



Photo shows a wooden handmade frame by New Orleans based Alyse studio owner Alyse Rodriguez.



Beyond Popsicle sticks: Tips for DIY picture frames



File photo shows a wooden handmade frame by New Orleans based Alyse studio owner Alyse Rodriguez.

Think back to kindergarten and your first picture frame, proudly put together out of glued Popsicle sticks, some yarn and maybe a splash of glitter. Voila! Functional art.

DIY picture frames - whether by adults or children - are still the bedrock of meaningful crafts projects. Printing out a photo of a loved one or landscape and displaying it in a frame elevates that image above the ocean of others that we post online or keep tucked away on cell phones and laptops. Here are some tips on how to make a picture frame out of wood and other materials, from book covers and fabric to those always popular Popsicle sticks.

Ideas and inspirations

New Orleans-based Alyse Rodriguez, 32, began making frames and home decor as a hobby while working as an accountant, but transitioned her Etsy.com store into a full-time studio and business last year. "I start with inspiration, from travel, my home and my clothes to playing the piano, and amalgamate all that into ideas, the color palettes and pattern design," she said.

Her Color Collection, made of two or three thick pieces of birch plywood glued side-by-side and hand-painted with acrylic paint in lime green, coral and other unusual colors, with the photo secured on top, reflects her bohemian style. Her new Mali Collection features right-angled frames made of smooth poplar, with a stained finish. Geometric patterns - squiggles, arrows, dots - inspired by African, handmade cotton fabric dyed with fermented mud, called mud cloth, are then screen-printed on the surface.



File photo shows wooden handmade frames by New Orleans based Alyse studio owner Alyse Rodriguez. — AP photos

"The way that I approach wood is like the way an artist approaches a blank canvas," Rodriguez said.

The right materials

If you're interested in making a right-angled wooden frame - four pieces of wood glued together at the joints and secured with nails or staples - Rodriguez recommends sticking to poplar. It's smooth, lightweight, easy to sand down, and has a fine texture. Timothy Holton, 58, of Berkeley, California, who founded the shop Holton Studio Frame-Makers in 1993, suggests investing in high-quality hardwoods such as cherry, oak and maple.

A table saw is one way to cut the wood; you can buy one at a local woodshop, he said. Or Rodriguez suggests having pieces cut for you at chain stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot that have cutting machines. Rodriguez, who also quilts, used to make frames out of plywood wrapped in fabric and glued in the back with fabric adhesive, like a fabric-covered book, with the photo on top.

Or you could take a hardcover book, carve out a rectangle in the middle of the cover, pop out the piece, and tape a photo in its place. For a simple, rustic frame, great to make with kids, combine four twigs to form a rectangle, and then bind them with string at the corners. "The simplest frame, if it's really made well, feels compelling and has integrity to it," said Holton.

That makes the process of fitting, gluing and nailing the pieces together important. First use a strong wood glue, such as Titebond, and wait for it to dry. "If you wait 24 hours, you have to use an axe to get those pieces of wood apart," Rodriguez joked.

To hold two pieces together at a perfect right angle to dry, use a miter clamp or other type of frame clamp. A picture frame stapler gun or nail gun are helpful when securing the frame in the back, after gluing. For kids, break out those Popsicle sticks, and buy colorfully patterned Japanese washi tape. Crafts blog Eighteen25.com recommends rolling out a strip of washi tape, sticky side up, and laying the Popsicle sticks on top, wrapping the washi tape around their edges. Then glue two plain sticks across your decorated sticks, to hold everything together. Glue a magnet on the back and a photo on the front.

Have fun decorating

"To me, the finish work is the best part. That's where the design really comes into play, and you can have fun," said Rodriguez. Head to a paint or art supply store and get color swatches, play with color combinations and buy inexpensive acrylic paint samples, said Rodriguez. She likes to use 1-inch-thick craft paint brushes. Use a pencil eraser dipped in paint or a stencil to create patterns.

Rodriguez made her first picture frame in 2011 with a stencil of a mask that she actually glued to the frame and then spray-painted gold. She now also incorporates braided leather and burlap into her frame designs. Your decorated frame should be personal, reflecting the picture in it. "The frame says, 'This matters. This is something I care about, that you should care about too,'" says Holton. — AP



Photo shows New Orleans based Alyse studio owner Alyse Rodriguez, who makes artistic wooden picture frames and rustic home decor, painting a frame.