

# The Design Process

## Clarification: Critique #3

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

Shadow box designing probably causes the most difficulty where the principles of design are concerned. In an attempt to deal with three-dimensionality and the placement of objects (rather than merely enhancing flat artwork), it is difficult to achieve the required balance and unity of a good design.

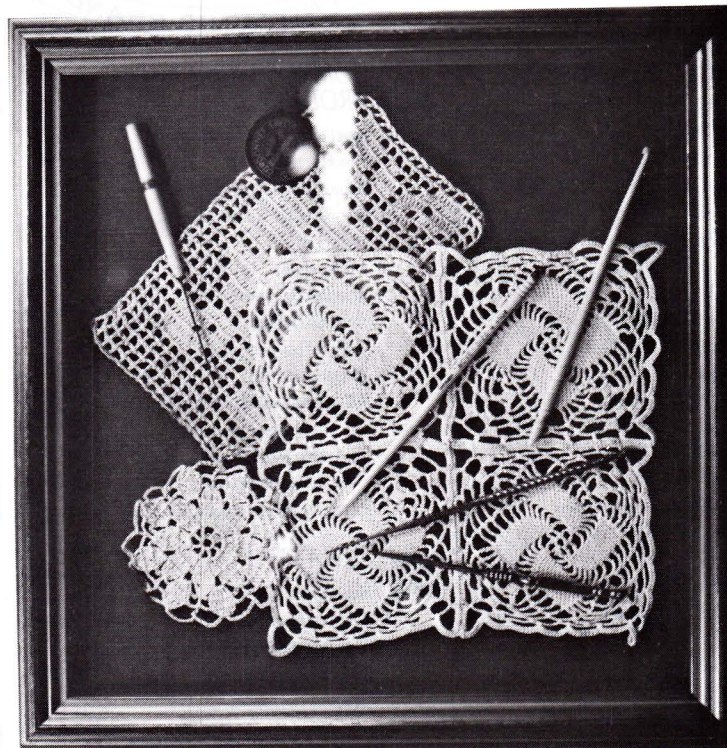
Quite often, visual impact through proper use of focal point and emphasis is sacrificed or forgotten altogether. Intensity is almost always present due to the highlights and shadows naturally created by the objects themselves. By randomly placing objects only to fill a space without considering the story being told, a design may not feel unified.

Shape and space may be used dramatically to showcase items quite successfully. The best example of this would be emulating the contour of an object by the mat window. In any event, the elements need to be carefully controlled so as to neither overpower nor create monotonous presentation.

### Defining The Project

This month's critique focuses on the clarification stage of a shadow box created by Barbara Benner for FrameTek. Three hand crocheted doilies and a series of five antique metal and bone crochet hooks were to be placed in an attractive layout.

The doilies are made of naturally aged spun cotton thread which are



off-white in color. The crochet hooks have also developed a yellowed ivory coloring, a direct result of their natural aging process.

The initial design concept was to imitate a random pile of Grandma's belongings, artistically arranged, of course. The main goal was to create an environment deep enough for the items—showcasing them yet not attracting attention to a "showy" framing presentation.

### Creating The Solution

The gilded moulding that was selected offers highlights of Venetian Red basecoat peeking through the leafed surface. This is often used to enhance the yellow gold appearance of applied leaf. It helps create a rich,

*continued on page 26*

Photo 1:

"Grandma's Goodies" features hand crafted doilies of natural threads, ivory and metal crochet hooks, and a thread box. The shadow box is 10" x 10" and has been presented for critique courtesy of FrameTek, Eugene, Oregon.



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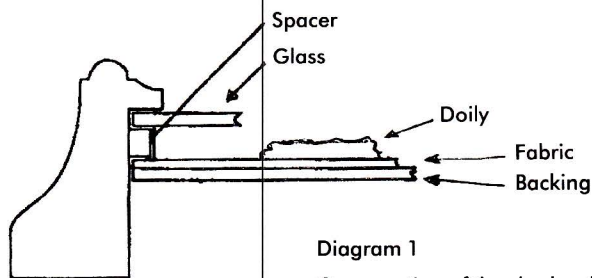


Diagram 1

Cross section of the shadow box assembly.  
Courtesy of FrameTek.

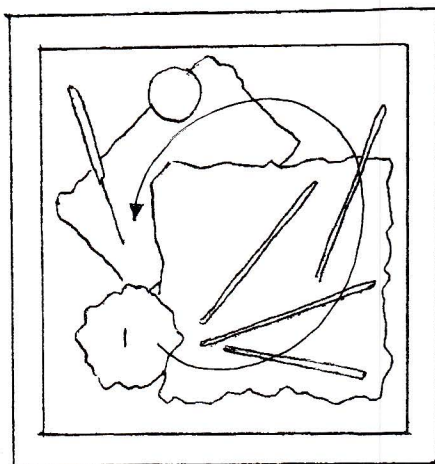


Diagram 2

This is an illustration of the most common focal point concentration beginning at the lower left, and travelling counterclockwise back to the coaster.

warm environment for the needlework and ties in with the gold band on the hook. A textural red-based fabric was selected as a backing for its warmth and texture, while also reintroducing the red coloring from the moulding. It is dark enough to contrast yet still maintain a "homey" feel to the needlework handcrafts presented.

## Analyzing The Materials/ Limitations

There were no distinct price limitations set on this project. The framed personal items needed to be kept somewhat simple so the piece would fit in with other framed photos and mementos in a family wall grouping. Frame dimensions were 10" x 10" using a 1 5/8" deep 1 1/16" wide moulding.

A Pompeii Red linen/cotton blend

fabric was chosen from Framing Fabrics, then mounted to a 3/16" foam board substrate. The backing was distanced from the Conservation Clear glazing by clear Framespace 4 allowing for 1/4" of airspace for the objects. The spaces were sprayed with a satin lacquer to kill the glossy shine of the material before assembly (diagram 1).

All the items were sewn with monofilament line or affixed with Silicone adhesive to the backing.

## Who, What, When, Where, Why

Let's approach the initial examination by following the eye as it explores the completed shadow box design (photo 1). The eye (who) is initially caught in the lower left quadrant at the small round coaster (what), hesitates as it briefly (when) examines the handwork, then flutters between the coaster and the three hooks to the right of it (where).

It then circles counterclockwise to the upper right, across the top to the upper left showcasing the rectangular doily and antique thread container. This circular visual motion then begins again as the eye is directed back down to the circular coaster lower left (diagram 2).

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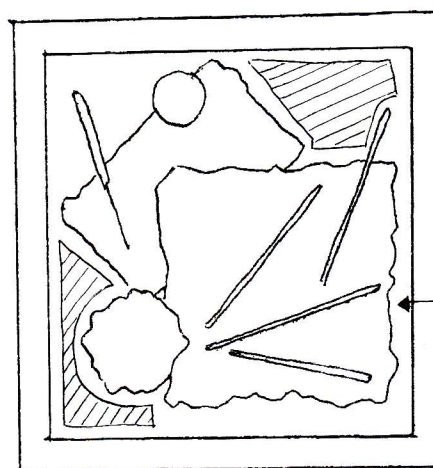


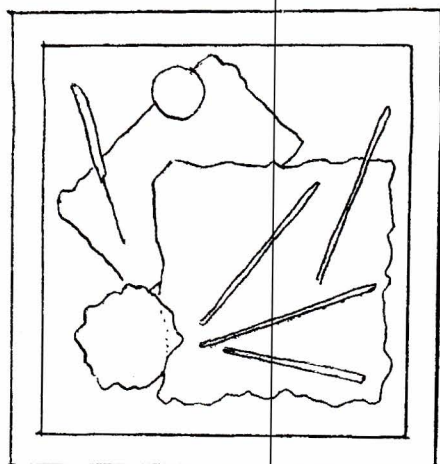
Diagram 3

The tight right margin is contrasted with the negative spaces to the upper right and lower left as well as the concentration of doily overlaps in the near center.

*A textured red-based fabric was selected as a backing for its warmth and texture.*

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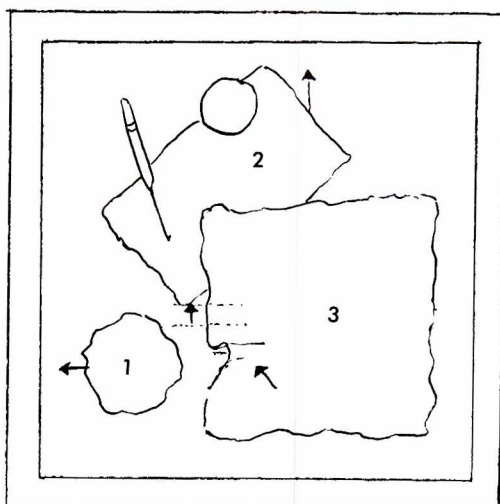


4A

Why this particular layout was selected over another comes back to the selection of specific contrasts and visual stimulants connected with viewer emotion. How all of this was achieved and perhaps how it may have been altered is covered as we examine the specific principles.

## Analyzing The Elements

The simplicity of this design becomes a rather strong statement in itself. Visual concentration remains solely on the collectibles within the



4B

Diagram 4A illustrates the design in the photo. Diagram 4B has increased the frame size from 10" x 10" to 12" x 12". The additional room allows the coaster (1) to be moved left, free of the square doily. The rectangle (2) is shifted up so as not to align with the line at center of the large square (3). The square is more loosely placed allowing more contour and moved left away from right edge of frame.

frame, for there is little else to distract the viewer.

Since there is no strong use of line, it cannot be counted as an element in this project. The only obvious use of line would be in the directed placement of the crochet hooks themselves used for visual emphasis. This could be even more exaggerated by shifting the placement and visual direction of the hooks.

Since there is always a given, color

is not used as an element in this project either. Although the Pompeii Red fabric creates a warmth and it is indeed a color, it is the only interior framing color and therefore not a countable element.

The texture, the first counted element of the background fabric is counted as a utilized element only because of the extremes of texture within the doilies themselves. The fact there are three totally separate patterns established in the needlework, along with the twisted handles and smooth ivory contrasts of the hooks, allows us to count the introduction of the new contrasting textural background as a noted use of an element.

By restricting the design to a box with no mats, color contrasts or odd use of frame shape, use of design elements is highly restricted. Remember that holding use of countable principles from three to five is the safest design standard. Once again, no unusual or contrasting use of shape is found in this design eliminating that also from the list.

Intensity, the second element used is almost always present in a shadow box, simply due to the use of three-dimensional items. Space, the third is also countable because of the well-used negative areas allowing for visual concentration on the art. This is emphasized by the 'square within a square' doily in the lower right being held tightly into the frame corner. This directly contrasts with the upper right open corner and the lower left odd space surrounding the coaster (diagram 3).

## Establishing The Factors

So far we've looked at a successful use of three elements. Now let's examine the factors that hold the elements together cohesively to determine if they do indeed hold their own or might be improved.

The overall size of the project is quite small—less than a foot square—in keeping with the desire

*The simplicity of this design becomes a rather strong statement in itself.*




# The Design Process

## Principles of Framing Design Series Bibliography

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## Additional Reading

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- Prohaska, Roy. *Basic Course in Design*. 1980. 

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## Principles of Framing Design Index of Series Articles

### ELEMENTS AND FACTORS

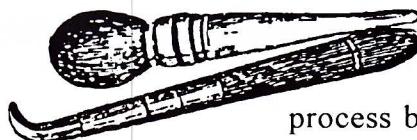
Part I	Essence of Design	January 1994
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Part III	Color	March 1994
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Part V	Shape	May 1994
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### CLARIFICATION

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Critique #3	March 1995
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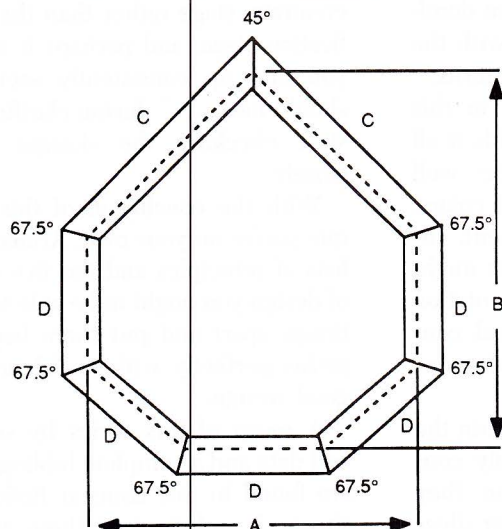
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## DESIGN ELEMENTS

- LINE:** Creation of movement to enhance or direct. (ie: french mats, panel accents, tiered mats ...)
- 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 molding, 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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to fit this design into a clustered wall grouping of family photos. But is also extremely important to design for the art and not always for its intended location. Though the proportion of the frame to the needlework appears fine at first glance, it might have felt a bit less confined if the frame were enlarged 2" horizontally and vertically (adding 1" around). This would have allowed for the small round coaster to have been showcased a little more to reinforce the emphasis of the directional crochet hooks (diagram 4).

Emphasis is the visual control of the viewer's eye through a concentrated focal point, in this case the directional hooks pointing to the coaster, then rotating somewhat counterclockwise around the box back to the coaster.

Perhaps if the frame had been larger, as noted above, the coaster could have been moved left eliminating the overlap of the larger square needlework. This would have removed some of the "old lady clutter" look reinforced by constant overlapping.

A singularly featured item allows for better visual concentration and less competition between portions of a design. In this case, the thread box at the top actively competes for initial visual attention, solely because of its unique structure compared to the rest of the featured items.

The balance of the entire design may well have improved with the larger format also. The large, tightly held square doily creates a tension and heaviness in the lower right of the frame. This would have been eased by allowing another 1/2" of fabric surrounding it. Whether dividing the square horizontally, vertically or diagonally there still is no comfortable balance created; it's a little too confined.

The rhythm, the fourth element used is wonderful. Repetition of the square doily with its individual square pattern in the square frame strongly reinforces the shape of the frame. The pinwheel pattern within

the same square doily echoes the small circular coaster and the thread box. The crochet hooks also reflect the quartered lines within the dominant doily. You can't argue with the use of repeated selected patterns.

So, is there a coherence in this design, a unity that truly holds it all together? It appears to be well thought out and reflective of colors, patterns, shapes and movement. Increasing the overall frame size might have strengthened the presentation by allowing for specific visual concentration, and a better use of space, but the design works.

The three hooks placed within the perimeters of the square doily contains them a bit more than they perhaps should be. If the upper silver hook was moved 1" or so right (in the larger frame suggested) it would have also opened and invited the eye more.

Minor changes might change the impact of this design, opting for better visual control; but then again, maybe not. The answer should have been determined during the initial creativity stage rather than the clarification stage, and perhaps it was. If you end up consistently saying "I should have..." during clarification, start checking the designs more closely.

With the conclusion of this critique you're on your own. Armed with lists of principles and the five stages of design you ought to be able to pick things apart and put them back together perfectly, with confidence and good design.

A recap of this series by subject and date and a complete bibliography are found in this issue in Reference sheets 1 and 2. Add these to the previous lists of design elements and factors from diagrams 1 and 2 in Critique #1, January 1995 PFM. Now it's all up to you.

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