

# Float Frame Trends

By Chris A Paschke, CPE, GCF

**The traditional basic float frame has evolved into sculpted faces, assorted wood stains, and unusual profiles, making it a creative addition to any frame shop**

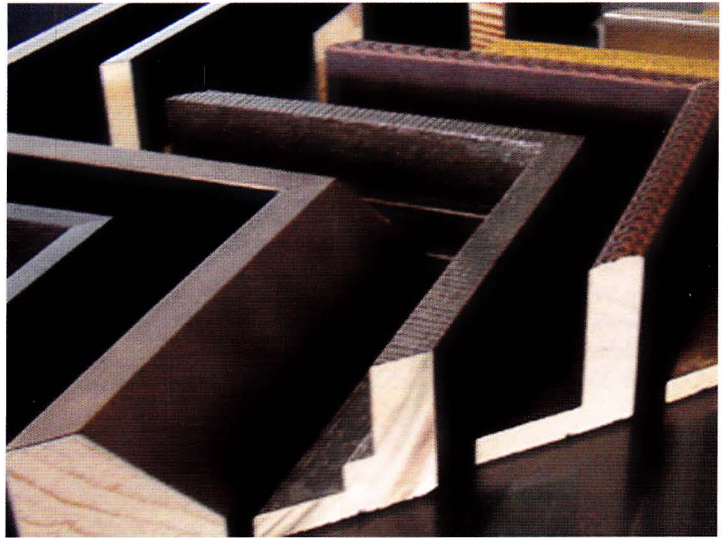
**F**loat frames are designed to use with painted stretched canvases as a narrow contemporary outline frame with base support and protection for the painting. Most moulding companies now carry a floater line. Over the years the basic undecorated 1/4" float face has evolved into sculpted faces, assorted wood stains and unusual profiles, but even then there is still way more that can be done with float frames making them a very useful profile, becoming a standard on any frame shop sample wall.

## Faux Float

Trends in the custom framing industry are sometimes driven by what happens in the wholesale home decor market. Stretched digital canvases have been around for years, promoting the gallery wrap as a complete look with no need for a frame. This kept retail prices down but has been a source of frustration for custom framers. More recently the wall decor market has seen the addition of the faux float gallery wrap by simply applying a solid straight panel behind the painting as a faux float, giving it the illusion of a simple accent frame. Then, by the addition of another small square block, the illusion is enhanced to look even more like a multilevel profile while still just being a flat wood strip and block.

## Flat Float

Bringing this concept into the custom frame shop allows endless design possibilities. In addition to fine mouldings already available, both domestic hardwoods (cherry, walnut, oak, poplar) and exotic woods (purpleheart, African mahogany, red oak) may be purchased as unstained 1/2" to 1" thick x 3" wide, length lumber from specialty cabinet companies online



*Most companies carry a floater line. The assorted floaters shown are from NurreCaxton, Larson-Juhl, Max Moulding, Universal, Studio Moulding, Omega, and CMI.*

like Rockler or Woodworkers Source.

These may be painted or stained and placed behind an existing float frame to create a much wider and/or colorful presentation as an option for economy-minded artists and clients. A flat float adapts well for use with 1/4" birch panels, commercial Ampersand cradled boards, 1/2" or 3/4" plywood, MDF, or other alternative painting surfaces. The painting overlaps onto the flat frame and attaches with screws, offset clips, or wood glue. Industry profiles that can also be used include Garrett Moulding 76 Poplar series, Studio Moulding B&B 5520, or assorted flat wide liner mouldings from Larson-Juhl, Omega, Max Moulding, Southwest Moulding, and others.

The 1/4" panel in the photo at the top of page 42 and the side-nailed, homemade painted 1" cradled panel in photo just below it have unfinished sides that visually detract from flat framing and would either have been planned for placement in a traditional frame or require clean-up. If planned for a float frame, or no frame, the edges of the unfinished box sides would have been covered with removable blue painters tape to protect it during paint application or painted black after completion. Make certain the sides are clean, painted, or stained by the artist. Or point out that they may be visible once framed.



A flat float stack is similar to any stacked frame (two or more frames combined to create a new frame profile). The painted panel is mounted to the floater with hidden screws or offset clips—but never glue. Flat liners with a rabbet may be stacked and paired with float frames to create a wider decorative effect for a basic contemporary float edging. Flat liner widths vary from 2" to 5" from many manufacturers, and all have a traditional rabbet lip so you generally need a wider moulding to accommodate the weakness of the lip unless using glue to fuse them.

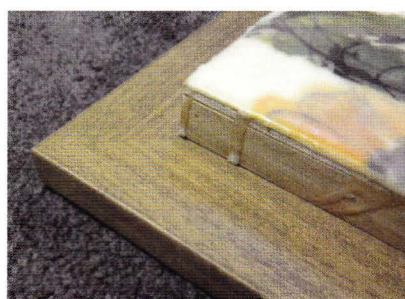
## Stacked Float

Since floaters are traditionally straight and simple, stacking allows for more decorative applications and therefore greater scope and more style possibilities. In the stacked diagram 5 on the following page, the cradled box is mounted to a long base float frame. By screwing or gluing that unit to a 3" wide gold decorative flat profile, the new stacked float frame becomes 4" wide and adds a color accent and dimension. Stacked floats easily adapt to either a long or a short base floater affixed on top of a wide flat profile or by capping the narrow face float with a suitable depth rabbet frame.

Another commercial option for stacked floats is a profile from Picture Woods that has a color exterior/interior



*Faux Flat Float with Garrett 76-797P River Rock Tan under a 1/4" Baltic Birch panel encaustic painting. Could also use flat hardwood lumber with no rabbet.*



*The homemade 1" deep cradled panel with unfinished sloppy sides should be covered or cleaned by the artist for this type of flat float with exposed edges.*

wall with a black painted base. All the company's raw and finished mouldings have a black painted shelf, except for maple, which has opaque white or whitewashed finishes. The painted base also allows the used of dark accents when combined with capped stacks.

## Capped Stack

Cap stack is a phrase that describes the use of a traditional rabbet lip profile with a float frame tucked inside. As you can imagine, the possibilities are endless when you begin



*LJ 578142 Wren Cerused (white washed) 3" deep stacked over LJ 324940 Gallery One 2" deep black float or Universal P1710 or P1722 would also work.*



*Larson-Juhl Lucerne Onyx 850790 moulding as a 3-5/8" contoured cap over Garrett 518H-501P horizontal black float.*

to play with corner samples, but there are a few things to always keep in mind when stacking mouldings as float frames:

- The float face should fit under the top edge of the cap frame.
- The full depth of the float frame must fit within the depth of the cap frame.
- If the painting is higher than the float face, the added cap or stack may create the required frame depth.
- The set back from the face for an oil painting is no more than 1/8" while an encaustic painting may be any depth.
- The float space for oils is close and tight at a maximum of 1/8" while an encaustic may be any width.

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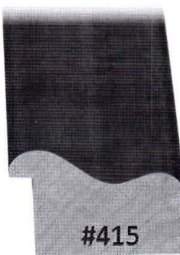
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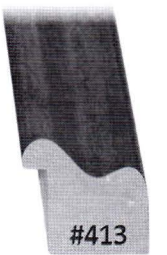
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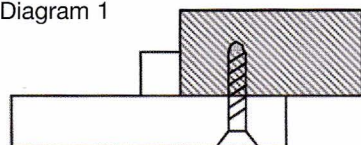
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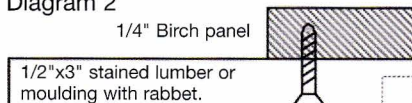


Diagram 1



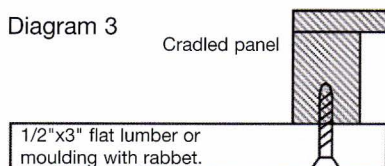
*Faux Float + Block with strainer and small accent block to enhance the profile.*

Diagram 2



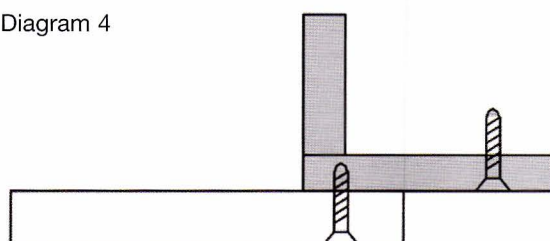
*Flat float frames made from specialty hardwoods as length lumber from cabinet shops or liner mouldings with rabbet.*

Diagram 3



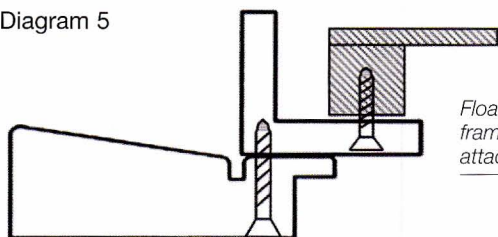
*Cradled boxes are easily enhanced with flat length or liner mouldings with rabbets.*

Diagram 4

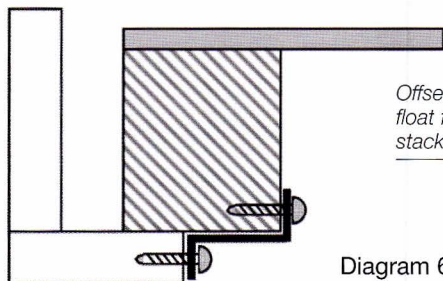


*A long or short base float frame is glued or screwed to the flat where desired.*

Diagram 5



*Float is glued or screwed to rabbet frame. Cradle or panel is screwed to attached float.*



*Offset hardware is sometimes best for short base float frame rather than screws. This unit is then stacked into the Wren cap.*

Diagram 6

## Resources

[www.cmimoulding.com](http://www.cmimoulding.com)  
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[www.garrettmoulding.com](http://www.garrettmoulding.com)  
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## Items

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 Unstained and Custom Profiles  
 Frame Mouldings  
 Frame Mouldings, Hardware  
 Frame Mouldings  
 Frame Mouldings, Float Hardware  
 Unstained and Custom Profiles  
 Domestic and Exotic Hardwood Lumber  
 Frame Mouldings  
 Frame Mouldings  
 Unstained and Custom Profiles  
 Domestic and Exotic Hardwood Lumber

into a frame allows more visibility of the black float insert, which becomes an accent liner under a lighter white-washed tall cap. A 3" deep white oak cap frame easily fits over the 2" deep black float frame to accommodate a 1-1/4" to 1-1/2" cradle. An array of wood tones of any color can be picked up in the art. The contrast between a black liner and a white cap helps showcase a light-colored painting.

## Wide vs. Deep

An original 6"x12" encaustic painting on 8-ply rag board was framed using the shallow black Garrett 518H-501P float frame. Tucking it inside a wide Larson-Juhl 850790 Lucerne Onyx moulding resulted in a wide 5" frame. Since paintings are not matted like paper art, the added width of the stacked frame becomes a visual substitute for decorative mats. Though a wide frame profile could overpower a small encaustic, a stacked wide float can become a substitute for mats and would also work well with an oversized 4' x 6' painting. A wider capped float frame is more dramatic and in some cases may even be a better fit for a client's decor.

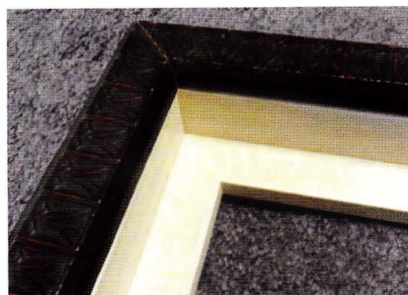
A 4-3/4" wide by 1-3/4" deep heavy walnut Italian cap moulding has the strength to support a heavy mirror but also has the depth for a 1" floater of a similar color. Unlike a contrasting cap and float frame with a black accent, a dark walnut float frame color (Arqadia 80709) matches a 5" wide LJ 814420 Dillon Antique Timber cap. This maintains the visual appearance, unifying the frame as a really wide float frame rather than a simple stacked combination.

A rounded brushed metallic cap like Studio Moulding 42217 can also be paired with an LJ Arqadia Dark Walnut shallow float to create an entirely different look.

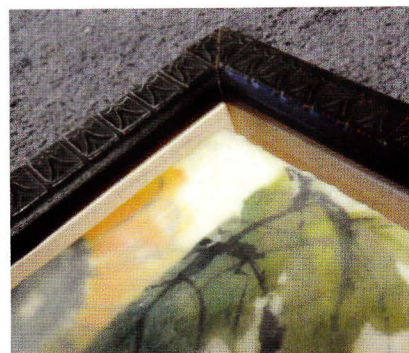




Studio 42217 rounded metallic cap over Larson-Juhl Arqadia 80788 Dark Walnut Float.



Nurre Caxton Metropolis 72560 stacked with Larson-Juhl Java Bean for a deep capped stack.



A lighter colored float expands the visual size of the art and prevents a cavernous float space from swallowing the art.

## Use of Color

As already discussed, the float does not have to match the cap frame to create an appealing and unique design. An LJ Java carved cap is paired with a 1" deep natural white stained float Nurre Caxton 72560. Though a white painted or stained float by itself can be a little harsh when stacked with a darker cap, it can prevent a potentially ominous dark float space surrounding a painting from becoming too hollow

and swallowing the painting. The lighter space surrounding the art gives the viewer's eye a place to rest between the art and the carved cap, plus the lighter coloring matches the encaustic medium which expands the art to appear larger than it actually is.

## Other Options

Another option for stacked and capped designs begins with raw wood profiles ready for staining or painting. Unfinished mouldings and special pro-

file designs are available from both Vermont Hardwoods and Foster Planing Mill. There are floaters and unfinished profiles available from cherry, maple, walnut, and basswood. Basswood comes from American linden trees, which is quite plentiful as an American and Canadian resource, making basswood environmentally green. For the base float frame, Vermont Hardwoods also offers a line of step float profiles—#900, 901, 902—that would easily adapt to stacking. The company also has 3-1/8" deep floats—#918, 919—to accommodate a full 3" deep stretched canvas. Foster Planing Mill has a 3/4" narrow stock basswood profile #595 that easily cap stacks with a 2" L-float, 4-1/2" deep cap #743, or #649 which is 2" deep x 3" wide. Foster also has four stackers #813-816 that fit with other profiles to deepen for floaters.

## Limitations

Stacked float frames are wonderful because of their versatility, and the possibilities are endless. Whether using domestic or exotic self-stained wood flats or finished frame mouldings, the depth and width varieties of new stacked profiles are only limited by the rabbet depth of the cap and the depth of the gallery wrap or cradle. Make certain the depth and width of all selected materials adequately allows for full cov-

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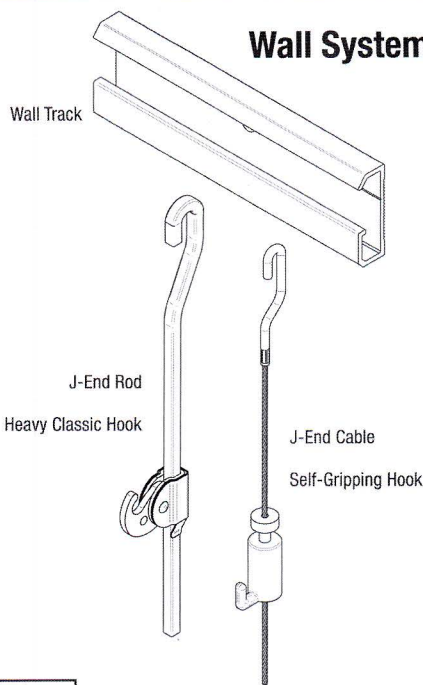
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A basic float frame is a contemporary option for framing a gallery wrap, and a faux float adds width and the option of introducing color to a cradled panel. A stacked float frame allows for depth, width, color, contrast, texture, and greater profit potential. All stacked frames will sell themselves—or at least the stacked concept—but they must be displayed to do so. ■



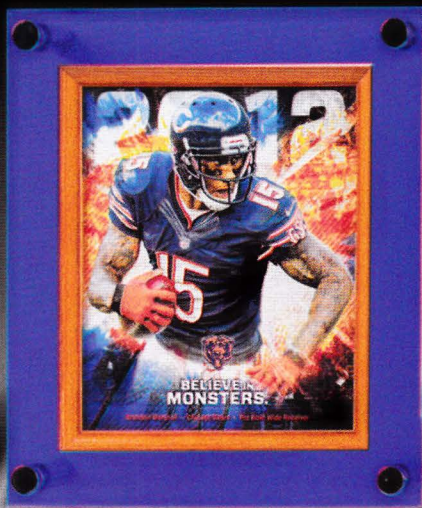
**Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, CMG**, mounting editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and consulting. Specializing in mount-

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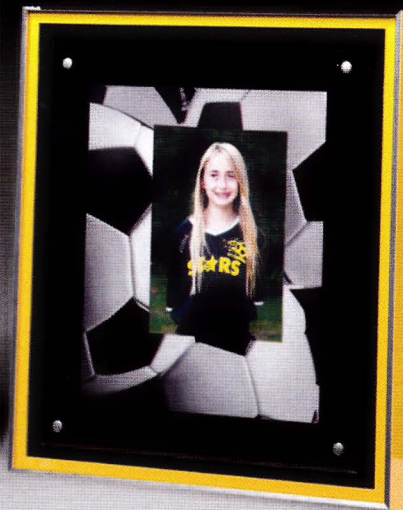
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