

Creating the perfect sample wall

“Sensory overload!” – That’s the feeling most customers get when they walk into your shop and look at your corner sample wall! Many framers don’t realize this, but your sample wall is the most important sales tool in your shop, and in my travels visiting different businesses every week, I’m disappointed to say that too many of the places I visit suffer from tired, neglected, “out-of-control” sample walls – which actually don’t do them any favors in helping them try to sell custom framing.



Because of this, I have put together some essential thoughts on what I consider contributes to “the perfect sample wall” – and I’m going to start with a couple of basics:

Wall Location

Your sample wall is a great way to visually convey the message of what your business is about – custom framing! A good wall should be worth showing-off, and should be visually identifiable from the entrance of your shop. The wall should be located in a prominent position, which is well lit and easy to access – additionally it also needs to be within close proximity to your consulting table.

Carpeting the Wall

The most popular (and reliable) system for displaying moulding corner samples is using a hook and loop Velcro® system, with Velcro® dots on the samples, and fabric “front runner” on the wall. Front runner can be purchased in lineal length from most car interior and upholstery suppliers. The best “long-term” method of securing front runner fabric to a wall is using EVA wet glue, applied with a paint roller. You will want to apply this in “sections” at a time, and you need to apply a layer that is at least 1-2mm thick all over, so that the glue will soak through and penetrate the fabric, as you roll it out over the wall by hand. Don’t worry if it soaks through the fabric, because it will dry clear. Just a tip – Don’t use spray adhesive or contact glue to adhere front runner or fabric to a wall, because it will eventually become brittle and break its release within a very short time.

Once you’ve got those basic elements in place, I have put together the following: **Jared’s Top 10 Tips for Creating the Perfect Sample Wall**

- 1. BREATHING SPACE** – Corner samples can visually suffocate from lack of breathing space. Tightly bunched samples create a confusing, continuous “blend” of color and texture, making it difficult for the average consumer to visually determine where one sample starts and the next one ends. Comfortable breathing space is critical, and the space between each sample is just as important as the sample itself.

- 2. CONTRASTING BACKGROUND** – In my opinion, only very dark colored or black fabric walls do the best job of flattering your samples, and offer a neutral perspective in which to display them. Golds and colored samples are more defined against a high contrast black background. The only color that doesn't really work on a black background is black! But when you consider that a black frame is usually a "last resort," I think it is a small sacrifice to make, when all the rest of your samples will look so fantastic!
- 3. EFFECTIVE LIGHTING** – Lighting makes a big difference. Your sample wall can look rich and vibrant on a dark (black) background, with complementary track lighting focused toward showing them off! In my opinion, you can never spend enough money on lighting.
- 4. CATEGORIZE YOUR SAMPLES** – "Any sample, anywhere," doesn't help reduce customer confusion and indecision. Applying a logical arrangement method to your samples is important for your customer to understand that there is actually a logical method to choosing the correct frame for their artwork. This is just like creating a menu for a restaurant. Think of the obvious themes and use them (e.g., Traditional Golds, Contemporary Golds, Formals, Decorator Mouldings, Country Classics, etc.). Categorizing your samples "by supplier" or "by price" definitely doesn't do you any favors in helping you sell "the right frame" around "the right job."
- 5. BREAK IT UP** – Display some framed examples on your sample wall to visually help break the display up into more digestible sections. This helps eliminate the sensory overload, which comes from too much choice. Don't just limit your sample wall to "samples" – mini framed examples can be useful selling tools to show customers different ideas, concepts and "add-ons" you can offer as well, such as fillets, v-grooves, shadow boxes, etc.
- 6. KNOW YOUR 20 PERCENT** – As the saying goes – 80 percent of your sales come from 20 percent of your products. Find out which are the samples your business can't live without, and make sure they are prominently located in your themed rows and easily accessible. Important samples may change with trends, but it is important to always know which ones are your vital samples. One simple way of keeping track of popular samples is by simply making a tally mark on the back of the sample every time you sell a frame in it. Within six months you will have sufficient data to be able to confidently update your wall, and not have to worry about discarding a sample that might be important.
- 7. KEEP IT FRESH** – Your wall is valuable "merchandising" real estate! Try new things, and stay in touch with new styles and trends. What sells well today may be unpopular tomorrow. Make an effort to rotate your samples and actively cull the samples that don't work for you in place of new ones. Today's consumer is always looking for something new and different. Don't just keep showing them the same old stuff – look for new trends and stay ahead of the game.
- 8. LESS IS MORE** – You don't need to have "every sample on the planet" to win the sale. In fact, offering too much choice can easily lead to indecision and doubt from the customer. Limit your choice of samples on display, and make sure you reduce the "close matches" and "double ups." Good framers are selective about the samples they put on display – and keep a balance between offering a wide range, without offering too much choice. Furthermore, fewer samples lead to better stock turn, which leads to higher profitability.

9. **REPLACE WORN SAMPLES** – Damaged or worn corner samples don't do you any favors regarding presentation, and could easily lead to your client doubting your quality and workmanship. If a sample is tired and worn, don't leave it – order or make a new one.
10. **BIGGER IS BETTER** – Most moulding suppliers provide a standard width 6 or 8 inch chevron cut sample. However, if you really want to make it easier for your customer to visualize, cut and join your own longer "oversized" chevron cut samples with a 12"-15" length! No one can argue with the fact that a longer sample is much easier to visualize, but longer samples do take up more space on your wall, which means potentially fewer samples. However, that might also be a good thing?

Conclusion

Your sample wall is your single most important tool in the consulting process, and keeping it presentable and organized takes constant work. You can't just do it "once a year" and expect it to work well for you. When you realize how much it can help optimize your sale potential on each and every job – it is not difficult to justify a small amount of time on a daily basis maintaining it. At the end of the day, you need to reduce your potential sale obstacles and make sure your wall works for you – not against you.

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