

DESIGN OF THE MONTH

By Thomas M. Houston, MCPF

Framing the Family Tools

It's not unusual for customers to bring us various object collections for framing. Often, they're framed for sentimental reasons. When my wife's father passed away, leaving behind a shop filled with tools that were both his and his father's, we decided to save the most interesting hand tools and frame them for display.

In one shadowbox, we framed a collection of ball-peen hammers (a type of peening hammer used in metalworking). In the other, we framed a collection of old wrenches. We felt that these tools represented something that was practical and infused with spirit from being held and used for so many years. I want to explore with you here the framing of this collection of wrenches from the 1940s. We've gotten many comments on it over the years because it elevates something as ordinary as a wrench to a piece of treasured memorabilia.

Because my father-in-law was a no-nonsense kind of guy, we decided to design a piece that would both reflect the straight-ahead work ethic of the tools themselves and the no-fuss nature of their former owner. To that end, we designed a shadowbox that set them off against a dark backing with contrast and texture while using a frame that was of the same nature as the wrenches themselves



These 1940s wrenches, handed down through two generations, were immortalized with a welded steel frame that lent itself to the industrial-chic aesthetic we were aiming for.

— something industrial and funky, yet with a bit of elegance.

We chose a welded steel frame from A Street Frames in Boston. This frame has the same gray steel color of the wrenches as well as a similar visual weight. We had the welds in the corners of the frame left unground to give the greatest effect of the industrial, funky elegance that we were after.

Next, we decided to use black, faux bomber-jacket leather from Raphael's Master-source for the backing and sides. This material worked perfectly for both color and texture.



Thomas M. Houston, MCPF has been framing for over 30 years. Since 1995, he has been the owner of Houston's Custom Framing and Fine Art in Ashland, OR. He graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1984.

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The wrenches definitely pop against the deep black, and the texture gives it a masculine feel.

We mounted the material onto 100 percent rag museum board using Raphael's "miracle muck" PVA glue applied with a foam roller and mounted in our heat press. We used the "fold up" method for constructing the backing and sides. The box itself need to be ¾" deep to accommodate the thickness of the wrenches. The piece was then backed with acid-free foam core.

We mounted the wrenches using monofilament wrapped twice (as the wrenches have some weight to them) around the tops and bottoms of the vertically oriented pieces and on each end of the horizontally oriented ones. The monofilament is virtually invisible except upon

very close observation.

As is the case with nearly all our shop displays, the glazing used to complete the framing is TruVue Museum Glass. We found that this glass effectively showcases all the textures of the metals and the backing. Because the frame has a substantial weight to it, we used extra-heavy wire on the back for hanging.

We try and display framing in our shop that shows off several different framing ideas and techniques, from the frame itself to the backing, glazing, and of course, the art or objects being framed. We think this shadowbox, housing a collection of heirloom family tools, accomplishes all those goals. **PFM**

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