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## HOME & GARDEN

By [Megan Swoyer](#) [Email the author](#) September 17, 2011

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## Picture Wall Brims with History, Special Moments

Decorators explain a variety of eye-pleasing ways to create a display of memories.



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*About this column: Do you wish you had a green thumb? Wondering about the best ways to liven up your home? Local home and garden guru, Megan Swoyer, shows readers how to make it happen.*

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Do you have a family photo wall? How did you create it? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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Do you have a pile of black-and-white photos of Great Aunt Mary, that guy you're related to who fought in the Civil War and classic, timeless photos of your parents on their wedding day? All nice, but where to put them? Beautiful to look at, but how to hang them? Consider a family photo wall.

Interior designer [Shirley Maddalena](#) of Bloomfield Hills thoroughly enjoyed the recent task of creating a family photo wall for a Birmingham client.

"There was an enormous amount of photos," Maddalena recalled. "It was, quite actually, a really fun and interesting assignment, as there were many sizes and dimensions to work with and fascinating family history."

Maddalena and her clients opted to frame the father's immigration papers, which were mounted on museum-quality paper.

"I think there are some 40 pieces on this wall now," she said. "It looks like an art form. The idea was to make the photo wall important, but to not command too much attention."

Interior designer Sally Matak of Bloomfield Township-based [MATAKDesign](#) believes photo walls are a great way to be surrounded by favorite photos "and without having to have a lot of freestanding frames all over the house, taking up valuable counter space."

Interior designer [Linda Shears](#) agrees. At her ranch-style Troy home, Shears showcases family memories, crests, historic images and more on a hallway wall that leads from the living area to the bedrooms. Passing by her family on a regular basis is a pleasant reminder for Shears of roots and tradition.

Here, these and other design experts share tips and various methods on how to create an eye-pleasing photo wall:

- **Start on the floor** where you can lay out and arrange the framed photos, then bring that pattern-of-arrangement up onto the wall.
- **Hang just the frames first** if it's a collage layout, said [Jeffrey King of Jeffrey King Interior Design](#) in Birmingham. "Then place the photos in the layout you want," he said. "No need to do this if it's a grid layout."
- **Match or don't match** Shears said. "There are two ways to create interest: all of the frames match (in color or style), or, as I did it, all of the frames are unique and each frame complements its respective photo."
- **Consider a theme when it comes to photo colors.** "My photo wall is done with all old, black-and-white and sepia-toned family photos," Shears said. "It's very vintage/retro looking."
- **Find a buddy** to help with the task, as grouping frames on the wall can be a daunting task, said Aimee Beatty, [Pier 1 Imports'](#) in-house stylist. "Have someone hold the artwork up on the wall and then you should step at least 10 feet away to see how it looks. This gives you the opportunity to have someone move the piece around until you feel it is at the appropriate height."
- **Draw your design first** and then cut out paper into the same shapes as your wall art, Beatty suggests. "Tape the cutouts onto the wall in various arrangements. Once you have acquired a grouping that is pleasing to the eye, simply replace the paper with the frame."

- **Shop around** at places like [Michael's](#), [Target](#) and [Bed Bath & Beyond](#), King said. "Those stores are great resources for frames." [Umbra](#) also is a popular designer of frames. "Umbra's multi-frames are some of the most innovative designs in the industry," said Cynthia Brody, a publicist for Umbra. Take a look [at the frames online](#) for inspiration.
- **Mix up frame styles**, King said. "I usually use three different styles, usually all in black, and then mix them all together. They have varying depths and widths to give dimension to the wall."
- **Go for odd numbers** when selecting the number of frames you'll use, Matak suggested. "Odd numbers display better," she said. "For example, on my photo wall in my living room, I did three horizontal rows of seven. This creates impact and visual interest while looking clean and cohesive." All of the photos are framed in the same black frame with white mat, all the same size, and all hang against a black wall.
- **Consider switching out photos** now and then, Matak said. "Photos can be changed out seasonally or to showcase a different family event or get-together, or when you simply want new ones to look at."
- **Check out photos of photo walls** in various shelter magazines. If you like a more eclectic group of various-size frames, go to [thepicturewallcompany.com](#) for examples. "One of my clients went to that site and her grouping looks fantastic," Matak said. "This website can also help with tricky conditions, such as stairwells/stairs/landing."
- **Pay attention to height**. "Hang frames at about an average person's eye level when standing," Matak said. "Too high or too low can look awkward in a space."
- **Make your own frames** with things you can buy at a home-improvement store. Lowes has some ideas for [picture perfect, personalized wall art](#) and [frame up](#).
- **Take a photo of your finished photo wall** if you are planning to renovate or repaint your wall so you can remember where everything was hung.



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[Mark Hampton](#)

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4:20pm on Monday, September 19, 2011

Great article on what can be a tricky (yet rewarding) endeavor. I must stress however that though frames from the big box craft stores can be bought cheap, they rarely if ever have archival components which will protect your memories. Don't be afraid to work with a custom framer to achieve an interesting mix of frame designs and styles. Yes, it can get expensive, but in the long run that extra bit can really pay off.

PS. I happen to own an Art Gallery/Frame Shop just so you know.

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[Tiffany Dziurman Stozicki](#)

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4:24pm on Monday, September 19, 2011

Absolutely display your historic family photos, but I agree with Mark about the archival components. Having worked as an archivist, I've seen photos destroyed and lost due to improper storage and use. Keep them out of direct sunlight and protect them with archival mats and other materials and you'll have them around to display for years to come.

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**Mark Blackwell**

5:59pm on Monday, September 19, 2011

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Most framing shops are just simply cost prohibitive. Maybe not for other folks. Certainly for me.

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