

Ask the Masters

Expert advice on solving your painting problems.

Give New Life to Old Frames

Q: I have some old picture frames that I would like to revamp. How should I prepare these frames for painting? Do you have any suggestions for how to refinish them?

A: Rita Broughton responds: Finding old frames and refinishing them is a wonderful way to add your own unique touch to the art you display. To begin, clean the frame with soap and water to remove any dirt and grease. Scrape and sand any loose or uneven paint to create a smooth surface.

Next, check the mitered corners for gaps. If there are gaps, remove any glue with a small chisel or screwdriver and reglue the corners with a wood glue (I used Elmer's). Clamp the corners and let dry. To avoid denting the corners with the clamps, I put wood shims between the clamp and frame. (The wood shim can be any scrap of wood, or even a paint stir stick.) Finally, coat the frame with a latex primer sealer (I used Benjamin Moore's). Let dry, then sand the frame lightly and wipe the dust off with a tack cloth.

Now you're ready to paint. You could simply paint your frame with the color of your choice—from gold to green. Or, try one of the following ideas to create a frame with extra flair:

- **Sponge and Speckle:** This frame (top right) was base coated with dark brown acrylic paint. Then I sponge painted the frame with three lighter shades of brown—working from dark to light. Finally, I used a spatter brush (you can also use a toothbrush) to speckle the wood with black paint.

- **Wood Grain Grandeur:** I applied an acrylic base coat of cream to this frame (middle right). I used an acrylic extender and brown to apply a wood-grain effect. Be sure to lay the paint on evenly, then, working quickly, make swift strokes with a graining tool.

- **Two-Toned Treatment:** I found this ornamental frame (bottom right) at an antique store. After a little cleaning up and minor plaster work, I base coated it with a coffee-colored latex paint. Next, I coated it with a metallic acrylic paint and wiped it here and there with a soft rag to achieve its distinctive, two-toned finish.

For all these frames, I coated the surface with a satin polyurethane finish—once the paint was dry.



Fabulous Frames

Turn throw-away frames into thrilling painting accents with a little clean-up and paint. Create a speckled antique, wood grain or two-tone finish for a distinctive look on a refurbished frame.