

FRAMER  
MARCUS WELLS

*This craftsman and art consultant creates pieces that are things of beauty in themselves*

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**M**arcus Wells has reinvented the art of framing. Using everything from buckles and buttons to items he salvages from skips, he creates pieces that are often as imaginative as the artwork they display. His skill has gained him a huge following among designers, notably Kit Kemp, the creative force behind London's Ham Yard, Soho and Haymarket hotels.

**How did your business come about?** After starting my career in publishing, I went on to work for an art gallery where I learned how to frame and also picked up business skills that have since served me well. I saw a gap in the market for a more creative approach to framing that was entirely bespoke. In 1995, I set up my business, Haviland Designs, and I never looked back. In those days, the internet was in its infancy, so it was a case of pounding the pavements to drum up work and having plenty of face-to-face meetings. My approach was to offer clients a bespoke service for supplying artwork, mirrors, sculptures and ceramics, and I targeted all the major interior designers and hotels in London.

**Why are these items so important to interiors?** Artwork and mirrors are often overlooked when it comes to interior design, even though they are integral finishing touches. Getting the frame right on a piece of artwork or a mirror can have a transformative effect on a scheme. That's why I love my job so much; it's enormously satisfying to see our work contributing to the overall effect of a beautiful interior. But these pieces also need to stand the test of time so I try to avoid fashion and trends, opting instead for a unique look.

**What are the most memorable pieces you've supplied?** Some of our early projects were for the Sandy Lane Hotel in Barbados and The Grove Hotel in Hertfordshire, where we fitted more than 5,000 feather butterflies into Perspex boxes for the bedrooms. Another of my more challenging projects was to frame an important art collection in a house in Greece. The paintings were too valuable to be removed from the property so I had to go to the site, measure them, make the frames in the UK, ship them to Greece and fit them in situ with my team. Handling museum-quality paintings by the kind of artists normally seen in the National Gallery was a wonderful experience. I've also been collaborating with Kit Kemp on the artwork and framing for her fabulous hotel schemes since 1995. She allows me to unleash my creativity and produce extraordinary artwork and frames. From her I have learned the importance of creating work that is eclectic; pieces that are unexpected, quirky and light-hearted can still be beautiful.

**Where do you source your materials?** I am always on the lookout. I find that builders' skips are a never-ending source of interesting materials. If something catches my eye, I always keep it, knowing I will use it one day. There is nothing better than finding a stack of old floorboards or garden fencing, as they make

the most fabulous frames. Recently I have been collecting old scraps of fake grass, which I've put to good use lining the box frames for a collection of tennis rackets. I enjoy rooting around in antiques shops, too, and love finding interesting boxes of old buttons and belt buckles which I can use to adorn frames. eBay is also a fantastic source; over the past few months, I've bought around 200 limited-edition *Campbell's Soup Cans* by Andy Warhol through it. They make stunning artworks when suspended in beautiful box frames.

**Tell us about your workshop.** It is housed in some converted farm buildings in Surrey and it's unashamedly and intentionally low-tech and artisanal. We use entirely traditional and centuries-old frame-making techniques to produce high-quality pieces and we don't need wireless technology for that. I have a team of three talented people who make frames.

**Where do you find your inspiration?** I try to walk everywhere when I'm out and about in London, so I often come across a shop or a building in a hidden corner of the city. It's a good way of seeing what's current. I like to think that I am not directly influenced by trends, but it's really useful to see new and unusual colour combinations. I admire Anthropologie's approach and imaginative displays. I also make an effort to go to all the latest exhibitions at the city's main art galleries and I visit the opera and ballet as often as I can, too. Recently, I was wowed by Nicholas Georgiadis' stunning costume and set designs revived by The Royal Ballet's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. I suspect it won't be long before some of his muted autumnal tones start appearing in our frames.

**Can you describe a typical day?** I run the business with my wife, Sally, from an office in our house in Dulwich, south London; I thrive on not having a set routine. When practical, I always try to deliver to clients personally. For me it's essential to maintain a close relationship with them to gauge their reaction to the pieces. My advice to anyone working in our business is that it's vital to meet people face-to-face, otherwise important nuances can be missed. Don't rely on email and impersonal forms of communication.

**How have you diversified the business over the years?** We started off as a framing company but there was a demand from clients to supply art as well. So, over the years we have emerged as an art consultancy too, supplying all types of art as well as mirrors and one-off sculptures and ceramics, such as hand-built pots by Daniel Reynolds and wonderful frescoes by Katherine Cuthbert.

**What are your future plans?** I like to keep my approach both efficient and personal, so I've made a conscious decision to ensure that the business remains a specialised niche. To that end, my aim is simply to do more of the same, while making sure that our offering remains exciting and different.  
*Haviland Designs, 020 8355 0504, havilanddesigns.com.*



**TOP ROW** Individual fragments of hand-coloured glass laid as a mosaic in a bespoke frame; brushes in the workshop, used for gesso, colour and wax; specially framed vintage fabrics, destined for the Haymarket Hotel's Brumus restaurant.  
**MIDDLE ROW** Marcus looks through a portfolio of artworks, including Joe Tilson's *Nine Muses*, prior to framing; Thirties fabric designs in deep bevel gesso mounts waiting to be put into frames; a chain burnisher is used to finish a frame made of recycled garden fence panels with a limed surface.  
**RIGHT** Mirror frame surrounding embroidery by the charity Fine Cell Work; a workshop drawer containing items used for gilding and finishing.

