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RETAILERS  
AWARDS**  
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Awarded to the art gallery/custom frameshop with the most beautiful, well-planned art and framing retail space to give customers an exceptional shopping experience

**WINNER:** Hanging Around Hoover

**OWNER:** Michael Mixon

**LOCATION:** Hoover, Ala.

**WEBSITE:** [www.hangingaroundhoover.com](http://www.hangingaroundhoover.com)



Michael Mixon, owner of Hanging Around Hoover, assists a customer during a recent visit.



Striking out to start his own frameshop business three years ago, Michael Mixon has proved that a strong vision and creativity can go a long way.

After 21 years in the industry, Mixon finally got the chance to prove himself as a professional custom frameshop owner when he opened Hanging Around Hoover in suburban Birmingham, Ala. Since, his custom frameshop has expanded, offering portrait photography as well as local and international artwork. The shop itself has expanded too, moving to a different location and now offers twice the size with twice the entrances.

"Having two entrances, I wanted to make sure the two work tables (at each entrance) were angled so that if customers came in on the east entrance they would know which table to walk to, and if they came in on the west entrance they would know which one to walk towards as well," Mixon says.

"The mouldings are all set up behind the two worktables. I've got a 5' dividing wall we put in because we wanted the workspace to be incorporated in the front

area so it would lend a sense of openness. We didn't want the entrance to be real messy so we wanted it to be a little behind the scenes."

Having moved to a bigger location in the last year, Mixon's main goal was to keep the customers first, having their needs and interests first and foremost while deciding how he wanted his new space to feel. Mixon created the layout

and design concepts, sketching out several options before picking one and bringing it to life. Although the space may look completely cohesive now, Mixon found that one of his greatest challenges in designing his frameshop interior was taking items that were in his previous space and not breaking the bank to do a re-design of his current store.

Taking advantage of the new shop's open layout, Mixon wanted to create a home-like atmosphere, where customers can sit and enjoy the art and frames that surround them.

"I didn't want customers to come in and feel like they're going into a business," he says. "I'm really close to a lot of my customers; it's kind of like you're visiting a friend. We wanted openness, we wanted a lot of places where people would be able to sit around and talk and enjoy the artwork and enjoy their time in

the gallery."

Attracting customers into his shop has become somewhat of a learning experience for Mixon since opening his own shop. Always having had a passion for photography, Mixon decided to offer portrait photography at Hanging Around Hoover, adding space in his store as well as selling photographs by local artists.

"I've been a photographer for years and venturing into portrait photography has helped the bottom line a lot," Mixon says. "We've devoted about 300 square feet of the front gallery space to lighting and props and I sell my art photography in store."

Along with selling his own photography, other artists' work he carries includes Sheila Horn, a local potter and well as metal work created by artist Reuben Halpern. In lieu of prints, which have not been selling well for Mixon, he has

A panoramic view of Hanging Around Hoover. Customers entering the store are greeted to wood floors, a comfortable sofa and chair, and numerous metal works, pottery and art photography. Other notable highlights include a portrait studio, LCD monitors displayed at each design table, two oversized carpeted walls with moulding samples, and a floor-to-ceiling mirror in the hallway that helps open up the 8'-wide space.

opted to sell Fair Trade baskets, thanks to a little bit of industry advice he came across online. To his pleasant surprise, the Fair Trade baskets took off in sales, having sold half of his initial inventory in less than three weeks.

For Mixon, keeping a new and fresh inventory has taught him that if he wants



Mixon's displays his award-winning shadowboxes above his print and photography bins.



## ONLINE BONUS

Visit [www.decormagazine.com](http://www.decormagazine.com) for more information photos and video of Hanging Around Hoover's gallery space.





customers to keep coming back as well as attract new customers, he has to keep offering items that continue to hold their interest, never wanting to tire his inventory by selling the same product repeatedly. The LCD monitors at each of the design tables have also aided in Mixon's sales. Featuring images of his past projects, both commercial and personal, his LCD monitors give his customers a clear view of the work they can expect to receive from Mixon. Featuring his work in the LCD



One of the two entrances to Hanging Around Hoover

monitors, Mixon says, has helped with closing sales, especially when a customer can't decide between purchasing multiple frames or is in a hurry and just want to drop off the artwork.

"I'll tell my customers that I can set up an individual website that they can log into to see what the different frames look like on their individual pieces," Mixon says. "That has helped me sell stuff from customer who are out of state and want to mail stuff in or customers that are too busy and don't have time to go through

## TAKEAWAY TIP

**"Keep everything you do new and fresh. Don't be a one-trick pony. In this economy, you can't be just a framer. You have to be a gallery owner, and offer as many services that you think your customers will use. It's very tiring but very rewarding at the end of the day."**

*—Michael Mixon*

the design and layout. That's the main reason for the monitors, showing them the products we have and helping them decide what framing is best for them."

Although Mixon has a loyal customer base, attracting new customers to his shop has been a bit of a challenge due to location.

"We're unique here that we're off the road a bit," Mixon says. "My signage on the building is not seen from the street. We are sort of back behind a credit union. The only signage we have for the shopping center is at the street and it is

a reader board without everyone's name on it, so we don't get a constant flow of people from that sign."

Despite these location challenges, Mixon has found ways to overcome his shop's lack of street visibility by making sure that the window displays and the exterior of the shop are both aesthetically pleasing and eye-catching. The bright blue doors, as well as the blue awning at both of the shop's entrances, help Mixon compensate for the lack of signage and attract new customers. Mixon's rotation of window displays has also played an integral role in gaining new customers. Because of his large variety of pottery, metal work and his own prints, Mixon has found that keeping them in constant rotation makes his store look "new and fresh."

Receiving this year's DECOR Top Art & Framing Retailers Award for interior design has special meaning for Mixon, an award-winning picture framer.

"I was very, very happy, and very surprised," Mixon says. "It's the first award I've won since going out on my own. I've been framing for 21 years but always framing for someone else. I've been in framing a long time and it's the first caveat we've gotten for Hanging Around Hoover. We are very proud."

*—Marylyn Simpson*



Mixon offers portrait photography at Hanging Around Hoover. The expansion inside his gallery has helped increase his store's profits.



One of the main goals of Mixon's showroom is to "create the atmosphere of a home." Customers are encouraged to relax on couches during their shopping experience.