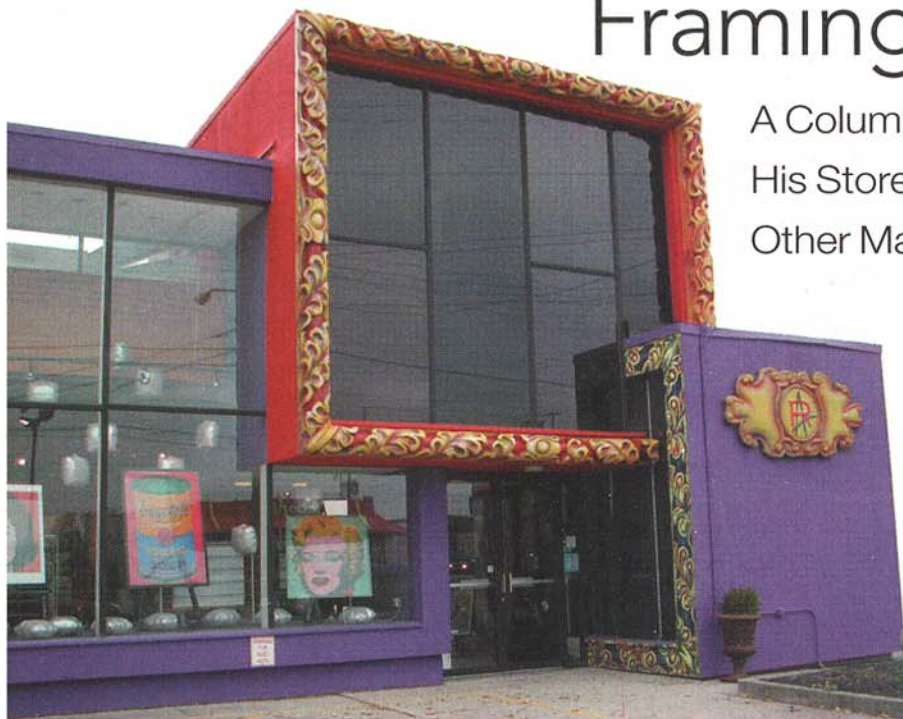


Framing A Frameshop

A Columbus, Ohio, Framer Discusses His Store's Impressive New Exterior and Other Marketing Initiatives.



up our visibility on the street. Although we have a loyal clientele, we often had people walk in saying they had never noticed we were here and were curious to see what we did. We are located in a part of town that doesn't really have much of an identity: trapped between two high-profile districts just north of downtown Columbus. There are a few other design-oriented businesses in the area—custom ironworks, a glass artist co-op, a high-end art gallery and a fine-carpet merchant—and we had started having conversations about using our businesses to define the neighborhood. I thought, 'If we could make our new exterior something dramatic, it could be an icon for the neighborhood.'"

With that idea in mind, O'Neill arrived at the idea of affixing an enormous, hand-carved picture frame to Reed Arts' storefront that would be painted with the shop's signature red and purple colors. A giant sculptural picture frame seemed appropriate because the building's architectural design has an innate, frame-shaped appearance. However, as skilled and experienced a framer as O'Neill is, even he needed help tackling this project.

After getting some recommendations from friends, he contacted nationally known artist and Columbus resident Greg Ackers, who had previously completed works all over the city, including painted murals of Columbus' Union Station and a giant hamburger sculpture at the headquarters of the Max & Erma's restaurant chain.

"Greg and I discussed it, and he came in and looked at a corner sample of a South American San Marcos frame, a 17th-century Spanish-style design," O'Neill says. "He decided to take on the project and base it on that frame." Reed Arts commissioned Ackers to lay out, carve, paint and install the behemoth, and for a few months, he toiled over polystyrene and paint as O'Neill and his staff eagerly awaited the frame's arrival.

"Because of the style and size of the frame, which is 15 feet tall, 18 feet wide and hoisted 23 feet up in the air, he really had to plan the carving carefully to make sure the frame had nicely joined corners and no interrupted parts," O'Neill says. "Greg charged \$5,000 for the job,



Top: Reed Arts' new exterior
Above, left: The exterior before the renovation
Above, right: Reed Arts President Tim O'Neill, CPF



DECOR has featured plenty of large, elaborate framing projects throughout the years, but it is definitely not a common occurrence for art-and-framing retailers to have their entire stores framed.

Tim O'Neill, CPF, president of Reed Arts in Columbus, Ohio, however, dared to take on this daunting task. And no, it wasn't because he bought too much moulding from one of his suppliers and was really bored one day. O'Neill wanted to create an iconic structure for Reed Arts—something passersby couldn't help but notice.

"Our building was originally a store for Goodwill Industries in the 1960s—a boxy design with a lot of stucco—and it had suffered some peeling and water damage," O'Neill says. "This past summer, our landlord said it was time to make a change, and because we had had the same exterior for 14 years, we saw it as an opportunity to do something different. I wanted to amp

and it was a complete steal at that price. It included not only the giant frame but also our logo created from the same material, as well as a flat mural he painted at our entrance. He felt the mural would complement the 3-D elements, and I agree. His price even included installation. I know he low-balled the price because he really believed in the power and impact of the sculptures. It's a showcase for his talents as well, and we're doing everything we can to get the word out that it's his work. I'm retaining him to do a sculpture and Zen garden installation for us in the spring, and we'll probably have a reception for him once that's completed."

Reed Arts' new exterior is definitely impressive, but it is only one of many efforts O'Neill has made to better promote the business in the past year. After noticing the shop had had a loyal clientele but not many new clients coming in, he wanted to take a fresh look at the marketing the company was doing. He decided to buy more online advertising and sought out in-kind advertising with some of the local arts organizations Reed Arts had worked with. Perhaps the biggest marketing step the company has taken besides its renovation has been its exploration of billboard advertising.

"We have tried billboard advertising this year, but it's hard to say how successful it is because I think the images log into people's minds subconsciously," O'Neill says.



Artist Greg Ackers took a few months to complete Reed Arts' new \$5,000 exterior.

us. We're actually running two billboard contracts right now. The first one was for a rotating billboard that moves around our area every four weeks. It started out carrying the main message we've been pushing in our marketing during the past two years: 'Art is not a Luxury...It's a Necessity.' People have commented on and agreed with that message."

O'Neill also had the slogan printed on bumper stickers, which Reed Arts' entire staff displays on their vehicles, and uses a sidewalk display board to reinforce the messages displayed on the company's billboards. During the summer, for example, both promoted the importance of UV-filtering glass, and Reed

"We have a feature in our framing software that logs why new clients have come in, and a few have mentioned the billboards, but I think even our current clientele notices them and are then reminded to stop in and see

Arts offered a free upgrade from the glass' respective non-UV product to the protective glass. "We absolutely saw a rise in our Museum Glass® sales during the summer, and once people get hooked on that product, they want it every time," O'Neill says.

Reed Arts' second billboard contract began in October. It's a billboard location down the street from the shop that has become difficult to sell because the filling station in front of it had moved its storefront backward a few yards. "It's actually two billboards side-by-side, and the view to the left one has become partially obscured from the intersection, so you don't really see it until you are driving past it," O'Neill says. "However, the billboard company offered us both spaces at an obscenely discounted rate if we would take it in the one location for a year. They created one super-long billboard with our main message on the right side and the entire Reed Arts staff pictured on the left. It's pretty fun and encourages people to come in and meet us. We have received many comments about it, so people are definitely noticing it."

Even though he doesn't consider himself a marketing guru, O'Neill says he has hit upon the right combination of advertising media and professional relationships to keep Reed Arts busy and in the minds of local consumers.

"I am extremely lucky to have the staff I have, and between us all, we have more than 85 years of experience in the industry," O'Neill says. "I also advertise that fact wherever I go, but I think the new storefront tells people we're proud of what we do, we're dedicated to what we do, and we defy you to not notice us. When giving driving directions to people in the past, we used to have to rely on other businesses in the area to serve as landmarks. We really don't have to do that anymore."

Reed Arts is a custom-picture-framing shop that opened in Columbus, Ohio, in 1977. Servicing residential, interior design, gallery and museum communities, it specializes in archival-quality frame products and craftsmanship. For more information on Reed Arts, call 614-291-0253, e-mail info@reedarts.com, or visit www.reedarts.com.



Examples of the billboard ads Reed Arts is using to increase its exposure to Columbus, Ohio, consumers