

Things to Know About Framing Your Needlework



You've sourced the finest quality materials and spent hours creating a magnificent piece of embroidery art. Now it's time to have your masterpiece framed...and now is not the time to take shortcuts or risks!

This article is about framing, and hopefully by the time you've finished reading you'll be well informed about what questions to ask your framer, and confident they'll take care of your needlework in the same manner that you would.

How do you choose a framer?

It's important to know that not all frame shops are alike, even though they might look the same from the outside. Dig a little deeper and find out who exactly is going to be working on your needlework. You might be surprised to learn that your local framer/ex-carpenter is not the best choice. Framing is so much more than carpentry.

1. Meet the framer who is going to be handling your needlework and notice their appearance. What are your first impressions? Are they clean and tidy?
2. Are their hands clean? This is extremely important when handling your needlework.
3. When discussing framing options, do they handle your needlework respectfully, or do you feel uncomfortable? Trust your instincts.
4. Is their shop and workshop clean and tidy?

These are small details, but consider how they treat your needlework in front of you as a guide as to how it will be treated once you're not there. All these things are a good indication.

Questions to ask your framer

Are you a qualified picture framer?

Most people don't know that framers can become qualified in their field. A qualified picture framer has taken the time to study the handling of art and the many different techniques suitable for framing it. The range of artworks, different types of media, textiles and associated framing techniques are many and varied. There is no such thing as "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to framing.

The easiest way to know if your framer is qualified is to look for the post-nominals after their name on their business card – MCPF (Master Certified Picture Framer, PPFA), CPF (Certified Picture Framer, PPFA), CGF (Certified Guild Framer, PFGV) and GCF (Guild Certified Framer, FATG). You can rest assured that these framers will care for your needlework and frame it correctly.

BEWARE: Do not be deceived by Guild Memberships. If a framer tells you that they are a member of a guild, and they point to a certificate of membership on their wall or decal on their window, that DOES NOT mean that they are in any way qualified. It means that they have paid an annual fee to become a member of the guild.

Can I see some examples of lacing and pinning?

Okay, so let's say that for whatever reason your framer is not qualified. It does not necessarily mean they won't frame your needlework correctly. A good framer will be able to show you exactly what they will do to your needlework.

The first step in framing your needlework is to stretch it.

Lacing and pinning onto archival quality boards are the only two techniques suitable for stretching needlework to preserve it. They are both fully reversible and inert, meaning that the process is not permanent, and that glue, staples, acidic products and MDF or Maisonite are not included anywhere in the framing package.

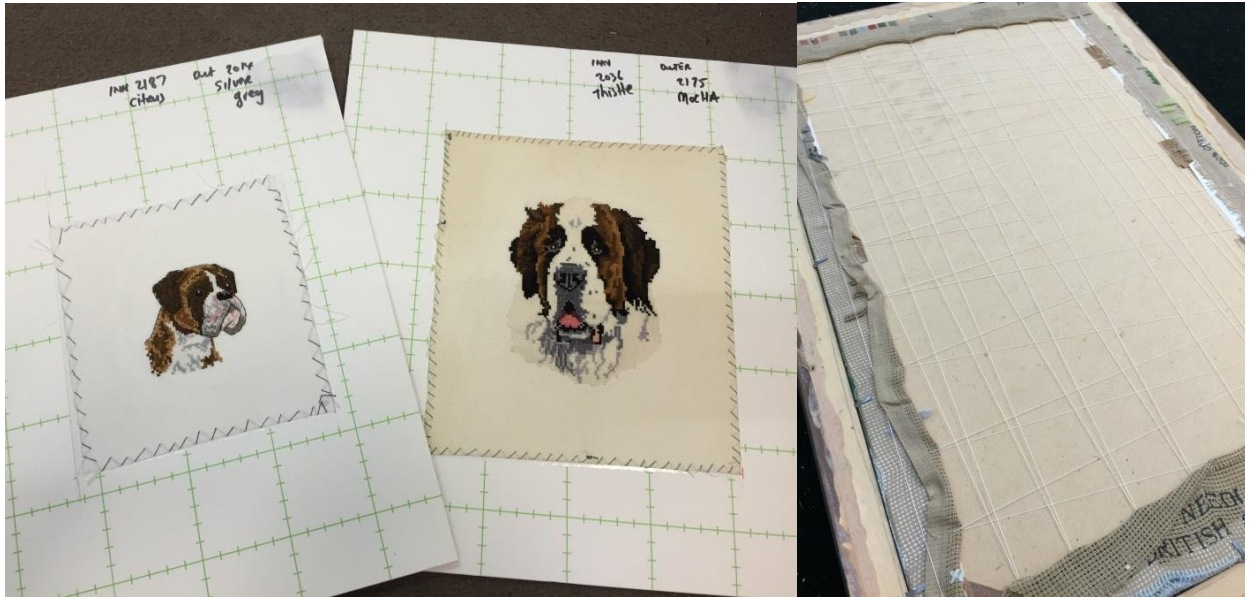
Your needlework should be laced or pinned onto a white, archival quality foam core board or mat board. I prefer to use 3mm or 5mm thick Bainbridge Alphamat Artcare Foam Board for pinning and lacing, or 100% cotton Bainbridge Alphasag for lacing. A layer of Pellon wadding may be added for padding. Only stainless steel needlework pins should be used for pinning.

What you DO want to see. Examples of pinning and lacing:



What you DON'T want to see

Examples of gluing onto sticky board and lacing onto MDF:



- Glue is permanent and becomes embedded in the needlework fibres, possibly causing discolouration, as shown in the photo below.



- Staples will cut the fibres and can rust, as shown in the photo below.



Other things to look for:

- Have a look at the back of other works of art in the store. Has the framer used MDF in many of the framed pieces? If they have, it's a good indication that using this highly acidic product has become a part of their framing "habit".
- Ask to see finished needlework frames they might have made for other customers. Take note of the thickness (depth) of the frame. Needlework frames done correctly are often quite thick, because of the many layers inside - the glass, matboard(s) or spacer, needlework stretched over 3mm or 5mm foam board and a backing board. If a needlework frame is thin, the needlework has probably been glued or stapled flat onto a backing board. Lacing and pinning are not flat processes.
- Is there a nice space between the needlework and the glazing product, or is the needlework sandwiched up against the glass? Needlework should never be sandwiched up against glass.
- Have they used a quality wire hanger with D-rings on the back of the frame, or have they stapled a piece of white cord to use as a hanger? This is another good indication as to whether or not your finished frame will be a quality product.

Conservation Framing

- Matting - Standard "acid-free" matboards will become acidic over time, and will eventually leave acid burns on your needlework. Calcium carbonate is added to boards made from wood pulp (which contains acid and lignin), to enable them to be sold as "acid-free" at the time of manufacture. Only boards made from 100% cotton or alpha-cellulose products such as linen or flax are suitable to preserve your needlework, because they are *naturally* acid-free.
- Glazing – 99% UV glazing (glass or acrylic) is the minimum standard for conservation framing. UV Glass protects your needlework from 99% of UV rays which are the main cause of fading and the deterioration of textile fibres.