

# frames of reference

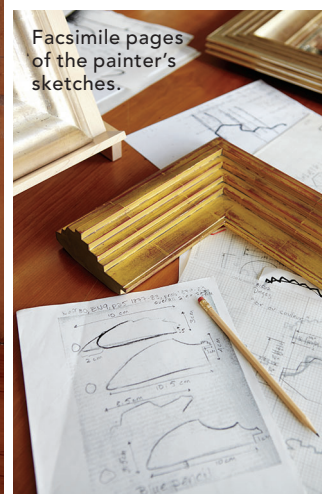
Jared Bark finds inspiration in an Impressionist's notebooks for frames that bring art history to life



Mirrors displayed in frames designed by Edgar Degas.



One of Bark's new frames.



Facsimile pages of the painter's sketches.

Edgar Degas was notoriously picky about the frames for his pictures. Legend has it that, upon seeing one of his works displayed at a friend's house in an ostentatious gold frame, the artist removed the painting, rolled it up, and left with it under his arm.

In his lifetime Degas made more than 40 sketches for picture frames. Nowadays, just a few of his paintings, such as *The Collector of Prints* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, are still in the frames the artist designed. But that doesn't mean the designs are lost to history. Working from Degas's notebooks, framemaker Jared Bark is lovingly recreating the structures the artist imagined a century and a half ago. Amazingly, they look fresh—even radical—today.

"The formal vocabulary of his frames is completely novel," says Bark, paging through a facsimile of one of Degas's notebooks in his workshop in Long Island City, Queens. Bark, who has been a favorite framer for museums, galleries, and New York's downtown artists for more than 40 years, believes the frame should never outshine the art—an approach Degas would have appreciated. Unlike his Impressionist contemporaries Renoir and Monet, who preferred fussy, Louis XIV-style antique frames, Degas favored simple, straight-sided forms, often with several layers of fluting on the sides as well as the front.

Presented as cross sections in the notebooks, the sketches look more like lumpy pastry than architectural plans. Bark, who has been working his way through the notebooks for the past 15 years, has nicknames for his favorite drawings, including one he calls Krazy Kat. "The sketch looked so goofy that when we made the frame I was stunned by how elegant it was," Bark says. "Some are less dramatic than I anticipated, and some just bowl me over."



Jared Bark at his eponymous showroom.

While the frames are a natural fit for works by Degas and other Impressionists, they also make stunning surrounds for contemporary works and for the antique-style mirrors Bark Frameworks produces. All the frames are custom made, though some small versions fitted out with mirrors can be bought from the workshop. "It's exciting transforming these from the pages of Degas's notebooks to actual objects in the world," says Bark. "They are faithful to his drawings, but in every other respect, they're brand new." **JENNIE YABROFF**