

# PEM

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period followed the furniture design and was simple, clear, and followed utilitarian principles. During later stages of the Biedermeier epoch, more elaborate ornamentation was favored again, because of the growing middle class wealth and influence and its desire to show off its newly gained prosperity. Typical was the preferred use of local wood like cherry, birch, pear, and ash. The reason for this was a high taxation of exotic woods like mahogany but also a change of general taste to natural colors. Concerning the aesthetics, there were often similarities to earlier styles, such as the accentuation of corners by using cubes, which echoes early Louis XVI frames.

**What furnishing/interior styles accompanied these style frames in their time?** The middle class home of the Biedermeier period was the center of family life. So

the furniture had to be comfortable. But to distinguish itself from the aristocracy, the new middle class preferred a simpler style with clean lines and a minimum of ornamentation. To quote a leading authority on the Biedermeier epoch, Hans Ottomeyer (1946-), "The cult of simplicity developed itself as a principle of beauty in contrast to the luxurious style of the close of the eighteenth century. Whoever could afford to pay for it acquired new decoration in the new style of unpretentiousness." ■

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**Friedrich G. Conzen Jr.** is the managing director of F. G. Conzen in Düsseldorf, Germany. The fine art service company was founded in 1854 and specializes in high quality picture frames. F. G. Conzen is one of the leading suppliers to German museums, fine art galleries, and collectors. He can be contacted at [conzen@conzen.de](mailto:conzen@conzen.de) and [www.conzen.de](http://www.conzen.de).

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# Style Snapshot



By Friedrich G. Conzen Jr.

*A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history*

**What style frame is this?** It is a gilded Blondel frame.

**Where is it from?** Germany.

**What time period is it from?** The late Biedermeier period (ca. 1840-1860). The Biedermeier was a period between 1815 (the end of the Napoleonic Wars) and 1884, a year of various European revolutions. Between these historical benchmarks, Europe experienced a period of relative stability and peace. Growing urbanization and industrialization led to the rise of a new middle class, which became a force rivaling the aristocracy. This bourgeoisie became a new audience and financier for arts and crafts. Growing political oppression initiated by Clemens Wenzel von Metternich after the Napoleonic Wars made the new class retreat to domestic life, favoring an apolitical attitude. This general withdrawal and concentration on home life and the arts led to a blossoming of furniture design and interior decorating.

**Who was instrumental in developing this style of frame?**

The name "Blondel frame" derives from the French architect, teacher, art and architecture historian Jacques-François Blondel (1705-1774), who decried the "ridiculous jumble of shells, dragons, reeds, palm-trees, and plants" in the contemporary interiors of his time.

**What are the defining characteristics of this style?** Its characteristics are the stylized leaf sight, the plain hollow, and an ogee top edge. The rich decoration of the centers and corners, with rocaille and leaf cartouches, is slightly reminiscent of baroque decor, but that element is subordinated



*The Blondel frame, made in Germany during the Biedermeier period (1840-1860), used net lace beneath the composition moulding to imitate elegant handmade engravings.*

completely to the frame's straight structure, making it more a reminder of the Restoration style. Reverberations of French baroque frames can be seen in the moulding and especially in the fine net lace structure in the surface. This latter element imitated elegant handmade engravings by using a new inventive, less laborious technique. Instead of engraving into the material, net lace is placed under the gilding and composition ornament, so the fine textile patterns give the Biedermeier frames their characteristic look.

**What design departures might be seen on frames of this style?** The frame design during most of this

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