

The Appeal of the Art

By Joanne Chappell

As a publisher of fine art poster prints for over 30 years, I often compare life to that of a clothing or fashion designer by saying, "I am only as good as my newest line." Every year Editions Limited must come out with significantly new approaches to working with new and old artists; this along with the development of fresh colors and formats will hold the interest of existing customers. Coming up with a new group of posters is like the challenge presented by a large, blank canvas. At Editions Limited, that canvas becomes a real creation when we find exciting, emerging artists whose works inspire new collections that will strike a chord with buyers.

Since I opened my first fine art gallery in the late

Joanne Chappell, president of the Emeryville, CA-based Editions Limited and its subdivision, Dry Graphics, is a dedicated member of the art publishing world. Editions established Chappell more than 30 years ago with a small gallery in Indianapolis.



1960s, publishing inexpensive posters has changed dramatically. Back then I supplemented original artwork with fine art posters from museums. In those

days these were typically works by Miro, Calder, Chagall, Warhol, and other widely acclaimed artists and were accompanied by white borders with large black print announcing major shows. Framed with little adornment, these early forms of wall art were displayed modestly.

Today, the business of publishing posters has become much larger, with outlets far beyond galleries. Like many other large art publishers, we have gone from producing 10 posters a year to hundreds. Covering all the needs of our commercial clients now requires having images ranging from strong abstracts and handsome landscapes to transitional collages, wonderful photography, and rich florals. These work particularly well for customers in the health-care and hospitality industries. We produce and sell art that corporate clients and high-end art consultants need for their more "executive" projects.

Finding artwork for large-scale framers who sell to "big-box" retailers is one of the biggest challenges. Retailers demand unique custom products, which means we must source images beyond our own poster line. Certain retailers also have a particular look and feel to their product, which

they want their wall decor to emulate. We find it best to offer a collection that is varied enough so there are always works to meet specific needs.

The framing methods used by production framing houses present another challenge. Working together, we find artwork that goes with their framing preferences and design styles. Developing an exclusive collection for the big-box market also involves such steps as resizing images at a smaller size or directing artists to produce a new collection for a particular production framer or retailer. The challenge is to maintain the originality of each artist while keeping in mind the customer's needs.

Some publishers work mainly with licensing studios, employing commercial artists to create new works for posters. The pieces produced are often strictly governed by popular colors and trendy subjects. Their complete line of posters can be produced in every imaginable size in a factory-like manner. While there are advantages to this approach, it can be quite limited in its creativity, which is an important aspect of producing framed art that will appeal to the public and to large retail customers.

At Editions Limited we prefer to highlight the individual creativity of up-and-coming and well-known artists by working with their styles to create new lines that go beyond the "canned" look. This can be time-consuming, but it eventually results in more salable art. We spend a lot of time reviewing work at galleries, art fairs, and private showings. The idea is to find images that will make successful wall decor. We look for pieces that display an artist's innovative ability and imagination. In some cases, we might ask an artist to use the concept of one of his/her pieces to create other works with the same look. It often takes several months to complete a collection.

Translating edgy, new images into posters for wall art can be a gamble and is certainly expensive. But such posters of new artists' works have been great successes worldwide—a rarity for art that simply mimics popular trends.

This doesn't mean we don't pay attention to finding artwork that fits with new furniture, fabric, and color trends. Any art publisher dealing with the production framing market must know what's happening in the home and corporate furnishings markets. But we feel that finding original art that works with today's trends results in better images and more sales.

Working with artists who have diverse, individual styles provides large-scale framers with works that are compatible with the specific needs of certain retailers -without sacrificing the quality and originality that make wall art truly successful. Framed wall art may be a mass-market commodity. But even at the price points of a big-box store, the success or failure of wall decor still revolves around the appeal of the art. ■