

# ARTIS PURA

## CUSTOM FRAMING

presents...

# An artist's guide to framing

Located within an art gallery, I often meet artists who worry about the cost of professional custom framing. When it comes to your art and your career as an artist, there is no compromise for quality. Settling for a cheap mass-produced frame can damage your art, making it look unprofessional through mismatched proportions or gaps in the joins. In worst case scenarios it can even fall apart on opening night (Yes, I've seen it happen!).

*Quality framing is an investment in your art and your career.*

Choosing the right frame for your artwork makes sure that it looks its very best for not only yourself, but for prospective buyers.

It's important to know your stuff when it comes to framing: how to present your art so that it looks professional and how to ensure that your artwork is protected so that it can be enjoyed for years to come. Respect your work and see it as an investment. A quality piece presented in a quality frame will sell value to a buyer - and they're more likely to pay a higher price as a result.

*An artist's guide to framing* provides information to help you choose the right materials to present and preserve your artwork.

### Engage the experts

Did you know that framing is a trade qualification? There's more to framing than cutting and assembling materials. A good framer understands art, design, and most critically, conservation. Each piece is different and it takes years of experience to make an informed decision about the right frame to complement and enhance your artwork. Choosing the right framer will ensure that your art is not framed in a way that is unknowingly causing damage in the long term.



# Choosing quality materials

## Matting

Matting serves two purposes. The first is decorative. From a fine art perspective, matting give the work space to breathe before the frame. From a design perspective, it allows for creativity in the ability to highlight colours and features in the work. The second purpose is the most important: conservation.

Have you ever placed your happy snaps into a ready made frame without matting? You might have found that, down the track when you've gone to switch out the photo, it's stuck to the glass. Without matting the photo touches the glass. Moisture builds up behind the glass due to humidity in the outside air (imagine the condensation that builds up on the inside of a water bottle on a warm day). This often reacts with the photo's glossy surface, causing it to stick to the glass. If the moisture doesn't dry out, it can also lead to mould growth. The same principle applies to artwork. If it's sandwiched against the glass there is a high risk of damage and mould.

## Picking the perfect matting

When it comes to picking matting for your piece the choices can be overwhelming. Many products claim to be 'acid free' and chemically treated to remove impurities. Always approach such products with caution. Anything that has been treated with chemicals may have residues that, over time, can damage your artwork. If you can, it's always best to choose a matting made from 100% cotton rag - these products meet conservation standards and will not harm your piece.

*Below: Acid burn on matting and artwork*

## Mattings to avoid

Production board - a wood pulp (paper) board with limited treatment to remove damaging acids and lignins. Generally found in mass produced frames, production board can be spotted by its brown core (or a core that turns brown quickly over time).

## Other options

Whitcore - a type of production board chemically treated to look white at the core, but that will still brown over time and result in acid burn.

Alpha cellulose - a paper based board chemically treated to remove impurities and lignins.

## Best choice

100% cotton rag - made from 100% cotton. Cotton is not only acid free, it is also lignin free.

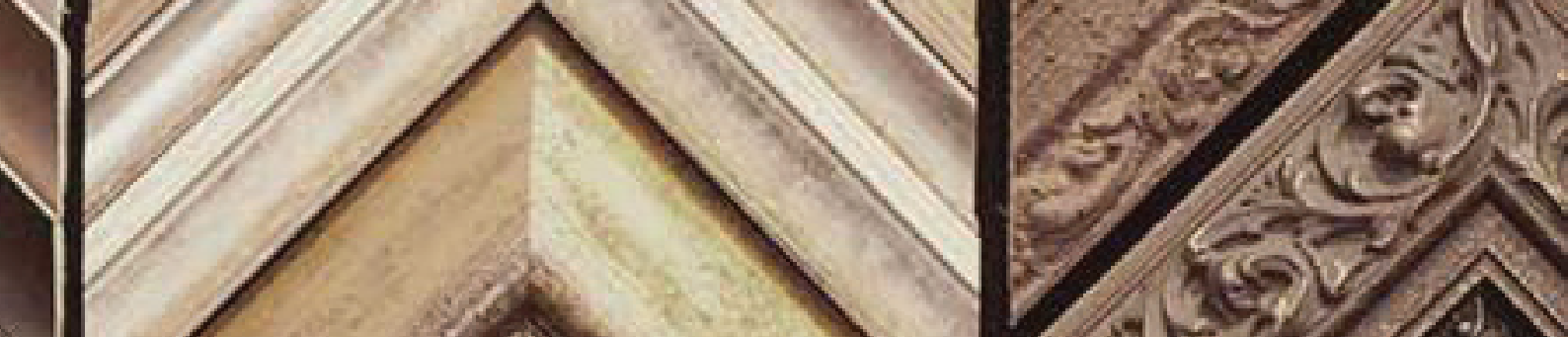
There are two types of cotton rag boards on the market - one has a 100% cotton core and backing, the other is 100% solid core. 100% cotton core comes in a large range of colours due to its wood pulp surface paper. When window mounted this surface does not touch the artwork, so is classed as conservation standard. However, it is not suitable for float mounting.

100% solid core is suitable for both window and float mounting as it does not contain wood products. It is full conservation standard, however colours are limited to natural cotton pigments.

While it may not always be affordable to purchase 100% cotton rag, knowing your options (and potential risks) means that you can make an informed decision when framing your next piece.

*Don't be fooled  
by 'acid free'.*

Lignin naturally occurs in wood and wood products (including papers). When exposed to UV light and other external conditions it becomes acidic. When used in framing, it can result in acid burn on artworks.

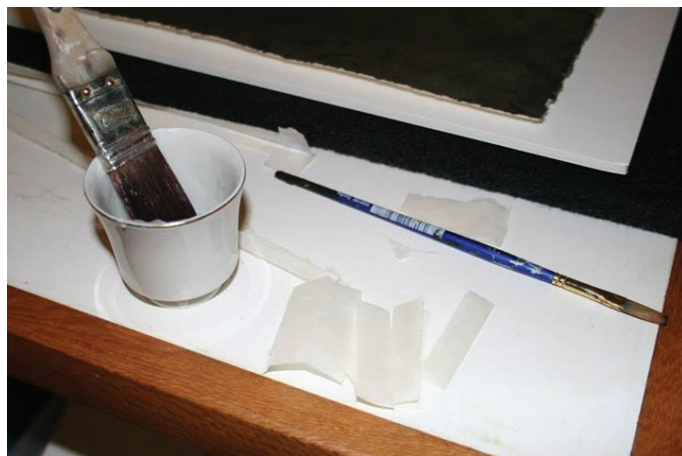


## Mounting

When it comes to mounting, it's important that the method you choose is reversible. You may not be able to afford full conservation framing to protect your piece, but a future buyer might. There's nothing worse than opening a frame to find that it has been stuck down and requires expensive restoration work to reverse damage.

Ensure that your framer uses an acid free pressure tape when mounting your work. Keep in mind that sometimes tapes labelled acid free and pH neutral can contain adhesives that break down over time and cause discolouration.

The best method for conservation mounting works on paper is Japanese hinging - made from Japanese mulberry paper and handmade wheat starch paste. Other options include Mylar acrylic mounting corners or strips. Check with your framer as to which method is best suited to your work and budget. If your work is fabric or canvas, other conservation mounting techniques are available.



*Japanese hinging mounting technique*

## Backing

Backing supports artwork and seals the frame. Usually backing touches the entire surface of the artwork, so choosing the correct material is imperative. Unfortunately, although banned in the United States, some providers in Australia still use MDF backing. MDF is carcinogenic and contains glues and chemicals that can damage the entire surface of your art. It is found in almost all ready made frames.

Foamcore is the alternative, preferred option for backing. There are several types of foamcore on the market and each range from 3mm to around 20mm thick. Generally you will require 3mm or 5mm unless your work is very large and requires additional support. Ask your framer which thickness is best suited to your piece.

## Conservation is a journey...

While you can make all the precautions to conserve your work, it's important to remember that external factors can threaten the integrity of your piece and the efforts of your framer. You must keep an eye on your piece. It's best to take your works into your framer once every 5 years for a check up. There can be outside factors such as moisture in your walls that may cause damage to your artwork.

### Foamcore options to avoid

Plain 'acid free' - although claiming to be acid free, over time many of these boards will turn yellow and brittle with age and acid deterioration.

Adhesive - is similar to plain foamcore but with a dry mount adhesive layer for permanent mounting. While visually appealing, allowing the work to appear completely flat, it is not reversible. We tend to only suggest this board for decorator prints and large glossy photos that can be replaced or that do not need to be conserved.

### Best choice

100% cotton rag - conservation standard backing. 100% cotton rag also contains zeolite chambers inside the board, shown to trap harmful impurities that may transfer from the external environment.

# Choosing quality materials

## Glass vs acrylic

There is some debate as to whether artists should use glass or acrylic when framing their work. It's my belief that, unless the work is extremely large, glass should be used.

Why? Acrylic is highly static and often attracts dust and specks, making the glass look dirty. This static can also pull the artwork away from its hinges. Due to the static nature of acrylic it should never be used on pastels and charcoals. While there are 'anti-static' sprays on the market, there is little known about the long term effects of these chemicals on your work. Acrylic is also very difficult to clean and scratches easily. However, there are benefits. It is lightweight and safer from a breakage point of view, so for very large pieces can be a viable option. Despite this, glass will always look better and be safer for your work.

## Types of glass

There are six basic types of glass available, differing in conservation quality and visual clarity.

Some types of glass block 99% UV light and some don't. If your glass (or acrylic) doesn't block 99% UV light it is not conservation standard.

Why do we need to block UV light? Just like our skin is damaged when exposed to the UV of the sun (even through the glass of our car window or from reflection) our art is also vulnerable, regardless of whether or not it is in direct sunlight. Did you know that many energy saving light bulbs give off UV light that can fade and discolour artworks?

As an artist it is not always affordable to upgrade to conservation materials. However, UV clear glass is more affordable now than ever before and is one upgrade that is worth considering as an artist.

## Glass to avoid

Float glass - 2mm thick common clear glass. Unless your framer has told you otherwise this is the glass you will have on your frame. This glass is reflective and has no conservation qualities.

Traditional non-reflective glass - made with a matte like finish that scatters light to minimise glare. The scattering of light caused by the finish not only makes artworks look out of focus and dull, it also makes them more vulnerable to UV damage.

## Other options

AR Reflection Free Glass (Anti Reflective) - unlike traditional non-reflective glass, AR glass looks as if there is no glass at all. Achieving 97% light transmission this glass enhances colour, brightness and contrast. Providing only 78% UV filtration it is not suitable for conservation framing.

Tru Vue Premium Clear - high quality regular framing glass, slightly thicker at 2.5mm making it stronger and easier to cut. Blocking up to 45% UV light, it is not suitable for conservation framing but is a more affordable option.

## Best choice

Museum glass - provides 99% UV filtration and appears virtually invisible. It is the most expensive option, but is full conservation standard.

Tru Vue Conservation Clear - standard conservation grade glass, providing 99% UV protection against fading, discolouration and UV burn (browning of paper). It is more affordable than museum glass.



TruVue conservation glass range

## Stretchers and supports

Like quality framing is an investment in your career so is your support and medium. You may be amazed by the difference a quality canvas and stretcher can make to the end result of your work. Quality does not have to mean expensive. An accommodating and friendly framer can help find ways to achieve quality on a budget. One way we do this for our artist clients is to source canvas at wholesale price, custom making stretchers as required. It may seem like a large cost up front to buy a full roll of canvas, but split across the number of canvases that can be made results in good value over the long term.

This can also be applied to paper. A high quality 250gsm artist cartridge paper is affordable and is designed for your medium, allowing better shading and blending. Other options include rag papers and hot pressed watercolour papers.

The materials you use at every step of each piece's journey will combine to play a major part in how the finished work comes out, in turn shaping your career as an artist.

## Framing moulding

There is more to a frame than a decorative piece of edging. It must be able to support the weight of the glass and everything inside. There are several options and materials to choose from.

### Timber

Timber is most commonly used for mouldings. Not only does it have strength, it also has versatility in design, colour and shape. The inside rebates of your frame must have the raw timber sealed for conservation. If they're not, impurities in the timber can leach into the matting and towards your artwork.

### Aluminium

Less commonly used, aluminum moulding is inert so, from a conservation standpoint, if it is not rusting it will meet conservation standards. It is very strong, allowing for a thin line of framing that can still support the weight of a large piece of glass. Aluminium is generally more expensive and is limited in design options.

### Plastic

Plastic mouldings should be avoided. They have no strength and are not environmentally sustainable. Over time plastic becomes lifeless and brittle.



*Timber moulding on canvas*

# Framing for different mediums

## Canvas

Canvas should always be stretched on a quality stretcher frame as the material and paint need to move with changes in humidity, similar to how a building needs allowances for movement. If allowance is not made, the paint may crack over time.

Any part of the timber stretcher that touches the artwork should be sealed with an acrylic primer to ensure that the stretching is to conservation standard. If not sealed appropriately, lignins in the timber will stain and break down the canvas over time.

Larger canvases often need to be cross braced. Ask your framer if your work requires cross bracing.

## Oils and acrylics on canvas

Generally, oils and acrylics on canvas are not framed behind glass unless they're in a temperature controlled environment. If you do choose to use glass it's important to check your artwork regularly, paying careful attention for moisture build-up on the inside of the glass. If moisture build-up is present, the frame will need to be opened to remove any mould growth. As long as the work is spaced back, the mould should not transfer to the artwork if taken care of quickly.

## Paper

Works on paper should be mounted so that they are 100% reversible and framed with matting or spacers so that they do not touch the glass.

## Pastels and charcoals

Pastels and charcoals always lose small amounts of dust particles. It is not advisable to use acrylic as the static will attract these particles. When framing pastels and charcoals, your framer should create a dust trap by spacing the matting away from the work so that the particles fall behind the matting into the rebate of the frame. This will keep your frame looking cleaner for longer.

It's also worth noting that certain pastel colours can fade very quickly, so 99% UV glass is highly recommended.

## Pencil

Pencil artwork can fade extremely quickly when exposed to light. Always use 99% UV filtering glass when framing pencil work.

## Sculpture

Sculptures and other 3D works need to be set back in box framing. There are ways to mount such pieces without using screws or glue that cause permanent damage. Always ask your framer about mounting techniques to ensure that your piece is not damaged in the process.



*Box framing technique for 3D artworks*



## Key things to remember

- Your art is an investment. Where possible you should look to preserve it with conservation standard framing.
- Don't be fooled by 'acid free'. Many products claiming to be acid free have been chemically treated, so could still cause damage to your work.
- Avoid cheap backings like MDF - instead opt for 100% cotton.
- Ensure all framing is reversible - especially mounting techniques.
- Consider your medium and choose the most appropriate framing option.



**ARTIS PURA**  
CUSTOM FRAMING

## Conservation checklist

- 100% cotton rag matting
- 100% cotton rag foamcore backing
- 99% UV filtration glass
- Reversible mounting using Japanese hinging
- Frame rebate sealing

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## About the author

Erin Salguero is the owner of Artis Pura Custom Framing. Originally an entertainment photographer, Erin discovered her passion for framing 18 years ago and, after working at a number of local framing stores in Brisbane, started her own business. Recently travelling to New York to intern with Lowy, one of the most respected framers in the industry, Erin has found further passion to combine knowledge, well-crafted products and professional techniques to keep the craft of framing alive and pure.

