

The Installation Advantage

By Barbara and Rob Markoff, CPF

There is definitely more to picture hanging than handing your customers newly framed pictures with a wire and a hook and expecting that with the tap of a hammer the pieces will hang perfectly straight on the wall. And what does a customer do when hanging on a curved wall, a stone wall, or when multiple pieces need to hang parallel and straight in a row? When clients are in a quandary, most likely they will turn to you for solutions. Frame shop owners and staff need to be prepared to explain the appropriate hanging hardware needed for the job as well as guide clients in determining which type of installation best suits their specific situation.

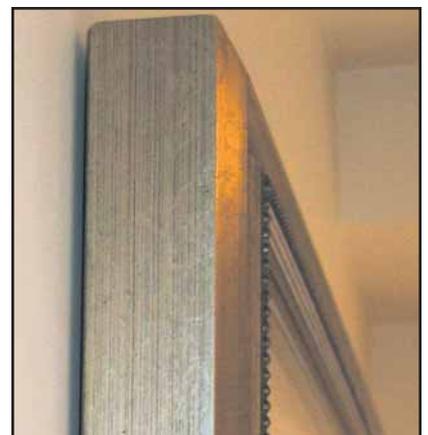
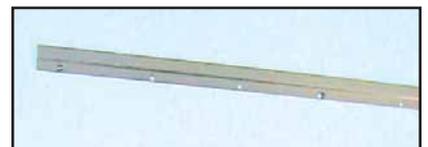
Our framers attach a prepackaged picture hook to the wire of each piece we frame for our retail clients. However, during the design process alternative hanging methods are discussed when special circumstances arise. Common questions center on earthquake safety, theft protection, mirror installations, and methods for hanging multiple pictures in a group. We offer a full range of installation services, and by asking the right questions during the sale our installers are given all the information they need before installation. With this information, the installers arrive at each job fully prepared with the right tools.

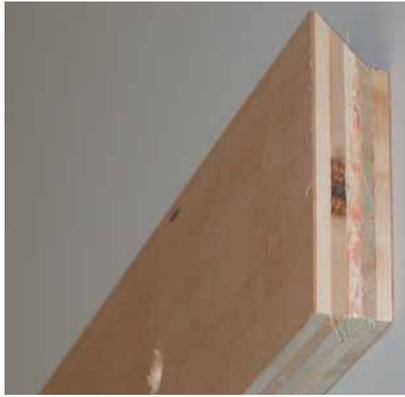
When customers select installation services, the type of hanging method is noted on the framing work order. This alerts the framers to prepare pieces differently than if clients will be hanging the pieces themselves. A separate installation request form is submitted to the frame shop for scheduling.

Though installation services may provide an excellent revenue stream and increased business, the work does impact productivity. When framers leave a shop to install at homes or businesses, it means less time for framing. Daily and weekly framing schedules need to



This large artwork (above) was hung on a wall with a Z-type channel (right) the result is that the work is mounted tightly to the wall (bottom right).





A cleat system uses two parts. Here the wall component is attached.

Hanging a family grouping with double straps means the pictures will always hang level and the homeowner won't have to straighten them.



Using security hardware in a public corridor will not only keep the pictures straight but help deter theft.

Public corridors like this one require security installation.



take into account how much time installation services will take and, equally importantly, that clients are billed for the services. The rate usually ranges from \$70 to \$100 per hour depending on if a job requires a one- or two-man crew.

When we leave a job, the art will stay straight and level. This is an important selling point of our installation services. We do this using one of a number of two-point suspension methods. We rarely use picture wire for this service because it can allow a picture to move on the wall.

For the majority of artwork we install, we use a "double strap" system, which uses two single-hole "D-ring" hangers on each side of the frame. For smaller pictures, we use a small "D-rings," which accept a 30-pound picture hanger. For the majority of pieces we hang, however, we use a larger "D-ring," which accepts both a 30-pound and a 50-pound hanger. A 50-pound hanger offers several advantages. It uses a larger nail, so if you hit a metal stud on a commercial installation the nail will usually penetrate the stud without bending. It is also easier to engage the "D-ring" because the hook is also larger. The nail is also longer than the thickness of drywall and adds a bit more strength to the installation.

To simplify and speed up installations, our fitters always install the "D-rings" at the same distance down for each framed piece, usually 6" to the top of the hanger. The higher the "D-rings" are on a piece, the flatter it will hang to the wall. While a piece is on the fitting table, the distance between the holes is also marked on the back of the piece. That way, when installers are in the field, they can be extremely precise in positioning the framed piece on the wall because the location of the hooks is easily determined by the location of the straps. Hanging multiple pieces in a group is simple because the distance down from the top of all pieces is fixed, making the distance apart easy to calculate.

When hanging heavy mirrors (or artwork), we will sometimes use a two-hole "D-ring" hanger. These are installed in a vertical orientation. It is important that the back of the framed piece is clearly labeled to advise whoever is hanging the piece to not add wire to the "D-rings" as that will torque the top of the hangers and could cause them to fail. We make "do not add wire" labels with a computer and laser printer that are attached to the back of the piece next to each "D-ring."

For very large pieces, or where the goal is to have a piece hang as flat to the wall as possible, we use a Z-type



Hanging a large framed garment with double strap hangers means it will always stay level.

channel. This system uses two interlocking pieces of aluminum channel, one that is attached to the wall and the other on the back of the frame. The channel comes predrilled with a series of holes that are evenly spaced. Sometimes they will line up with the spacing that is required for installation. Often they will not. Aluminum is easily drilled, and holes are marked and drilled in the channel as required.

When attaching the channel to the wall, an electronic stud finder is used to mark the channel for drilling as required so that at least two fasteners are located at studs. It's not necessary to put a screw into every hole for the wall channel. Often, we hang works from two or more studs and use a wall anchor to secure the ends of the channel to the wall. We tend to use more screws on the channel that is attached to the frame because they are shorter.

Many times, the span of the wall channel will extend from studs that are “crowned,” meaning that if you put a straight edge on the wall it will “rock” because the wall is not perfectly flat. It is important that the channel is straight on the wall because the picture won't bend to conform to a curved wall. In this case you should either loosen the screws on the wall channel (be sure the screws you select are long enough to go through the channel and drywall and still grab the stud) or shim the channel straight. Plastic laminate samples work well as shims. You can stack them as needed, and they have holes so the screw you're using will hold them in place. Loosening the top channel will

also work if the piece tends to “float away” from the wall when installed. This will also allow for easier engagement of the two pieces. For additional security, or for pieces that won't sit flat, a security bracket is added to the bottom of the frame. For long pieces, we may add two, one at each bottom corner.

A variation of the Z-channel is a cleat system made from wood. This system is used in conjunction with stem-type moulding and a strainer or with large acrylic boxes that also use a strainer/platform combination. The biggest advantage of this system is that the piece will hang perfectly flat to the wall because the cleat is recessed inside the frame and is part of the strainer.

The mating wall cleat can either be attached to the studs or to an appropriate wall anchor. The 30-degree bevel of the cleat allows gravity to pull the piece to the wall. This system can also have a security bracket attached to the bottom, though the piece will no longer lie parallel to the wall because the bracket is attached to the back of the strainer.

The security system we often use is a component system, the heart of which is a screw with a T-shaped head called a “T-lock.” This screw engages into either the channel of metal moulding or into a slotted bracket attached to the bottom of a wood frame. For metal frames, two corresponding brackets are attached to the wall and the piece slips over the brackets. The T-lock is then engaged using a special wrench to lock the piece to the wall.

For wood frames, the same type of plate that is attached to the bottom that secures the “T-lock” is also used at the top of the frame. Corresponding brackets are then attached to the wall, the picture is slipped onto the brackets, and the “T-lock” is engaged into the slotted bracket on the bottom to lock the piece to the wall.

When our fitters attach the top brackets to a wood frame, the brackets are usually spaced the same distance in from the outside of the frame on both the left and right sides. The distance between the centers is also measured and written on the back of the dust cover. This way, when the frame is installed, the holes for the top brackets will always be the same distance down from the top of the frame and the same distance in from the edges. Installation will be precise as the holes are always a known distance from the top and sides.

The bottom bracket is always installed so that the flat part of it is flush with the bottom of the frame. We

usually use the “spotter” points on the bracket to help locate the position of the hole for the “T-lock.” On wall-paper or textured walls, a piece of masking tape placed temporarily behind the bracket makes it easier to see the indentations made by the spotters. Where it is not possible to use the spotter feature of the bracket, the bottom of the bracket can be marked and then the correct measurement transferred to the wall for the “T-lock.”

Preparing the back of the frame with accurate measurements is a huge timesaver once a crew is at an installation. Having a fully equipped installation kit is also essential for unexpected situations when the job is not what the client described or what the designer envisioned based on the information gathered. Many times installers can solve problems onsite to achieve a professional look. This means having back-up tools and hardware ready for special circumstances. Once an installation is sold, we are committed to completing a job professionally, solving unexpected problems even if multiple trips are required.

We promote our company as a full-service art and framing source for residential and corporate clients. Installation is a significant part of the package when closing all deals, and it often leads to increased sales and

profits. We have landed numerous large residential and corporate jobs based on our ability to solve installation challenges. Turning over such services to an outside source means lost revenue and the risk of losing jobs to other framers who offer hanging services. In today's economy why give your clients any reason to not use your company. Offering installation services increases your chances of closing larger jobs and attracting new clients looking for a complete package. ■



Barbara Markoff is co-owner of Artrageous!, an art and framing retailer with three stores in San Diego, CA, and has been an art consultant for 25 years. Her firm specializes in art selection, framing, and installation for the corporate environment. She has a BFA in ceramics and an MA in art therapy.

Rob Markoff, CPF, has been framing for more than 35 years. He co-owns Gallery Services, a contract framing company, and Artrageous! He has written extensively for industry publications and is a featured speaker/educator at framing venues across the U.S. and Canada.



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