

Stretching Canvases

Paintings or prints on canvas are traditionally framed after being stretched. Gallery Wrap is a style of stretching canvases onto deep sided stretchers, with the artwork continuing over the edge of the stretcher, remaining visible on the sides. The canvas is stapled on the back and neatly finished on the sides and corners, so that no framing is necessary. Framed or not, the canvas surface is left uncovered so that light falls directly on the image, undistorted by the reflective qualities of plastic or glass. Delicate printed images can be protected with heatseal film before stretching or varnished after stretching.

Gallery Wrap Style - canvas taken right round stretcher and stapled on the back

1. Select appropriate sizes of stretcher bars.

Remember to allow for the canvas covering the sides as well. Make up a stretcher frame by fitting together the slotted ends of the four stretcher bars.



Check the squareness of the frame by measuring from corner to corner diagonally, so that both diagonal measurements are equal.

Use a table top corner as a guide. If bracing is desired for a larger size, attach the brace/s in the brace slots, for later expansion.



2. Alternatively, you can buy some stretcher bar profiles in long lengths. You cut and join these as you would any frame moulding. This can be very convenient for unusual sizes. The only drawback is that you cannot use wedges later for re-tensioning the canvas.

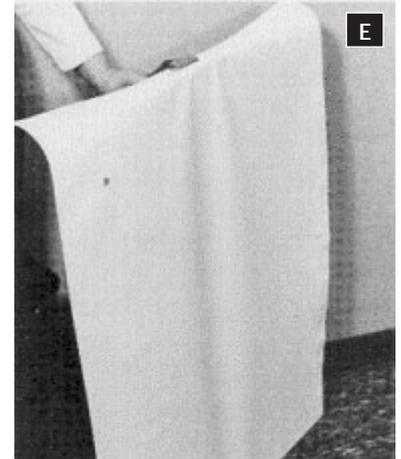
3. Spread the canvas on a clean flat surface, face down. There should be 75 - 100mm / 3" - 4" excess for gripping and stretching, depending on the type of stretchers.



4. To start, fold one side of the canvas over a short end of the stretcher, align with the image or the weave and staple at the centre of the stretcher bar.

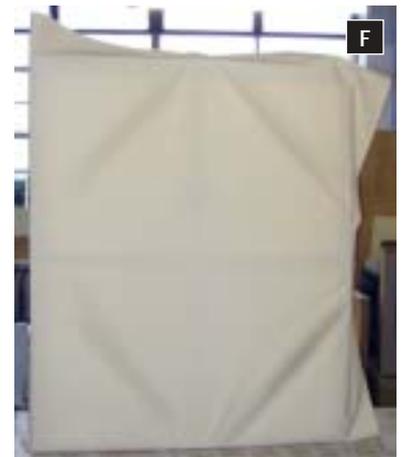


5. Reverse to the opposite side, using canvas pliers to grip the canvas in the left hand and holding the staple gun in the right hand.



6. With a tight grip on the pliers, pull firmly until a straight crease is formed running from the pliers to the stapled end. Staple while maintaining plier tension at the top of the crease.

7. Move to an adjacent side and follow the same procedure, pulling firmly and stapling canvas to the stretcher at the centre, creating first a triangle crease and then a diamond crease in the canvas with the fourth staple, at the opposite long side.



8. Work out from the centre of the long sides. Move the pliers about 50mm / 2" to one side, pull tightly, and staple to the frame. Repeat in both directions from the centre, then move to the opposite long side and continue the process.

On smaller canvases, an entire side can be stapled at one time. On larger ones, the canvas should be rotated several times, stapling individual sections in turn, moving out to the corners.

A linen primed canvas or printed canvas will normally require more closely spaced staples as there is limited stretch to the fabric.



9. For a neat finish on the back of canvas wrap, neatly fold over the surplus canvas and secure with a second row of staples.



15. Finish the corner by folding and inserting two staples.

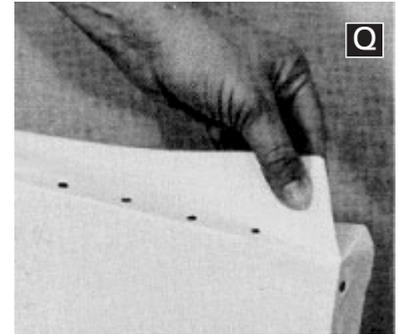


10. It is important to get a neat finish at the corners. Start as shown in 'J' by folding in and pulling up so that the folded edge is vertical and in line with the corner of the frame.



Normal Canvas Style - canvas taken round stretcher and stapled on the sides

1. Leaving about 50mm / 2" unstapled in both directions at the corners, tuck in the corners as illustrated and staple or tack through the folded canvas into the stretcher.



11. Fold over as shown and insert a staple.



If using tacks, a magnetic-head hammer will allow you to pick up the tack with one hand and insert it faster, using the other side of the hammer to tap in. For longevity, use rust proof staples or plated tacks.



12. Using a knife as shown, carefully make a straight cut into the surplus canvas.



Be very cautious about making any cut on a customer's artwork.

Notes

Avoid using wedges to take out wrinkles during the initial stretching as this may throw the frame out of square, damage the canvas, or enlarge the stretcher frame so that it may not fit a standard picture frame. Re-stretch the wrinkled portion instead.

The use of wedges should be confined to their proper purpose, to add tension at a later date should the canvas become loose.

When framing fine art, it is good practice to drill and tie the wedges. This retains them should they fall out and stops them falling down into the gap between the canvas and the lower stretcher bar.

On acrylic primed canvas only, small indentations and ripples may be flattened out by dampening the affected area with a damp sponge or fine spray and allowing it to shrink back to its original shape. However, always use care not to saturate the canvas, and allow it to dry completely in a well ventilated area.

Note: DO NOT wet back of oil primed canvases.

Large wrinkles should be removed by re-stretching the affected area, or the entire canvas if necessary.

It is relatively easier to stretch raw canvas than painted or printed canvas.

Ink jet printed canvas requires care in stretching, as there is practically no stretch, and it is not at all unusual to have to remove some staples at wrinkled areas, re-stretch and re-staple, before getting the canvas perfect.

13. Using big scissors, pull up and cut away the surplus canvas.



14. Carefully fold and neaten the canvas and then staple.



Photographs above taken in the workshop of Harris Moore Canvases, Birmingham. They are specialist manufacturers of custom and standard size artists canvases. Tel: 0121 248 0030 www.stretchershop.co.uk