible to remove without damaging the art. It is also possible that condensation may form on the inside of the glazing. In that case, if the paper is pressed against the glazing the paper may be damaged. In order to separate the glazing from the art we use window mats, either 4-ply, 8-ply, or 12-ply. We feel that 4-ply mats usually provide insufficient depth. In many cases we use fillets, which are spacer strips from 1/8 inch to several inches deep. At Bark Frameworks we use plexiglas which is at least 1/8 inch thick and on very large works we use 3/16 inch or 1/4 inch plexiglas. This thick glazing is less likely to bow into the art or cause visual distortion. When framing very large works we also construct a panel to which we hinge the art. This rigid panel is built to remain flat and stable so that the art work will not be pressed against the plexiglas.

Many of the frames we design are unique, demanding projects, taking full advantage of the materials and techniques outlined above. We also make simpler frames, as conservationally sound as our more elaborate ones, which are economical and of high quality.

We welcome your inquiries,

*Jared Bark,*  
President

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**BARK FRAMEWORKS, INC.**

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