

Postcard from Vegas 2010

Jared Davis CPF, GCF

You know you're in Vegas when nothing starts until 11:00am, and everything is still open after 11:00pm.

Once again, I had the opportunity to be part of the annual West Coast Art & Frame Show, held in January over 4 days in Las Vegas, to support the GUNNAR CMC team, by teaching classes sponsored by GUNNAR, and working on their stand through the duration of the show.

Travelling from Australia to Las Vegas for the last five years, it is not hard to notice the difference in the US economy this year. With "For Lease" signs everywhere, unemployment at record levels since the great depression, and overall business downturn widespread across all industries, it makes me feel that Australian business, in general, has fared much better than we realise or possibly appreciate.

Las Vegas has suffered a huge drop in tourism (over 25% down), and is fighting hard for business with the best value room rates and accommodation packages I've ever seen, because of the increased competition for patronage. However, with unemployment tipping 20% in Las Vegas, there has been some significant downsizing and cut-backs as well.

However the West Coast Art & Frame Show 2010 still proved a success, even in tough economic times. The feedback from this year's West Coast Art & Frame show was positive across the board. Even though attendance was down on last year, exhibitors were happy with the "better than expected" turnout of attendees, and noticeably serious business owners looking to consider new products, new concepts and improvements to take their business further through these tough times, and to learn everything they can from the industry's biggest and best smorgasbord for educational classes on offer. The overall



Australian framers again met up for the annual "Down Under Dinner"

feeling and atmosphere was extremely positive, and forward thinking.

There was a touch of sadness, however, at the show this year. The show organisers held a special tribute for the recent, untimely passing of our industry matriarch, Vivian Kistler. Vivian had a tremendous following of supporters, whom she had no doubt influenced and inspired in incredible career as "the Queen of Picture Framing". It was pleasing to see such a strong turnout of dedicated people for this respectful tribute, which allowed some very close friends and speakers to share some humorous "Vivian" stories with everyone. Vivian was a major draw card for attendees at any tradeshow, and it will be tough to replace her influence and pulling power for future events without her presence, but her legacy will always remain.

It was pleasing, to see some fellow Aussie framers at this year's show, many of which found the time to join my 4th Annual "Down Under Dinner" held on Australia Day, at a popular restaurant at the Paris Casino. In speaking with these Aussie framers, I discover that they mainly head over to this show for either a bit of an exciting break or holiday (on the business), or to engage in the countless specialised educational classes and sessions throughout the 4 day period – armed with ideas and knowledge to take their business to the next level.

This year, on behalf of GUNNAR, I personally taught four different classes over the show, which were all well received. Additionally, for the first time, I was asked to participate as one of five industry experts in "the big event" held at the conference each year,

which is an open discussion called "Successful Retailing" focusing on the future direction of the framing industry. It is chaired by Jay Goltz, and attracts over 200 attendees.

The bottom line of this 2.5 hour Q&A discussion, was that framers need to recognise the need to change and re-engineer their business in order to survive and succeed. Ultimately – in order to survive in the future, you cannot rely on the same business formula for years and years – you need to change, always. The complete transcript of the discussion is published in Picture Framing Magazine, in the last quarter of the year.

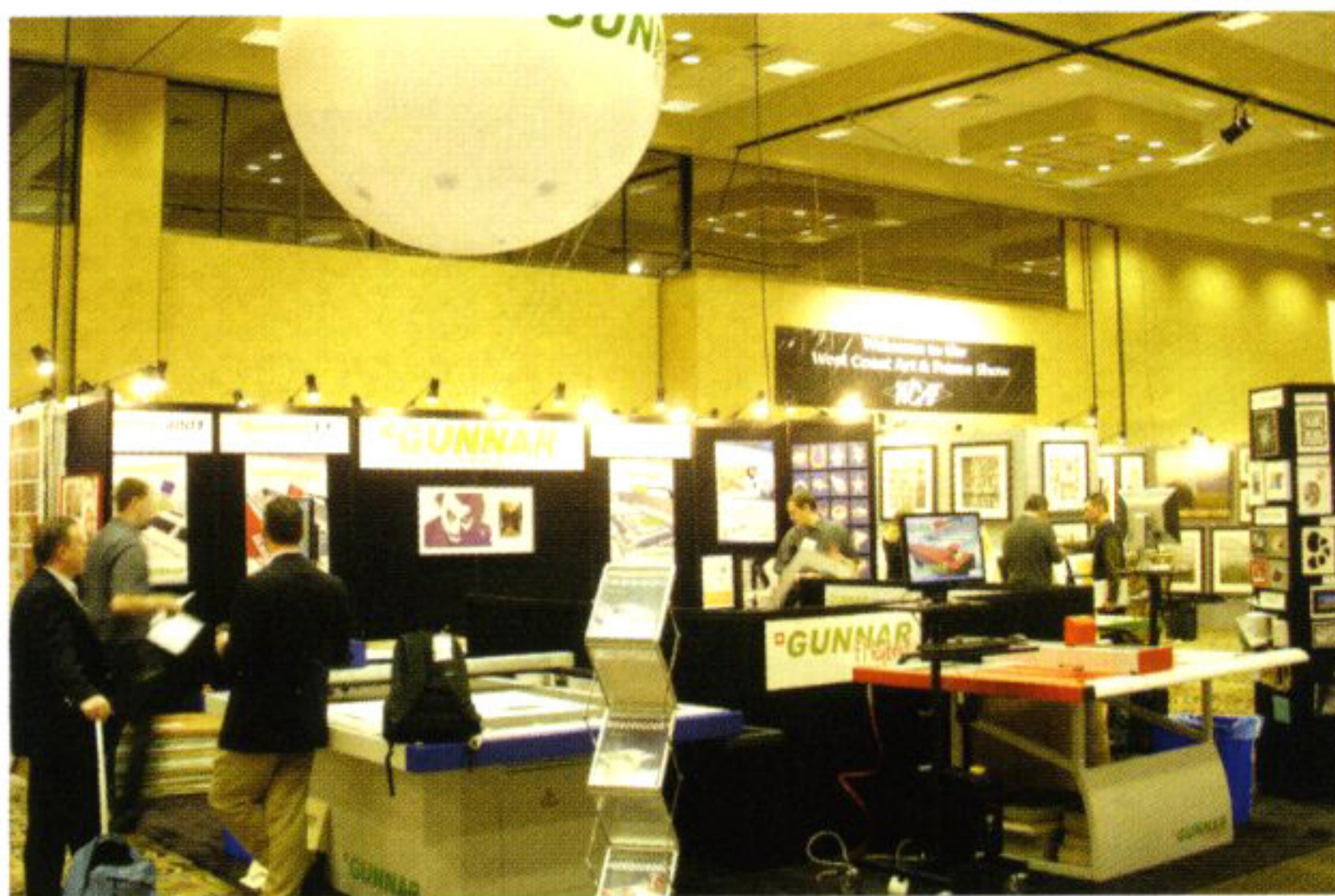
The show is always held each year in the famous Las Vegas Hilton – the original Las Vegas home of Elvis Presley (back in the early seventies when the hotel was called "The International"), and for the first time ever this year, the exhibitors were offered an exclusive cocktail function, put together by the show organisers from Picture Framing Magazine, held in the private, impressive "Elvis Suite" penthouse on the top floor (which has been re-modelled since Elvis used to stay here...). I lost count of the luxurious bathrooms after 10, and there was more than one bedroom for every day of the week, a private swimming pool, 5 Jacuzzis, all in a single suite! only in Vegas!

After Las Vegas, I took a small holiday in scenic San Francisco to see the sights, and visited a well known, long established framing business called "The Framer's Workshop" in Berkeley, owned by Kirstie Bennett, who was kindly generous to spend some time with me to show me through the finer details and

operations of her business. "The Framer's Workshop" has recently seen four competitor framers in her local area close in the last few months, but Kirstie's business is still thriving, outlasting her competitors through her forward thinking approach towards trying different ideas for marketing, and changing their products and services to continually attract new clientele.

The positive inspiration and ideas gained from attending a trade show like this, offers countless value to any serious business owner, and all framers should make a point of attending industry trade shows, not just to support our industry, but to support your own business with fresh ideas and fresh enthusiasm, which can help you identify ways for maximising your business in so many areas.

To those framers who tell me "Jared, I can't afford to go to a show like this", my reply is "You can't afford not to!" Here's an idea to help make it happen: why not



add an extra \$2-3 to every custom frame you sell for the next year, and over a year, that can accumulate into a nice "tradeshow fund" to help cover the costs for a trip to a show like this?

**See you in Las Vegas 2011 –
www.wcafshow.com**



Jared Davis is a world recognised educator at major international industry tradeshow and conventions, and is the Gunnar Product Manager for Megawood Mouldings. You can read some of Jared's previous articles at his website: www.jared-davis.com