

# The Design Process

## Layout & Design: Critique #1

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

In any classroom situation, a lack of questions or comments often indicates one of two things. Either the students understand what is being taught and are ready to continue, or they are completely lost and too confused to even know what to ask. There's also another slight possibility: that no one is listening (or reading) at all. Since I'm sure that isn't the case, it's time for the final exam, the fifth and final stage of the design process: clarification.

This series was designed to "framerfy" the traditional principles of art and design, and if you've paid attention you should be armed with a better understanding of design elements and factors as they apply to framing (diagrams 1 and 2). To reinforce your understanding of the individual principles and to better illustrate their design potential, let's examine a few completed designs over the next few months and critique the end product.

### The Design Process

To recap, the five-stage process of design includes *defining* the project, followed by *creativity* in finding a solution, *analyzing* the plans based on any limitations, and then finally *producing* the framed art. We then come to the final stage, or *clarification*, the ultimate critique and final overview which should point out design strengths and weaknesses.

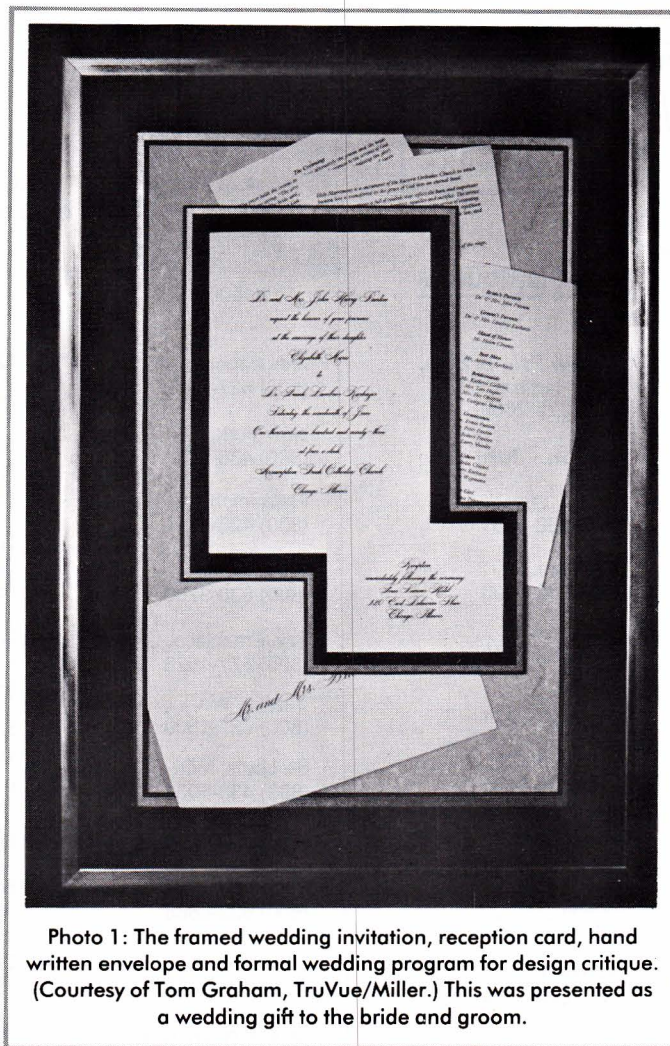


Photo 1: The framed wedding invitation, reception card, hand written envelope and formal wedding program for design critique. (Courtesy of Tom Graham, TruVue/Miller.) This was presented as a wedding gift to the bride and groom.

### Defining The Project

The challenge in the example shown here was to frame a very upscale letterpress (printing directly from a raised inked surface) wedding invitation on elegant, soft, heavy-weight paper, with hand lettered envelopes and printed formal wedding program. The only specifications were to keep it elegant and use gold and black (photo 1).

### Creating A Solution

The design approach was to echo the delicacy of the fine lines from the lettering of the invitation itself, then use gold to subtly accent the richness of letterpress quality. The textural specialty-mat backing was selected as a soft contrast to the non-patterned papers used, and was chosen instead of fabric to maintain the dignity of the upscale printing process, keeping the entire

design and objects within the paper media.

### Analyzing The Materials/Limitations

This was a carte blanche project so there were no financial, size or time limitations. The frame dimensions are 15 1/2"x22 1/4" and I chose Larson-Juhl 1 1/8" gold Hokito X2745 moulding. The top mat is TruVue/Miller #2353 Black Ultiblack with a 9 ply liner pin-striped tiered mat (4 ply #2396 Florentine Rose fused to 4 ply #2353 black with three sheets of Crescent Colored Art Paper #1050

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Olde Tan between for the stripe). The textural backing is #2726 Crema Palazzo Ultimat. The entire piece was glazed with Conservation Clear glass.

## Initial Overview

The easiest way to begin a critique is to stand back and simply look at the overall framed image. The old rules of investigative reporting: "who, what, when, where, why and how" are a great place to start. You and your critical viewer's eye are the *who* in this case; that's the "given". Notice *what* your eye sees first, *when* it elects to move to the next detail, *where* it remains held, *why* the design feels successful or not, and ultimately *how* the design principles were used.

Framing design is required to relate to the art, to enhance and protect it. Framing should indeed work well with the image as a whole, and make a statement in its own right, but should never overpower the art. The various individual elements in a design must all appear intentional and interrelated or the basic design will fall apart.

The viewer's eye (who) is caught first by the invitation (what), then after slight hesitation (when) drops to the reception card moving from upper left to lower right (where), then is pulled up to the program as it circles counter-clockwise around to the lower left envelope, in an almost spiral movement. It then is visually encouraged back into the invitation by the slanted placement of the lettering on the envelope.

There is a feeling of unity in the flow and all principles used appear not only intentional but well fused (why). Why involves the selection of specific contrasts and accents to evoke particular emotions and viewer responses stimulated by correct use of design principles, or the *how*.

How all this is achieved is by inte-

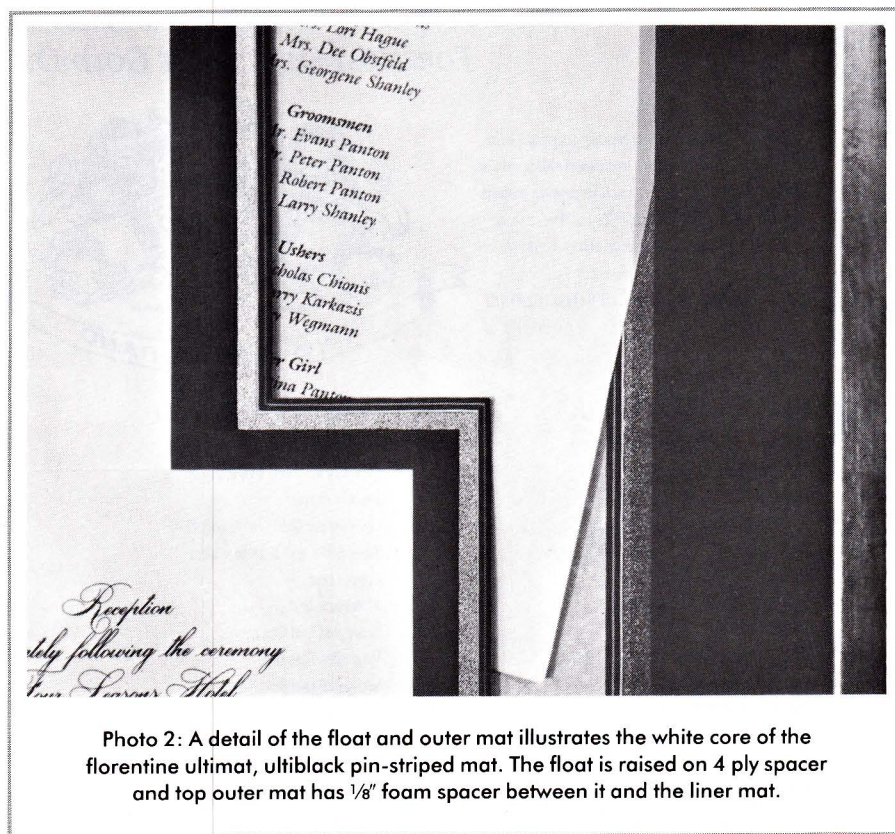


Photo 2: A detail of the float and outer mat illustrates the white core of the florentine ultimat, ultiblack pin-striped mat. The float is raised on 4 ply spacer and top outer mat has 1/8" foam spacer between it and the liner mat.

grating the use of individual elements and factors by limiting them to a total of three to five.

## "The How" Continues: Counting Elements

*Line* (1) was used repeatedly in the double mat, pin-striped tiered center pedestal, and outer mat. If black was the given, *color* (2) was used through the introduction of gold and the creme backing. By beginning with the pebbled surface Florentine gold mat, then adding the faux marble Palazzo backing, *texture* (3) was used. (photo 2)

Since a centralized, non-decorated, rectangular mat opening dominates a frame by its central position, double matting may add color accents and surface or bevel decoration may add line. In this case, however, the actual mat opening becomes nearly secondary because of the use of the dominant *shape* (4) in the center float. There appears to be

the illusion of a frame within a frame.

Neither *intensity* nor *space* have been used as active elements in this design (though spacers are used) since there is no extreme use of highlight and shadow, or vastness of negative unused area.

In framing, the above six elements are best recognized through the appearance and visual feel of individual moulding, mat board, fabric, paint, pigment, decorative paper and artwork. The element count holds at four.

## Holding It Together

Basic factors hold the elements together in a visually cohesive unit. They are not a series of rules, but rather guidelines developed to assist in completing a more harmonized or unified project.

Other than the bevel depth, the widths or *proportions* of each introduced mat or visual edge remains

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## DESIGN ELEMENTS

- LINE:** Creation of movement to organize, divide, enhance or direct. (ie: french mats, panel decoration, ruling pen accents, tiered mats, fillets, carvings...)
- COLOR:** Result of light wavelengths to vision, used in framing to accent, harmonize and assist in creating a mood through contrast and associations. (ie: matboard, fabric, frame...)
- TEXTURE:** Character of materials creating a mood or richness determined by a physical structure. (ie: fabric threads, specialty boards...)
- SHAPE:** Actual forms in relation to height and width of the surrounding areas. Rectangles, ovals etc. (ie: mat openings, frame construction...)
- INTENSITY:** Visual energy evoking strong reactions of mood often through highlight and shadow. An extreme of theatrical measure through physical construction as shadow boxes, floated glass etc. (ie: glass etching, deep bevels, stacked mouldings)
- SPACE:** Distance around or between items to accent or unify the central image as positive and negative areas. Both outside and within frames. (ie: wall groupings, vast openness...)

There are six basic elements to be considered in frame design including *line*, *color*, *texture*, *shape*, *intensity/value* and *space*. These make up the available raw materials, ingredients or bricks of a design equation which will be mortared into a finished presentation. In framing, these six elements are best recognized through the appearance and visual feel of individual moulding, mat board, fabric, paint, pigment, decorative paper and artwork.

## DESIGN FACTORS

- PROPORTION/SCALE:** Deals with the ratios and relationships of one part to another. This translates into the actual frameable image size plus the outer dimensions of the mat and completed frame. (ie: art image to frame, border widths...)
- EMPHASIS:** Physical positioning of visual concentration or focal point establishing centrality, otherwise defined as a high point or climax. Control of eye movement. (ie: physical position within frame)
- BALANCE:** The feeling of equality in weight, attention or attraction to other parts within a pictorial field or frame, almost mathematical in nature. (ie: relationships of fillet to mat to frame...)
- RHYTHM:** The use of measured accents, patterns, colors, space etc. to create a whole. Repetition of select details, ratios etc. (ie: fillet detail in moulding pattern in mat carving...)
- UNITY/STYLE:** Pulling together to create a quality of oneness or a fusion among the individual elements and that they are in HARMONY as a result of careful and deliberate planning. Also familiarity in type of art, period in history or personal expression. (ie: art deco, impressionist... ultimately a well designed piece)

Basic factors include *proportion*, *emphasis/placement*, *balance*, *rhythm* and *unity*. They hold the elements together into a visually cohesive unit through a controlled, organized and well integrated presentation. The factors are not a series of steadfast laws or rules, but rather guidelines developed to assist in completing a more harmonized or unified project.

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unlike the others for variety. Liner mat accents of  $\frac{1}{4}$ " on the outer mats are contrasted with  $\frac{3}{16}$ " gold accents on the inner float. Distances from the float to the outer mat are varied in direct result to use of the program pages and weight of the text beneath it.

Tighter black borders surround the reception card than do the invitation itself for focal point *emphasis*. Emphasis is also well-used by the conscious control of the viewer's eye movement as discussed during the initial who, what, etc. overview. From a design point of view the emphasis or focal point concentration is very successful, accenting the invitation and supporting it by related wedding pieces.

If a line were drawn diagonally, horizontally or vertically dividing the frame, an asymmetrical *balance* is created between the visual weight of the three program pages upper right in direct contrast to the negative spaces utilized surrounding the name on the envelope lower left. Even the float unit alone has the invitation and reception card in asymmetrical balance using the longer text weight to contrast with the horizontal placement of the overlapped card.

Repeating the pin-striped bevel on the outer mat and inner float, surrounding the central image and the entire presentation with black mats, and selecting a quality gold moulding which proportionately reflects the gold liner mats are all utilization of *rhythm* in a successful, yet subtle,

manner. The fine lines in the printed lettering are reflected in the delicate pin stripe of the 9 ply mat bevel, and even the moulding is brushed with black to unify the use of selected colors. More than a specific pattern here, it's the textures, colors and ratios that are rhythmically repeated. **So, Does It Ultimately Have Unity?**

Yes Virginia, I believe it does. The elements were held to four and all of the factors appear to have been addressed, whether conscious or subconsciously is not an issue. A good designer will instinctively know what is necessary to achieve a unified design.

The program and envelope edges deliberately invade the isolation of the outer mat allowing for a freer

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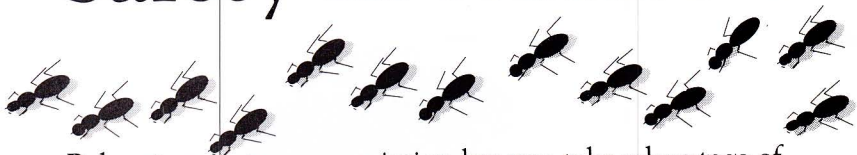
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visual flow or crossing of the planes on top of, between and beneath the mats themselves.

The contemporary style and quality of the invitation is reflected in a crisp, dramatic presentation which allows for movement yet continually draws back into itself. We always subconsciously look for some type of organization within a design, something that feels comforting and familiar. When there is a sense of coherent unity it will naturally be a successful design; it just feels right.

The final portion of any critique—design aside—is that all mechanical and technical portions involving the design execution are truly well done. You will never be able to pass off even the most successful and creative design if the execution is loaded with overcuts, poor miters and no dust cover.

So after twelve months of putting it all together we're finally picking it all apart. But then again, isn't that the best way to determine if what has been achieved is good and why? Design, very much like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, designs will greatly vary from framer to framer, and this is often revealed during the creativity stage.

I personally love working in the illusion of the third dimension, deliberately striving to create an intrigue through invading double mats with spacers, floated materials and tiered bevel designs. Individuality is what sets us apart from other framers and truly makes us talented "frame designers".

See you next month with another design critique. 

*Chris A. Paschke, CPF has a B.A. in "Creative Arts and Design", has been a professional calligraphic designer and lettering artist since 1975, and continues to teach two- and three-dimensional Layout and Design courses across the country. She is the owner of Designs Ink, Oxford, Connecticut, specializing in commercial framing, fine art calligraphy and lettering design, and consultation.*