



Avoid these common hardware mistakes when framing and displaying your artwork.

What's Wrong With This Picture?

BY CHRIS A. PASCHKE

ARTISTS BEWARE! Using the best materials when painting or drawing isn't enough to preserve your artwork. The way you frame and display your art is also important, and using the right hardware correctly is one of the most crucial considerations.

On a recent visit to a gallery, I found most of the mistakes featured in the “don’t” photos in this article (see Editor’s Note, at left). Correctly framed and displayed artwork secures the picture within the frame and the framed picture upon the wall, and does so with minimal stress to the picture wire, frame, stretcher bars and other elements. Let’s take a look at some common mistakes—and the corresponding best practices.

EDITOR’S NOTE

do

don’t

The “do” and “don’t” icons in the upper left corner of the photos in this article indicate recommended and nonrecommended practices.

Safe, Secure Housing

Artists commonly use canvas clips to hold a canvas in a frame (**A**). Hardware companies developed these clips because, all too often, a frame’s rabbet (inset in the back of the frame into which the canvas is placed), is too shallow for the painting’s stretcher bars, but canvas clips have disadvantages. They put stress on the

sides of the frame and stretcher bars and can leave metal scuffmarks on the wall. The frame you choose should have a rabbet deep enough to hold the full depth of the picture. When stretcher bars, panels, bracing or cradles jut beyond the back of the frame, the assemblage adds stress to the picture wire and prevents the frame from hanging flat against the wall.

Another disadvantage of canvas clips is that they don’t allow you to place a dust cover over the back of the painting. A dust cover protects the picture from punctures, dust, dirt, pollution and insects. A foamboard cover backing is best for stretched canvases. It should cover the stretcher bars and be attached to those bars with screws and washers (**B1**).

Then, to attach the painting to the frame, use offset clips—zinc-plated, Z- or step-shaped hardware. The tension pressure required for keeping the canvas in the frame should come from offset clips of the proper depth, screwed into the frame only (**B1**). Note that although you use only one screw when attaching an offset clip, many offset clips have a screw opening at both ends.

A: DON'T choose a frame with a rabbet that's too shallow for your stretcher bars or panel. DON'T use canvas clips to secure the picture to the frame.

B1 AND B2: DO place a dust cover over the back of your picture. DO attach foamboard cover backing to the stretcher bars or panel bracing with a screw and washer (**B1**). DO secure the picture to the frame with offset clips (**B1**), brads or points (**B2**). DO attach each offset clip with one screw inserted into the frame (**B1**). For charcoal or pastel artwork, DO insert brads with a manual brad pusher (**B2**).

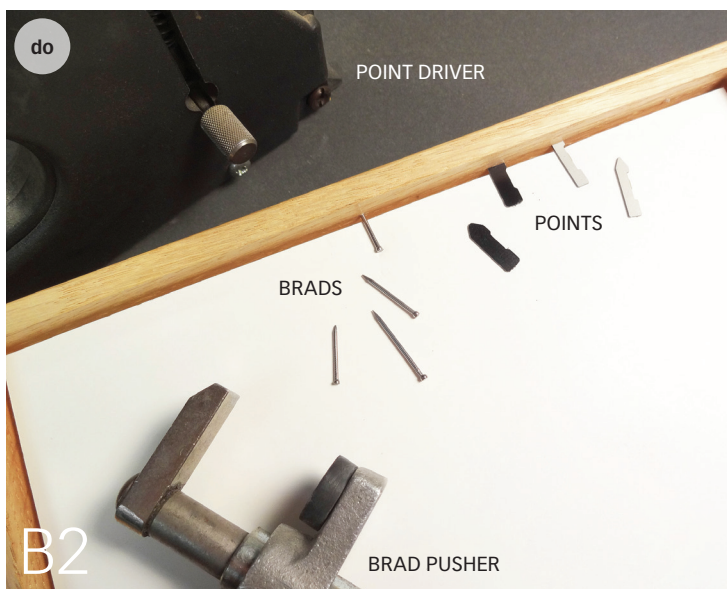
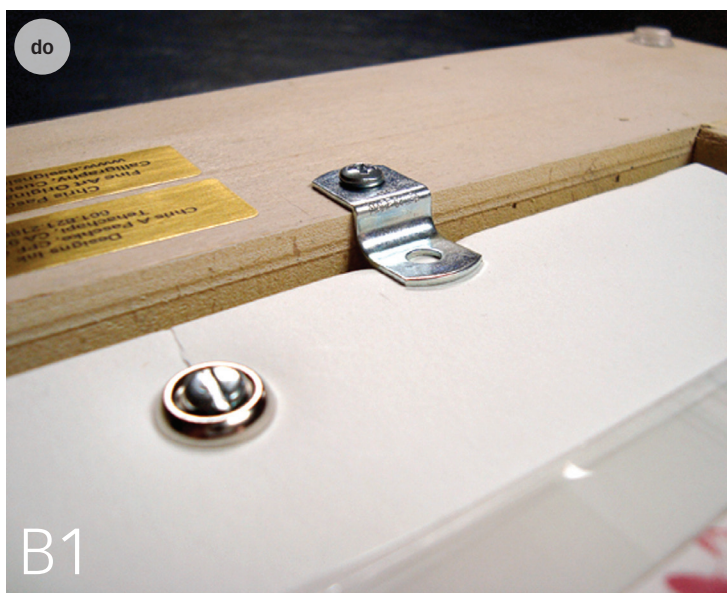
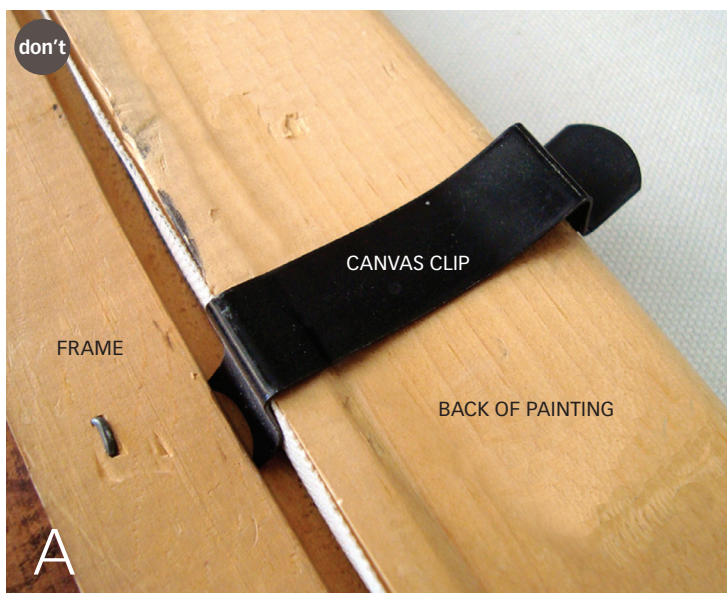
Brads (thin nails with small heads—also called finishing nails) and points (flat strips of metal) offer two other options for safely securing a picture in a frame. Insert points manually or with a point driver, depending on the style of the points; insert brads into the sides of the frame with a brad pusher (**B2**). Brads inserted with a brad pusher are the best option for pictures created with a loose medium like pastel or charcoal.

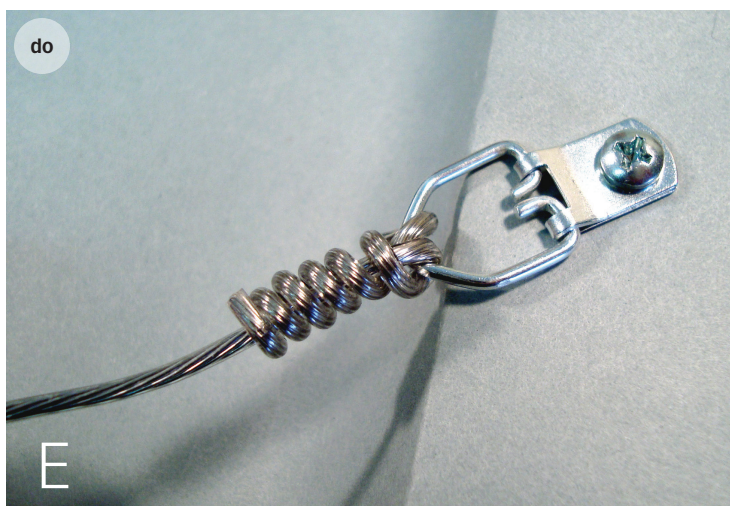
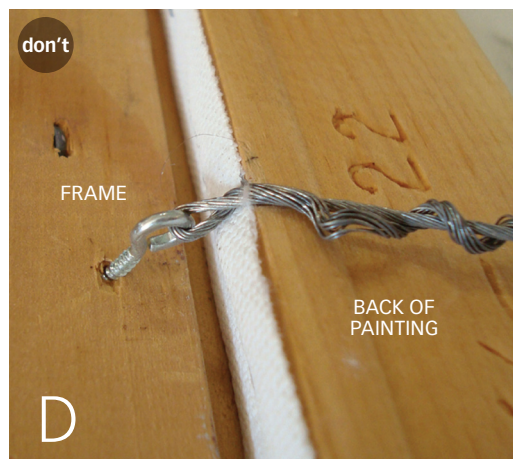
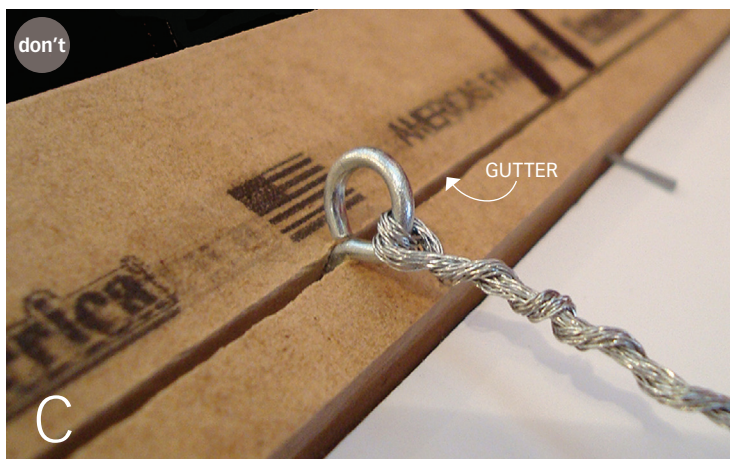
Frame Hanger Hazards

After your picture is securely held in the frame, you'll need to screw in the frame hangers. Screws used in combination with D-rings, strap hangers, steel plates or flangers are good; screw eyes—screws with a looped head—are bad. That looped head creates a stress point that can result in the loop breaking off or the threads of the screw working loose. Also, the loop pushes the frame away from the wall, which can be visually unappealing. If you value your artwork, don't use screw eyes.

Having said that, be aware that even regular screws can be misused. Never place a screw of any type into a gutter or recessed portion of a frame, as you see in image **C**. The artwork in this example is at risk for several reasons. First, the framer used a screw eye. Second, this particular frame is made of medium density fiberboard (MDF), so when you twist a screw into it, the threads turn the surrounding wood into sawdust, making the screw prone to pulling out of the frame. Add to that the fact that the screw was placed in the gutter, so the threads are in contact with the wood on only two sides. Even though you may find that twisting a screw into a gutter makes inserting the screw easier, the convenience isn't worth the risk. This is a screw application looking to fail.

In order for any screw to work efficiently and hold to the manufacturer's specifications,





it must be seated well into the wood with the entire shaft screwed in, down to the head. In image **D**, not only has the framer used the infamous screw eye but, in an attempt to bring the looped head even with the stretched canvas protruding above the rabbet, only the bottom threads of the screw's shaft are screwed into the frame. Two things (besides the use of the screw eye) are wrong here: (1) The rabbet is too shallow for the canvas, and (2) the screw isn't fully seated into the frame. Using only two or three threads of any screw won't allow it to catch enough wood to solidly hold the screw in place.

Image **E** shows a properly positioned D-ring firmly attached to a frame with a fully seated screw. D-rings and other hardware used for attaching picture wire to a frame should be screwed in one-quarter of the way down from the top of the frame. To avoid splitting the wood of the frame, pre-drill the holes for your screws. Pre-drilled holes should be a size smaller than the screws you use and, when selecting screws, make sure they're neither too short nor too small for your framed picture.

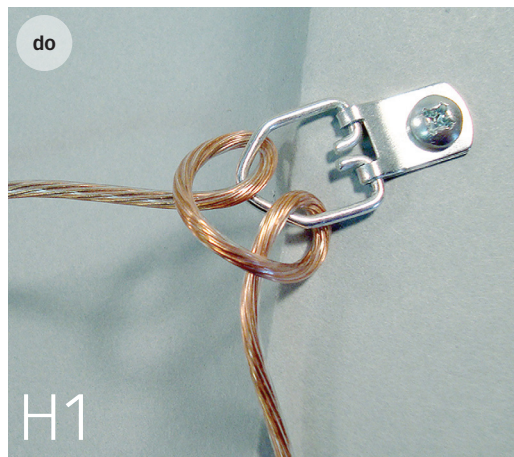
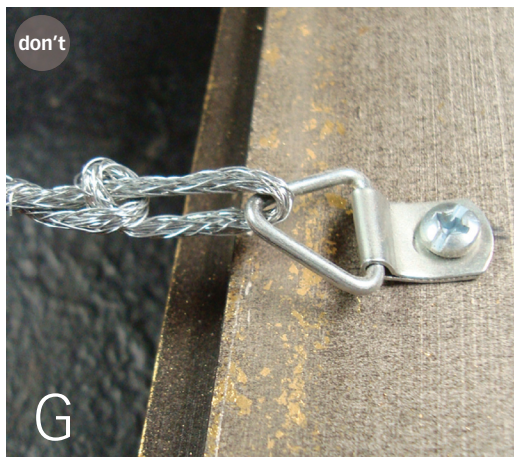
C: DON'T use a medium density fiberboard (MDF) frame. DON'T use a screw eye. DON'T place a screw of any type in a gutter or recessed portion of any frame. DON'T expect loosely twisted picture wire to hold

D: DON'T use a screw eye. DON'T try to compensate for a shallow frame with an improperly seated screw of any type. DON'T expect loosely twisted picture wire to hold.

E: DO use D-rings (pictured), strap hangers, steel plates or flangers to attach the picture wire. DO fully seat the screw. DO slant D-rings at a 60-degree angle toward the top of the picture. DO tie the picture wire with a lark's head knot. DO wrap the wire ends six to 10 times. DO push the twists snug against the knot.

F: DO use narrow flangers with two screw holes to leverage the stress on narrow frames.

Be aware that narrow frames are particularly susceptible to stress. If the frame package is heavy or large, the narrow sides can crack or split, or the screws can pull out. Hardware called flangers come in narrow, medium and wide sizes as well as in left and right



G: DON'T attach picture wire with a half-hitch knot.

H1-3: DO tie the picture wire with a lark's head knot (**H1** and **H2**). DO tightly twist the short end of the wire around the long end six to 10 times and then push the twists against the knot (**H3**).

Learn More

"The Hard(ware) Facts"

For a link to Chris Paschke's March 2014 article explaining framing hardware basics, go to www.artistsnetwork.com/learnmore2015.

Hardware Resources

Art Materials Service (www.artmaterialsservice.com): offset clips, strap hangers, super steel hangers

ArtRight.com (www.artright.com): offset clips, super steel hanger

Framework (www.frameworkinc.com): offset clips, wire, steel wire hangers

FramingSupplies.com (www.framingsupplies-shop.com): offset clips, D-rings, wire, hangers, floreat hanger

Jerry's Artarama (www.jerrysartarama.com): offset clips, wire, hangers

Picture Hang Solutions (www.govart.com): offset clips, hooks, flangers, hangers

The Picture Frame Company (www.picturehardware.com): super steel hangers, D-rings, offset clips, hooks

United Mfrs. Supplies (www.unitedmfrs.com): offset clips, screws, flangers, D-rings, wire

West Shore (www.westshoreframes.com): flangers, wire, hangers

Ziabicki Import Company (www.ziabicki.com): floreat hangers

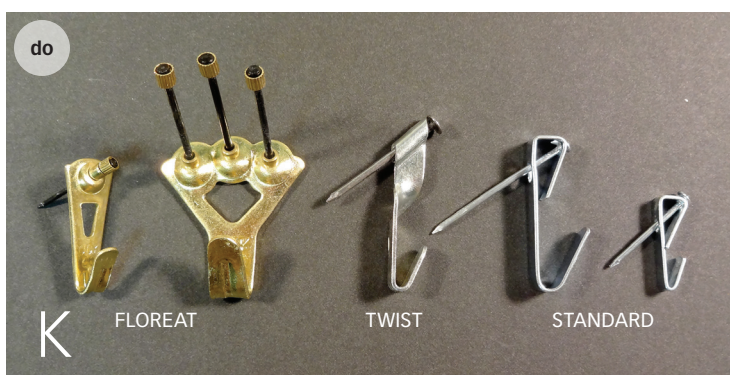
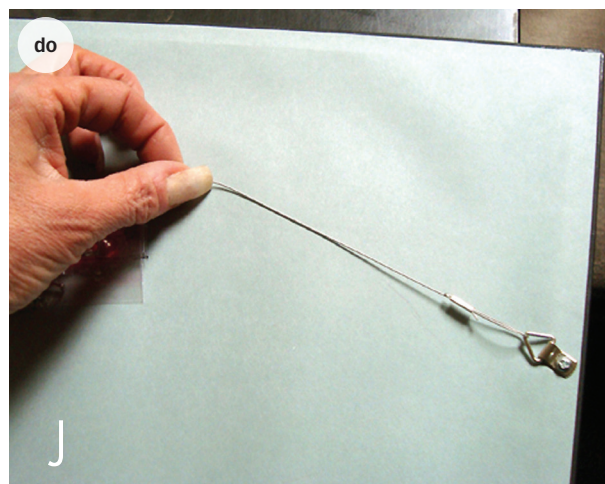
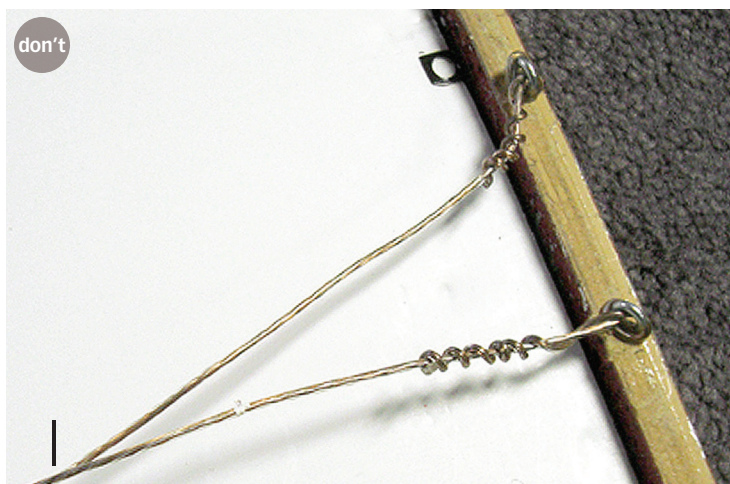


strong as the knot and twist that secures it to the hanging hardware. A single half-hitch knot (**G**) will never hold, nor will a loosely twisted wire, as seen in images **C** and **D**. Instead, tie a full lark's head knot around the D-ring or other hanger and then tightly twist the short end of the wire six to 10 times around the wire length. Finally, push those twists against the hanger (**E**). Images **H1-3** show how to tie a lark's head knot with a properly twisted end.

orientations. When attached with two screws, flangers leverage the stresses on thin frames (**F**).

Get Wired Up

Keep in mind that picture wire is only as



I: DON'T use screw eyes, *especially* on a narrow frame. DON'T assume using two wires will double the weight-bearing strength or compensate for the stress on the frame

J: DO attach the hanging wire one-quarter of the way down from the top of the frame. DO cut a wire length that, when attached to the hardware, will reach about halfway between the hardware and the top of the frame

K: DO use Floreat, twist or standard wall hangers that hold the nail at a solid 30- to 40-degree angle.

Wire is available in many strengths (gauges), but simply adding a second strand won't double its weight-bearing strength (I). My March 2014 article, "The Hard(ware) Facts," gives more information about wire strengths (see [Learn More](#), page 22).

The length of the wire is also important. When a picture is displayed, the hanging wire shouldn't be visible above the top of the frame. If the wire is too loose, the painting will tend to slant forward. The highest point of the loose wire should be halfway between the hardware and the top of the frame (J).

Hang With Hooks

Another common mistake is to use regular nails without hooks to mount framed pictures to a wall. Nails without hooks can become loose and slant downward or pull out from the wall, allowing the frame to fall to the floor. Frame hangers that combine a hook with a nail or brad are readily available, but there are many versions of the same concept, and some are better than others. The aligned holes in the hanger should solidly hold the nail at a constant 30- to 40-degree angle with no flexibility (K). Floreat hangers, produced by the German company Ziabicki, are favored by many profes-

sionals in the custom-framing industry (Moore Push-Pin Company and OOK offer similar versions). These hangers have thin, tempered-steel nails with solid brass, knurled heads, as well as nail guides that control the entry of the nail into the wall at an optimum 30-degree angle—and they don't harm walls.

Use two hooks (never just one) to hang each picture. Place these hooks on the wall so they'll be one-third of the way in from the two outer vertical edges of the frame.

A frame is meant to house, hold, enhance and protect your art, but it's only as good as the hardware you use and the way you use it. Choose your hardware wisely, and install it properly. ■

CHRIS A. PASCHKE received Certified Picture Framer (CPF) status in 1986 from the Professional Picture Framers Association (PPFA) and Guild Commended Framer (GCF) status in 1997 from the Fine Art Trade Guild (FATG), based in London. She was awarded the 2008 PPFA Award of Distinction for Leadership and the 2010 PPFA Vivian Kistler Recognition for Innovation Award. As a specialist to, educator of, and columnist for the framing industry, Paschke has written the books *Creative Mounting, Wrapping and Laminating* and *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook*, both available at her website, www.designsinkart.com.