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## Design vs. Function – Digital Reproduction Magazine January 2007

What is more important, Design or Function?

When it comes to custom framing, we as framers, have a dual responsibility. One is to “enhance” and make the image or article being framed look the best it possibly can. This is the “design” element. The other responsibility is to “preserve” and protect the item from deterioration. This type of framing is referred to as “conservation framing”. This is a core “function” of a picture frame. But in the eyes of today’s consumer, which is more important? Design or Function? This question can only be answered by our customers, and their current buying trends – not us.

### **“COLLECTOR” OR “CONSUMER”?**

After visiting hundreds of different framing businesses across Australia, I can testify that every picture framing business is different, and each one addresses a different type of customer and market. That is what is so great about this industry, the diversity on so many facets means that no two framing businesses are alike!

So, when it comes to the “conservation” aspect of framing, should we have “one rule” or “one standard” of framing that “must” be applied to all? No. Our businesses and our customers differentiate too much, and it is difficult to distinguish “what” should be applied, “when” for “who”.

As framers we need to ask ourselves, “who are our customers, and what is important to them?” There are some framers that insist that “conservation” framing of an image or artwork is more important than anything else. However, are we selling our service to a “collector” or just a “consumer”?

If your clients are art “collectors”, then preservation of the artwork is paramount, and conservation standards are critical when handling and framing an item. The value of the artwork is relative to its condition, and its condition needs to be preserved as long as possible. But my question is this – how many of our customers are actually “collectors”?

### **PEOPLE PAY MORE “DESIGN”**

It is no secret that today’s average retail consumer is willing to pay more for “design”, than they will for “function”. This means that the psychological driving force behind the amount of money a consumer will spend on a product will be more directed towards “the look & feeling” of the product first, and the “function & construction” of the product secondary. Once again, I am only referring to the “average” retail consumer – not the niche “collector”.

We are now living in an age where average retail consumers are becoming increasingly comfortable buying products of a “disposable” nature, and have little or no intention of keeping them forever. People are paying more for products that “attract their senses”, “invoke pleasant emotions & memories” and make them “feel good”. This is all generated by the “design” aspect of the product. The “how” or “where” the product is made is actually a secondary influence on the purchase,

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not the primary influence. This does not mean that “function” aspects (eg: conservation framing, quality of materials, craftsmanship) are not important... they are. They are just not as important to the average consumer as the “design” aspect.

Furthermore, allow me to add this for the “male” readers of this article (who are aggressively disagreeing with me right now!) – In general, men think “function” & women think “design”. It is common knowledge that 80% of our retail custom framing clients are female. However if you are dealing with a male client – then the “function” aspects may move to the top of the list.

### **DO THEY WANT IT FRAMED FOREVER?**

Not every “consumer” wants their artwork framed “forever”. They may only have the intention to have it up on their wall as a “decorative” piece, which they intend to change when they re-decorate in 5-7 years time? If they regard their framing as “wall furniture” (which is how the big furniture companies are directing us to think) then they will change their frames as often as they change their bedspread, their carpets and their couches?

Please don’t get me wrong, conservation & quality IS important and can’t be ignored... as custom framer’s, we have a responsibility to learn more about preserving the possible “history and culture” we are handling on a weekly basis in our shops. This is especially important if we are looking at establishing a long term business. However, it is important that we don’t fool ourselves into thinking that this is what actually drives today’s average consumer buying motives?

### **WHAT’S THE ANSWER?**

This most important thing we can do is to ask every customer the questions required to be able to determine what is more important to them, the design or the function? Then we need to offer them the right choices accordingly. For most of us, the solution is to offer them the best of both aspects, and use products that offer a focus on design, without compromising the function.

If you wish to learn more about conservation framing, products & standards, then investigate some of these websites:

- FACTS – Fine Art Care and Treatment standards – [www.artfacts.org](http://www.artfacts.org)
- Fine Art Trade Guild – [www.fineart.co.uk](http://www.fineart.co.uk)
- Professional Picture Framers Association – [www.ppfaaustralia.org](http://www.ppfaaustralia.org)
- Bainbridge Artcare Conservation Framing Products – [www.nielsen-bainbridge.com](http://www.nielsen-bainbridge.com)

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*With over 15 years experience in the framing & graphics industry, Jared Davis CPF, GCF has covered the wholesale, commercial and retail aspects of the business. His previous sales, marketing & training experience gives him an understanding of the changing opportunities for retail businesses, and he offers an up-to-date approach on new methods and techniques now required by today’s business owners, to be able to successfully market, merchandise and sell their services to consumers. Jared is also a featured educator at major international industry tradeshows & conventions.*