

Design of the Month

by Thomas M. Houston



The French Laundry Shadowbox

Turning 50 is a special occasion, but turning 50 and celebrating the milestone at The French Laundry is even more outstanding. This framing project was brought to us by a client with whom we've worked for many years. To celebrate her 50th birthday, she was taken out to dinner by her husband at The French Laundry—an award-winning French restaurant in Napa Valley. As it's considered one of the finest restaurants in the world, a visit there is always memorable.

After the festivities, our client brought us a collection of items from her evening at the restaurant; two menus, a silver-and-blue ribbon, two wooden clothes pegs, and a small birthday candle from the cake. We wanted to integrate these items in a harmonious way while highlighting the menus and communicating the specialness of the occasion.

My concept was to use the ribbon all around the interior of the mat window as a decorative element. The challenge here was having a finite amount of the ribbon to work with and being able to position it so that the silver clothes pegs were all pointing in the same direction and evenly spaced around the window of the mat. Fortunately, there was just enough ribbon to accomplish this. After some conceptualizing, I came up with a triple mat design that consisted of two hand-wrapped silk mats—one as the bottom mat, the other as the top mat, with a gold Bainbridge Alphamat and the blue ribbon in between the two.

The first step to executing this was creating the hand-wrapped silk mats. The silk was wrapped onto the 100 percent cotton rag museum board using Miracle Muck PVA glue. After first cutting the windows out, the glue was rolled onto the mat with a foam roller. Then, after carefully laying the silk on top and placing the fall-out exactly into the



Our goal: to harmoniously integrate all the elements of our client's birthday memorabilia, including two menus, a ribbon, two clothes pegs, and a candle.

windows on top of the silk, the mat was placed in the press to heat mount the fabric. After cooling, the windows were trimmed out and the silk carefully wrapped into place.

Showing 1/4" of the bottom mat, the ribbon was placed on top of the gold Alphamat so that only 1/8" of the gold bevel showed. I used the blue ribbon in four separate strips that overlap in the corners and laid them out so the silver clothes peg motif would be symmetrical and evenly spaced all around the window. Then, the top mat was placed so just the edge of it covered the ribbon to hold it in place.

The menus were mounted using photo corner and 100 percent cotton rag board. I chose to create separate windows for the menus rather than float them to add dimension and a subtle distinction to the overall design. The 1" divide between the two windows also gave me a place to attach the small, white candle that

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came with our client's birthday cake. The candle was carefully sewn onto the mat in two places using white cotton thread. The two wooden clothes pegs were also sewn on in two places through the mat using monofilament, as it is more invisible against the wooden peg than the white cotton thread.

Although gold is typically associated with 50th wedding anniversaries, we used it to commemorate this special 50th birthday and to accentuate the overall project. The fluted gold frame with stars on each corner was made for us by C&J Picture Frames Inc. in Long Island City, NY. I felt that using a genuine gold frame would emphasize the specialness of the occasion and the objects being presented. The frame is handcrafted and water gilded with 22K

gold. We requested the depth of the frame be increased by one inch to make space for all the three-dimensional objects incorporated in the framing. To accommodate the depth of the wooden clothes pegs, 3/4" spacers were created to lift the glazing off the matting. TruVue Museum Glass was chosen to complete the project.

The result: our client was thrilled with the completed piece. It now hangs prominently in her home with many other pieces I have framed for her and her husband over the years. It's always a joy to preserve someone's treasured memories through frame design. **PFM**

Thomas Houston, BFA, 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.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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AMERICAN PICTURE FRAMING ACADEMY 2- and 4-day Basic and Advanced classes feature technical, business and design training. Call 888-840-9605 or visit www.pictureframingschool.com.

ART TO BE FRAMED (Mt. Shasta, CA) is an instructional and educational custom picture framing retreat. One-on-one instruction, beginners through advanced. Visit www.arttobeframed.com or call 530-926-3609.

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL MATERIAL (Victoria, Melbourne) hosts a 3-day symposium on traditional frames by Degas for artists, historians, and conservators. Contact loubradley@bigpond.com.

B.L. HAYMOND SUPPLY (Ukiah, CA) offers hands-on, one-on-one, 2-day Oil Painting Restoration Workshops with an experienced conservator. E-mail: blhaymondsupply@pacific.net or visit www.blhaymondsupply.com or call 707-462-4221.

CHARLES DOUGLAS GILDING STUDIO (Seattle, WA) offers a 3-day intensive in traditional water gilding with an experienced professional. Call: 206-795-8376 or visit www.gildingstudio.com.

COMPLETE FRAMER'S SUPPLY, INC. (Fort Lauderdale, FL). Call 800-330-3263 or 954-581-2444 to register and for class schedule or visit www.completeframers.com.

ERS.COM.FRAME TUTOR SCHOOL (Alberta, Canada) offers a 3-week course (90 hours) hands-on professional training. Weeks 1 & 2 Basic; Week 3: Advanced (Design & Specialties) Call 800-268-0897, e-mail: penny@frametutorschool.com or visit www.frametutorschool.com.

JAYENESS MOULDING offers hourly tutoring (3 hour minimum). Call: 206-292-9664 or visit www.jayeness.com. **PRESTIGE FRAMING ACADEMY** offers classes. Call 617-285-0855 or visit the website, www.framingacademy.com.

REED'S GOLD LEAF (Nashville, TN) offers 2-3 days Gold Leafing/ Gilding classes by appointment only. One-on-one or max. 2 students. Call Micki Cavanah at 615-294-6113 or send e-mail to rglstudios@bellsouth.net.

SEPP LEAF (New York, NY) offers 1-week traditional water gilding, glass gilding, and Kolner Gilding Method classes. Visit www.seppleaf.com or call 212-683-2840.

SHUPTRINES GOLD LEAF DESIGNS offers 1-day seminars for artists, professionals/ designers and 2-day gilding and restoration classes. Call: 423-266-4453 or visit www.shuptrines.com.

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