



Left: Hendrick Draakestein *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* 1686 hand-coloured copper engravings.

TO FRAME OR NOT TO FRAME

Keep it simple when framing period art so that the frame doesn't take away from the art itself

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Many years ago, I was pondering ways of improving my antiques and restoration business. After antiques retail, antique restorations, decorating and advising, art was the next move. I had always dealt in art, however finally focusing on this changed everything.

I had become tired of over-framing my period art. For as long as I can remember, galleries would mount rare engravings, for example a Besler, not just once, but up to four times, then place a huge and expensive hand-gilded frame around it all. This didn't just look OTT, it also cost a small fortune; framing could cost up to \$1000. This day I remember clearly, as I had just purchased a pair of first-edition Basil Beslers 1613. They had three gold, patterned pink and gold again mounts, and the most hideous hand-gilded frames.

I went to a new framer, Vicki Hutchins. Together we started a brand-new way of framing 16th-20th-century engravings, lithographs, photographs and paintings. No mounts and plain

off-white frames. Suddenly my art was modernised. You could now place a framed 17th-century hand-coloured copper engraving into a modern setting or a period-style home. This change of styling completely changed my art market and brought my art sales from around 10 per cent to more than 30 per cent over the next few years.

With medium to large Australian or European watercolours or oils, for example a 17th-century European oil, I sometimes completely remove the frame. I colour out the markings to the sides, attach a new string, and we have a bold new statement of art, less the gilt frame that took away from the art itself.

I then started placing between three and five engravings into one single wide frame, all without mounts. This has worked very well over the years, with everything from Basil Beslers and Hendrick Draakesteins to Elizabeth Blackwells and recently a grouping of three 19th-century Indian botanicals, however these suited a darker, modern, clean-lined frame. I love the effect this creates, especially with the early





Opposite: Basil Besler *Hortus Eystettensis Aethiopia* Second Edition 1644.
 Above left: Elizabeth Blackwell *A Curious Herbal The White Rose* 1730.
 Below left: Basil Besler *Hortus Eystettensis Geranium Sangui* first edition 1613.
 Top right: Hendrick Draakestein *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus Sobena* 1686.
 Bottom right: Thomas Pancovius *Herbarium* 1536–1665.





engravings, when the edges of the papers are all imperfect and somewhat messy. By showing the more unusual variations, this makes every piece of art I sell unique.

An old frame can be modernised by simply painting over the gold or dark timber frames. This Buckmaster is a perfect example — from an unattractive goldish frame to this, with a coat of paint and a little steel wool highlighting. Sometimes retaining the original frame is the right decision, this being one.

I remember selling a stunning Marian Ellis Rowan to a university, back in 1992. This was a rare one for her, as it was Melbourne's Government House, with

the Botanical Gardens and Yarra River reversed to the front. I had obtained this amazing watercolour from a great friend, Bryan Collie, Melbourne Fine Art, MFA. Bryan saw that I loved that painting on his gallery wall. He kindly allowed me to take the painting and pay the artwork off, simply by restoring all of his furniture. Sometimes in business, you meet some very kind people and forge many wonderful friendships.

Over the past 28 years I have placed art into many homes, weekenders, shops and offices, even toilets around Australia. Even once I retire I will continue to buy, sell and collect art. 🐾

Above: Hendrick Draakestein, *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* 1686.
Right: Elizabeth Blackwell, *A Curious Herbal* 1730.

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