How to Create a Seasonal Photo Wall Gallery

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Every three months, I take down my seasonal wall gallery and swap out my photos with the next season's photo stored already in the frame! It's fun and refreshing to see my favorite photos of all time up on the wall that reflect the traditions and activities our family enjoys during the seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.

Seasonal timeframe. My personal allotment of time to the seasons is a bit odd for some, I'm sure. Winter photos are full of snow and Christmas and baking and red/green. And, since I find that Thanksgiving photos are more fall in color, and in Oregon it doesn't snow much until December, I decided to make "winter" the months of December, January and February. Then, I progressed three months at a time from there.

- Spring: March, April, May (blossoms, Easter, green, rainbows, umbrellas, kites, tree climbing)
- Summer: June, July, August (swimming, ice cream, fireworks, sunglasses, water balloons)
- Fall: September, October, November (orange/gold leaves, bus, carnival, costumes, Thanksgiving)
- Winter: December, January, February (Christmas, Santa hats, holiday décor, snow, red/green)

How to design your wall gallery layout:

1. Find a large, blank wall; mine is in my front entry. The usable space is approximately 4' tall x 6' wide. Begin your measurements approximately 8" above your horizontal barrier: the buffet, the mantle, the chair rail, the sofa, etc.
2. With your height/length measurements, draw out your rectangle on graph paper using four grid squares for each foot.
3. Grab your tape measure and head to Michaels or IKEA to choose your frame. I found the quality at Michael's Arts and Crafts superior to IKEA. And, if you can wait until there's a 50% off sale, the pricing is comparable. I chose their Signature Collection with the glossy, black wood frame. Be sure to choose a frame style with a selection of sizes. Variety of sizes (from 5x5 to 16x20) AND a common frame color will provide interest while keeping the focus on your photos.
4. Decide whether you want to mat your photos. I have done it both ways, and I prefer without mats to allow the photo sizes to be larger overall. However, mats look nice and allow you to change the actual size of the photo, if desired. You could put a square photo in a rectangle frame with a mat, for example. You couldn't do that without a mat—a square photo must go in a square frame when not using a mat.
5. Begin laying out frames on the floor or their frame counter. You will begin to see the benefit to choosing many large photo sizes. With my 4'x6' rectangle, I ended up with 30 frames total.
6. Consider buying a few extra sizes if you aren't sure of your layout at the store. I ended up returning three frames without a problem after finalizing my configuration at home with my photos.
7. Lay a blanket on top of your dining table or on the floor to match the exact size of your wall rectangle space. Layout the frames on top of the blanket as you want them to appear on your wall.

Tips for achieving a pleasing layout:

- Mix up portrait and landscape and square orientation.
- Pair large and small.
- Don't put all the large photos on one side and small frames on the right. Keep it balanced.
- Arrange from the center out with similar spacing.
- Anchor the corners of your wall rectangle space with larger frames
- Maintain the perimeter outline (roughly) so it looks like a rectangle shape when you look at it from a distance.
- Minimize (or stay as consistent as possible) the spacing between the frames. Center a smaller frame (or two) adjacent to the side of the larger frame.
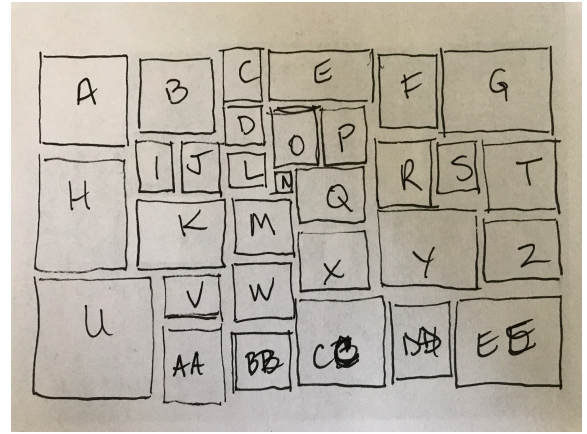
The goal is to find and print photos that match the sizes of your frames. With varying sizes and orientations, it is easy to get confused. So I've come up with a system to make it easier.

How to create a map of your design:

1. Find three different colored post-it notes. Assign a different color of post-it for each orientation: square, portrait and landscape. Here's what I did: green-landscape, blue-portrait, orange-square.
2. Put the orange post-its on each square frame, the blue post-its on each portrait frame and the green post-its on the landscape frames. Back up and see what you think. Is it a nice repetition and/or variety?
3. Measure the exact size of the photo that fits in the frame and write it on the post-it note. Repeat for every frame.
4. Assign a letter to each frame and write it on its post-it note.
5. Draw your sketch on your graph paper.
6. Either make a note of the orientation or color in your frames on your chart to coincide with your post-it colors. (I didn't worry about the exact dimensions, just sort of went column by column.)
7. Add the dimensions and letter in each square as well.
8. Count your frames and count your squares on your chart to be sure you didn't miss anything. Another way to double check is count all the squares, all the portraits and all the landscapes and add them together. Green + Blue + Orange = the number of the frames? Good, you've counted them all!

How to find your photos:

1. In your photo management software, create smart folders for each season by setting up a sort for each year with photos captured in the months of your season. (I use Lightroom partially because you have unlimited criteria. Photos limits you to seven criteria, I believe. So, if you have multiple years of digital photos, you may need to have Spring 2001-2007 and Spring 2008-2014, and so on.
2. Then, search for your 2-3 star photos. Begin to apply your likely candidates with the keyword "Spring". Then, when you've narrowed it down to less than 50, you can go back and look at the culled group and apply a new keyword, "Spring Gallery", to the ones you wish to print/frame.
3. Look for variety:
   a. Head shots (or close-up shots)
   b. Group photos
   c. Candid vs. posed
   d. Horizon or landscape of the season
   e. Still photos of "things"
   f. Activities or traditions
   g. Each person in your family represented equally
   h. Recent photos and old photos
   i. Colors that evoke the season

How to select and layout your photos:

1. Set aside more time than you think you will need to edit/crop your photos. For some reason, it always takes more time than I think it will.
2. Print out all the photos you will be using in a very small size using the template called a contact sheet (very small photo sizes). For example, my contact sheet template can fit thirty photos onto 1 ½ pages. Cut them apart.
3. Lay them out into sorted groups. First I sort by child to see if I have a balance. Then, I sort them by orientation: portrait, landscape and either (or square). I make a count and compare it to my chart. Do you have too many portrait? Too many of one child? If so, go back and print out a few other photos.
4. Begin to lay them on top of your frames. Here are some tips to decide where to put what:
   a. Put your best photos in the biggest frames.
   b. If your subject is facing one direction, place the photo so they are looking into the middle of the gallery.
   c. Separate photos with strong color dominance into a visual triangle. For the Winter gallery, I separated the snow photos instead of clumping them together in one corner.
   d. Distribute the macro shots into a visual triangle as well. In other words, don't line them up. If you drew a line between the three photos, would it make a visual triangle?
5. Once you've finalized each photo's location, write the dimension, orientation (portrait/landscape/square) and the letter assigned to the frame's location listed on the post-it to the small photo.
6. Stack up all the photos and bring them to your computer to use as reference.
7. I like to start with photo in location A and move sequentially through the alphabet when editing. When I get to Z, I start with AA, BB, CC and so on.

How to edit your photos for printing:

1. Starting with photo A, crop for size and edit for brightness. You may wish to download your printer's profile (.ICC file) and upload it to your photo management software's printer settings. If you do, it's helpful to select "Soft Proof" to see exactly how your photo will print with those settings. Here's an article that shows how to install in Lightroom your .icc file: http://alikgriffin.com/aug/09/how-install-icc-printer-profiles-lightroom-5
2. When I have cropped and edited the photo visually, I hit "print to file" and save it to a folder called "Spring Wall Gallery". I rename the photo with a naming convention, such as "Spring A 5x7 Portrait" or "Spring L 16 x 16 Square".
3. When uploading to a printer, it's helpful if you have the size in the file name.
4. If you upload to Costco, here are additional tips:
   a. When you upload your photos, deselect the Auto Correct box in the window right before you check out. You don't need the printer to adjust your photos after you've spent time making it just right!
   b. Review the pricing. I find there are only five-six prices and 10+ sizes. It's because they print 16x16 on 16x20 paper, so they are both the same price. So, I make presets for each of the four paper sizes and crop to that size. (In other words, I float an 8x8 photo on a 8x10 paper, for example.)
   c. When you get your order, you will need to trim your photos. For the photos larger than 12", I use a metal ruler and an exacto knife.

Installing your new gallery wall:

1. Use glass cleaner on all your glass to remove the dust and let it dry thoroughly. Wear gloves to return the glass to the frame so you don't get fingerprints on the glass (or cut your finger on the sharp glass sides!)
2. Be sure to return the frames to the blanket in the exact location where you laid them.
3. Put the photos in the frames. Be sure they are installed with the top of the frame on the top of the photo.
4. Screw in the brackets and adhere rubber disks on the bottom corners. I don't advise using wire. It makes the frame hang off the wall at an angle.
5. Beginning with the lower corner, hang your first frame. Continue along the base line and up the side edge so you have a bottom and a sideline.
6. Continue hanging, taking time to adjust for straightness or to check for spacing.
7. Once you have completed hanging your photos, take a picture for your reference so you can repeat the same layout the following year.
8. When changing for the next season, leave the old photo in the frame in back of the new photo for safe keeping.