

Frinton goes to Hollywood



Bespoke framemakers Frinton Gallery were thrilled, flattered and just a little bit intimidated when they were asked to re-create frames from the Louvre for the Hollywood blockbuster *The Da Vinci Code*.

Diana Smith from the Frinton team explains how the frames were hand-crafted in preparation for their starring roles

We need a hundred frames, as close as possible to the original designs and finishes, and they must be to scale and as competitively priced as possible,' matter-of-factly announced a Hollywood executive down the telephone a year ago. Though my heart was pounding as I quickly considered the obvious challenges in making replicas of the Louvre's frames, I managed to reply, 'Of course. When would you like us to start?'

The thought that millions of people

from all over the globe would see our frames in the film of Dan Brown's best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code*, starring Tom Hanks, was astonishing. The film revolves around the spectacular murder of one of the Louvre's curators, whose body is discovered in the Denon Wing of the museum, and the mystery is solved via the interpretation of hidden messages in Da Vinci's paintings, so we knew that our frames were guaranteed to be centre stage.

Getting ready

The frames included a wide range of

A still from the film, showing Hollywood stars Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou standing in front of Frinton's frame for the *Mona Lisa* (image courtesy of Sony Pictures)

shapes and designs, but the most obvious challenge was the sheer quantity of (mainly large) frames and the tight time schedule. Sizes ranged from 14x10" up to a staggering 216x144", with profiles from 2" up to 12".

The considerable expertise that we have at our disposal in-house, meant that we would not have to sub-contract any aspect of the job. The fact that we would not be reliant on any outsiders, but would retain control of the entire production process, would play a big part in ensuring that the whole job should run according to plan.

We were asked to make three frames to start with, and if they met stringent design and finish criteria, we would be given the go-ahead for the whole project. These test frames varied considerably in size and design, the object being to assess whether we had the breadth of expertise necessary for the job.

The frames were made and despatched and an anxious few days followed. We felt as if we had auditioned for parts in the film and some members of staff, with rather wild imaginations, started compiling Oscar acceptance speeches. The call finally came with the news that we had passed with flying colours; a slight moment of panic followed and then it was all systems go.

The frame designs

The film company emailed us an illustrated list of all the framed paintings, together with their external sizes. This allowed us to calculate profile widths and select moulds that resembled the ornament and intricate patterns on the original frames.

In many cases we could not find appropriate designs in our extensive collection of original boxwood moulds, so corner and centre decorations and complicated running patterns had to be individually hand-produced. Some of our moulds were very close to the original designs, so just needed doctoring slightly, while in some cases we combined sections from more than one mould. It was also necessary to make a few new moulds from scratch, and to take moulds from old frames that we had at our disposal. Our team of craftspeople were easily able to meet these challenges, which contributed greatly to the smooth running of the project.

Logistics of time, space and delivery had to be carefully planned, so as not to compromise the day-to-day running of the workshops. Scott Hensley, our workshop manager, rose to this challenge, as well as helping to design and make the frames ready for hand-finishing. The film company had access to lorries of differing sizes at various times, so we arranged to make the frames in batches according to the size of lorry that would arrive on a particular day. Handling space was less of an issue than it might have been as most of the work was carried out during the summer, so we were able to pack up the frames outside. We are used to working to deadlines, so that aspect of the job was not a major problem.

ART BUSINESS TODAY



Many of the frames had to be made from up to four individual profiles, to achieve the required width and shape. We are used to working with multiple profiles, but it was important to find shapes that closely matched the outlines of the original frames.

The size and combined profiles placed much emphasis on the strength of assembly of each frame, particularly as they would have to withstand a lot of manhandling on the filmset. The frames were glued, biscuit joined and pinned, and were then reinforced with double metal plates at the corners.

The majority of the frames are rectangular, but some of the shapes pushed our design team to their creative limits. We had to make exact templates for a massive half-moon canvas and two very large circular paintings, otherwise the chances are that they would not have fitted into the frames. Other challenges included highly detailed and ornate →



Top: Frinton's replica tabernacle frame for the film

Below: The original frame that hangs in the Denon Wing of the Louve

FRAMING



Top left: Frinton's replica spandrel frame
 Top right: The original spandrel frame from the Louvre
 Below: A selection of the frames that Frinton made for the film



→ head pieces, intricate carvings and overmantel designs.

We made spandrels to support the circular canvases, which we cut ourselves and then inserted into the frame. A special jig was produced for the half-moon canvases, made from a template traced from the canvas itself; this painting was one of the few we had sent down to us so we could fit the painting into the frame, the majority of the frames were sent empty and the paintings were fitted at the film studio.

Some of the head pieces were extremely time-consuming to make, but we produce a lot of these for portraits and historic buildings so they did not present a major obstacle. The design is first sketched out to scale and then the ornaments are either made from moulds or are individually moulded by hand.

Hand-finishing

Having successfully re-created the designs, the next step was to achieve colours and finishes that would reflect five hundred years of wear and tear and look aged and authentic. This called for a subtle blending of colours, mostly from our antique gold range, as well as sympathetic hand-distressing and burnishing, and careful application of a range of washes. Each process was carried out by hand.

As there are over 300 colours in our standard range alone, we were able to produce finishes on all of the frames that matched the original tones almost exactly. Sometimes it was necessary to mix two tones together, and the ageing process took a little longer than is normal; some of the frames had to be heavily distressed and a number of layers of wash were applied.

Some of the original frames are embellished with hand-painted designs, so we decided that stencils were the obvious way to replicate these. Specific patterns were required and when we were unable to source exactly what we wanted, we cut our own stencils. We took tracings of the original designs, which were transferred onto sheets of acetate and then cut out by hand. The surfaces that needed stencilling were generally flat, but where stencils were required on curved profiles, a number of us held the stencil as flat as possible.

The base colours on the hand-painted frames are particularly vivid; there are rich blues, sludgy greens and blacky reds. The stencilled designs are mostly in distressed gold, the perfect complement to the bright undercoats. The end results are quite breathtaking.

A happy ending

The two frames that would be seen the most by film goers, were those for Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *Madonna of the Rocks*. Initially the film company said that these frames had already been made elsewhere, due to their importance in the film, but we were still

asked to make replicas as back up. We were thrilled when a call came through to say that the film company had chosen to use ours, instead of their own, and so our two 'understudies' did make it onto the big screen.

Recreating frames to scale, for paintings by artists of the calibre of Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Uccello, Caravaggio, Titian, Veronese, and of course Leonardo Da Vinci was a wonderful experience. This was a project that could not have been undertaken without our dedicated team, who designed, created and delivered all 100 frames to perfection and on time. All of our team were involved with the project at some stage, and it took about two months to complete the bulk of the order.

We worked from our normal trade price list when pricing this project, and added set amounts for extra liners, decoration and stencilling. We certainly didn't hoist up the price because we were dealing with a big international film company; one of the reasons we got the job was because we offered value for money. We knew from the outset that the designs would be complicated, but were confident that we could replicate them

from our wide range of profiles, corner decorations, running patterns and finishes.

We won this contract through word of mouth recommendation. The film company put out feelers for a framing business that could produce extremely large frames to order and stick to a strict timetable, all for a reasonable fee, and apparently our name kept coming up. We were contacted for a brochure and Edward Adkins, our MD, took some corner samples to Shepperton Studios, after which we were given the order for the three sample frames. We are currently producing some Elizabethan-style frames for another film project, a contract we also won through word of mouth recommendation.

We were invited to the 'wrap party', held once filming had finished, but were unable to go, although Edward Adkins and another one of our team, Moira Saban, did go to Pinewood Studios to see the frames on set during filming. Edward thought he might get picked to play an extra. Did he get a part? Look carefully for the tall dark good looking one in the opening scenes. ●

www.frintongallery.co.uk

FRINTON GALLERY LTD

*Internationally Renowned Swept Frame & Moulding Manufacturers
with the most competitively priced product range of its kind*



Make an appointment to visit our beautiful new showrooms and choose from over 9000 combinations of style, colour and size. We are open five days a week and have the facilities to cater for any quantity from one off frames to a full exhibition service.