

Design of the Month

by Jodie Prymke, CGF



The subject for this design was rather unusual: four antique taxidermy wet specimens in three antique bottles. The title plate says it all: “Species of Centipede, Kangaroo, and Scorpion c1920 from the Private Collection of Madam Professor J.M. LePoidevin.”

Considering the unusual subject matter, the frame design needed to be light in color (not dark or morbid) and it had to be understated, so the bottles collectively would remain the focal point. The keywords for the design were elegant, feminine, French-inspired, and vintage-looking (1920s).

Construction of the Frame

A moulding profile was required that had an antique French look and one that was available in two different sizes to accommodate the shadowbox design—a small moulding for the inside and a matching wider moulding on the outside. The ivory-colored Providence from Larson-Juhl was most suitable. The smaller profile was 1-5/8" wide x 1-1/8" high, and the larger profile was 2¾" wide x 1-5/8" high.

The design began with the mantel shelf, which was made by cutting the small moulding vertically. The flat, back edge of the moulding became the top of the shelf, measuring 1-1/8" wide (wide enough to hold the 1-1/16" deep bottles). The shelf was screwed in place onto a Bainbridge Glazed Linen matboard in Sawdust. The matboard was chosen for



An understated and elegant design was created to enhance these three small and unusual antique bottles from the 1920s. They were previously owned by a female professor, so a feminine approach to the design was desired.

its rich, neutral color as well as its linen texture, which was magnified behind the bottles, creating a subtle, additional interest. The glazed finish of the matboard also served as extra protection, just in case the bottles leaked.

Since the proportion of the mat to the bottles was so important, the general rule of thirds in design was followed. The three bottles appeared visually as one object; therefore, the inner mat width was the same size as one bottle—or a third of the total “object” size. The bottles were siliconed into place on the shelf, allowing for ease of removal if necessary. The design was kept upright as much as possible by being placed on an easel.

The next step was to make the inner shadowbox frame. A vertical matboard or plain inner frame would have been sufficient, but the decision was made to try something a little different. The small Providence moulding was used for three reasons:



The side view of the shadowbox frame showcases the versatility of the Providence moulding from Larson-Juhl—cut vertically in both the small and large profiles.



A 4mm wide band of hand-leaved bronze paper was applied to the outer mat to tie the rusty bottle caps and outer Anvil frame together. Pinstripes were a prominent fashion feature of the 1920s, so this design element was suitable.

1. Cut vertically, it was the required depth for the shadowbox. The depth, 1-5/8", cleared the shelf containing the bottles by 1/2".
2. The sight edge of the moulding created a decorative fillet.
3. The rabbet of the moulding became a solid support for the outer mat.

At that stage, quite a few design options were tested. Wide and stacked frames and contrasting mats were considered, but rejected. Both were either too distracting or overpowering for the tiny, delicate objects. The same mat was chosen for the outer as the inner mat.

A resting space between the bottles and the outer frame was desired so they would not look crowded. It also gave the overall frame more presence on the wall by increasing its size. The design rule of thirds was used again when deciding the size of the outer mat—one third larger than the size of the inner mat. A reverse bevel was cut on the outer mat to ensure a tight fit over the inner frame's fillet. Several layers of foamboard were glued and hidden behind the outer mat to give the outer mat stability and strength.

The feature frame, Anvil from Larson-Juhl, was chosen for its industrial, antique feel; rusty finish; and "reinforcing bar" pattern, which matched the color and shape of the antique screw-top lids. It was also small enough so it would not overwhelm the design.

The piece was looking good, but at this point it seemed that something wasn't quite working. The inner ivory Providence frame and outer Anvil frame seemed disconnected from one another. To fix this, a 4mm band of bronze, hand-leaved paper was applied to the outer mat next to the fillet. The dark brown color and line was just enough to tie together the color of the rusty bottle caps and the outer Anvil frame. Pinstripes were a prominent fashion feature of the 1920s, so that design element was suitable and in keep-

ing with the client's design instructions.

To give the bottles an explanation of their provenance and age, a title plate was necessary. An engraved brass plaque was considered, but the introduction of another color (brass/yellow) and texture (high gloss) was discounted. An acceptable solution was paper, similar to what would have been used in old laboratories and museums. The title plate was printed onto genuine, antique, water-damaged paper using archival pigment ink and an old typewriter font. It was further distressed and bent to make the cut edges look authentically old before being glued into place on the mantel shelf.

The next consideration was finishing the sides of the frame in an aesthetically pleasing way while accommodating the depth of the framing package. The large Providence moulding was used, cut vertically, making the outside frame 2 3/4" deep, plus the height of the Anvil frame, which sat neatly onto the Providence rabbet.

Interestingly, the frame was constructed from back to front. The outer Providence frame was sealed with brown paper first, labels applied, and then wire attached. The mat package was then inserted face up into the outer frame. The final construction was done as quickly as possible, just in case the bottles leaked. Museum Glass was placed on top of the mat package, and then the outer Anvil frame around that. The two outer frames were joined together by four screws, two at the top and two at the bottom. The screws were drilled upwards at a 45 degree angle and were concealed by the lip of the outer Providence frame. ■

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