



Framing Photographic Prints as Décor for the Home

How to get the best results and maximum décor impact with large photo prints and family photos as framed artwork in your home.

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Today's digital cameras bring freedom and quality. People, even kids, can take appealing, high-quality pictures – stunning scenes, interesting travel photos, close-ups of flowers, and other subjects that look great when printed.

Cameras have more megapixels and anti-shake technology. And with software, you can boost image size dramatically for larger prints. It's easy to create high-quality, poster-size prints.

Local copy shops, photo labs and online services will make high quality poster prints from your images at low prices.

And new large format inkjet printers, with quality papers and inks, are more affordable. This means with practice you can also do large prints at home.

Framed family pictures have always been part of a home. Now, with new technologies, more people are creating and framing large family photos. These give a family-oriented feel, but don't always work as stylish décor for a room.

Even these new levels of print size, quality and sharpness, don't necessarily mean the resulting pictures will be artistic, or yield a pleasing decorative result.

Framing

If you want your framed images to look stylish, think about the subjects you choose, how you take the picture, the style of custom framing, and where they will be hung. After all, large prints fill more wall space and become major décor items in your home.

Many people buy inexpensive pre-made frames for their pictures, especially smaller ones. These can work for smaller pictures for your desk, or even a collection of family pictures in a hallway.

But budget frames may not show larger pictures at their best, or smaller prints you want to feature in a group. And also consider the current frameless mount.

Going for a décor effect

Some design advice, and an experienced framer, can help you make the most of this personal touch for your home. A skilled professional framer, with an eye for artistic images and a good design sense, can work with you to create a pleasing piece of framed artwork.

So let's look at what you need to do, if you are going for a stylish décor effect.

1. Consider where the picture is to be hung.
2. Avoid filling an entire picture with faces, or a family group in the picture.
3. Avoid using the typical family picture, or picture of the kids pulling faces, as a large décor item – pick something appealing, artistic or eye-catching.
4. Make sure you use an image that is focused and correctly exposed.
5. Use a photo quality paper or similar medium that is archival.
6. Buy or create a quality frame that suits the picture.
7. Even you pay a lot for a frame, make sure it suits the picture and room.
8. Avoid filling every available wall space with pictures of the kids. It makes a house feel like a photo album, and some visitors may feel, well, uncomfortable.
9. Avoid large collections of historic family pictures dominating a room. This also can make visitors feel uncomfortable, and it usually isn't very stylish.
10. Always use a border (known as a mat) around your photograph. Unless, say, you are going frameless, or printing on canvas to stretch. You can also create a border by printing the same image on larger paper.

Rules for photo art

When you use your own photographs as art, you get to choose the size you want. And there are a few rules that help this choice.

When you consider framing your photographic art to place on a specific wall, make sure you allow enough wall space around the frame for it to "breathe".

There can be exceptions. For example, at the end of a long hallway, where you want to fill an entire small wall area with, say, two frames – one above each other, as a décor feature.

When you decide the height to hang a picture, start by having the eyes of people in the picture at the same eye-level as the average person looking at it, or slightly above. If there is a horizon in the picture, this can also be best at eye level.

But when the picture is looking up at a building or a mountain, you can place the picture higher, to get a sense of looking up. Or lower, say with a picture looking into a valley, to give a sense of looking down.

If a photograph is of people, particularly a portrait or group, consider how much of the picture area the people will take up. If you fill the frame with people, then the picture serves only one purpose – to say, "Here is a picture of these people."

It is better to show people in an interesting context, such as a colorful garden, a national park, or a tourist attraction. It then becomes a picture of that location at the time you were visiting. That way, it is more appealing to other people.

As an example, our own wedding photograph shows us standing on a bridge over a river, with the towering cliffs of Yosemite Valley behind us. We are relatively small in the picture, yet when you get close you can see us clearly. From a distance, it is not a dominating wedding photograph, but a beautiful landscape with two people in it. And for us, it evokes the memory and the broader experience of that day.

Of course some people may want an entire room dominated by their wedding picture, or images of their children. It's a matter of personal choice.

Size, subject and placement

Each print has its "own ideal size". It depends on the subject, and the quality of the image. And by viewing distance – how close people get to look at the picture, and where it is in a room.

Suppose you have a picture of a beautiful lake with spectacular mountains behind. This may look good in something the size of a coffee table book, or a small print. But let's suppose there is a tiny canoe on the lake maybe with people you know in the canoe. Then you'll want the print to be big enough to recognize the people, or least see the canoe when the picture is printed, framed and hung.

If this mountain scene with the canoe is hung in a narrow hallway, people are always going to be close to it and will be able to see the canoe. But, they won't be able to step back to get a sense of the entire scene. So if it's going to be hung in a hallway, the print probably needs to be smaller.

However, if it is going to dominate a large room, then it can afford to be larger. It may even need to be bigger, to attract the attention of people in the room. In this case, visitors will walk up to the picture to see who is in the canoe.

That raises another consideration. The picture should be placed so the canoe is at approximately average eye level. So you need to consider the picture's placement, and the viewing distance.

Working with a framer who has a flair for design and creative framing can make your beautiful or intriguing personal prints special. But remember, a framed picture has to go somewhere.

So, when you think framing, think of the context. If it is a particularly important piece that could dominate a room, consider seeking advice from an interior designer. They can assist in making the most of the print as a feature for the room.

Choosing a frame

Now you need to choose the style of frame. For photo art, in very broad terms, you have two choices. The first is a very minimalist frame, such as a thin black molding. This typically looks best with a single white or ivory mat.

The alternative is custom décor framing, uniquely designed for the image and setting. Naturally, the mat will be part of this design choice – you'll need to consider its style, complexity, color, and size.

The size of the mat, or border, you choose will depend on what you want the picture to say. You've probably seen exhibitions where smaller photographs have a very large border. This is done to draw attention to the smaller picture. It sends a message that the picture is important – important enough to warrant a large border.

You should also consider the paper or "stock" your photo is printed on. This may even be a fabric. When you print on fabric or canvas, you need to think about whether you will frame with or without glass.

There is standard grade glass, with or without ultraviolet protection. This gives a better view of the image details, but will catch reflections from windows and other light sources.

So, if you have a lot of bright light sources around the image you may prefer a non-reflective glass. But with non-reflective glass you lose a little of the image's crispness and definition.

Another way to cut reflections without loss of crispness option is to use museum glass. This is a clear and very low reflective glass with ultraviolet protection. It is more expensive, and for larger prints it may become quite costly.

Another possibility is acrylic also known as Plexiglas. This is still reflective, usually has ultraviolet protection, but is more resistant to fractures than standard glass. It is definitely a safe option if you are transporting or shipping a large framed piece. But it can bow, and is more easily scratched.

And there is the frameless look. Your print will need to be protected with a coating. You may choose to "bleed" the print to the edge, use a wide border on the print itself, or even try an online service that prints on canvas and wraps the image around the edges.

Print materials

You can also print on canvas or fabric, or even a textured paper or cotton stock. There is quite a range of surfaces to choose from from a finer bright white, to heavy textured off-white.

For this kind of material, to allow the color, detail and texture to show best, you may choose not to have glass. You need to choose a mat that is robust enough to brush or clean. The print surface needs to be protected, so it is important to apply a coating to the image to protect it from abrasion, ozone, and ultraviolet light.

If you choose canvas for the print, you can have it printed with a large blank border around the image and then stretch the canvas onto a special frame. The stretched canvas on its frame is placed directly into a custom frame, without needing a mat.

When you are making décor choices, work with a designer, or professional framer with a sense of design. The right framer can give experienced and trained advice and décor suggestions. This adds real value which people are happy to pay for.

A skilled framer can create individual professional frames to your requirements, by designing and choosing materials and frame style to bring out the best in the piece.

Summary

Let's sum up the key factors you need to consider

1. Pick an ideal size of the print, bearing in mind the subject, content, image quality, wall space and viewing distance.
2. Allow the right amount of breathing space around the picture on the wall.
3. Think about the placement height of the piece based on the subject and its viewing distance.
4. Show a broader context with pictures of people.
5. Make subject and framing design decisions based on the room in which it will be hung.
6. Choose the appropriate stock, mat and frame.
7. Decide if you'll use glass. Which kind is best for the print and its location?

These have been a few thoughts on how to turn a personal picture or travel photo into an appealing décor item or even a work of art for the home, that will be noticed and admired.

If you would like information about products I use and recommend for enhancing your photos, boosting image size, color correcting your computer display, visit my photography blog at www.itookthat.com.

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