

Stretching Canvas:

An excerpt from

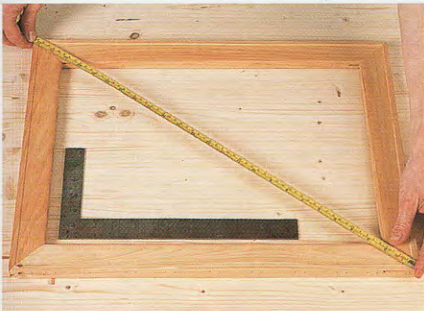
The Complete Oil Painter

by Brian Gorst

STUDIO
PRACTICE 4

Stretching a canvas

This is a method for stretching linen and cotton canvas over stretcher bars. Larger canvases are best stretched on a clean floor by two or four people. New canvas can be soaked for half an hour and dried before stretching to reduce the likelihood of future sagging.



1 Tap the stretcher bars together to make a frame and check its squareness with a large set square or by measuring from corner to corner with a tape measure. (Wedges are only used if stretcher expansion is required.)

2 Lay the stretcher frame beveled side down on the canvas and cut out the canvas, allowing an overlap of about 3 in. (7.5cm) all around.



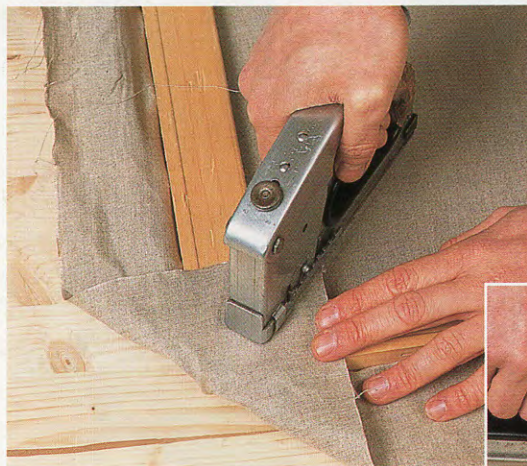
3 Make sure that the warp and weft threads of the canvas are parallel with the edge of the frame. Pulling the canvas taut with canvas pliers, staple the canvas to the center of one of the longest stretcher bars and then repeat the process on the opposite side.



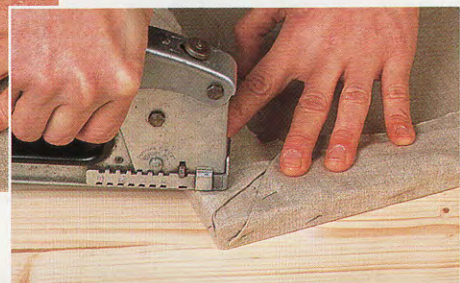
4 Do the same with the shorter sides, taking care to pull the canvas more taut with the second of each opposing pair of staples. (This prevents the canvas from being stretched unevenly.)



5 Return to the first long side and place a staple to the right and left of the first staple, 1½–2 in. (4–5cm) apart. Do the same on the opposite side, and then in turn to the remaining two sides. Continue working outward from the center toward the corners. (The longer sides will need more staples, so remember to miss out the shorter sides from the sequence on a few occasions.)



6 Gather and fold the corners around one or two sides and staple onto the back.



STUDIO PRACTICE 3 Stretcher bars



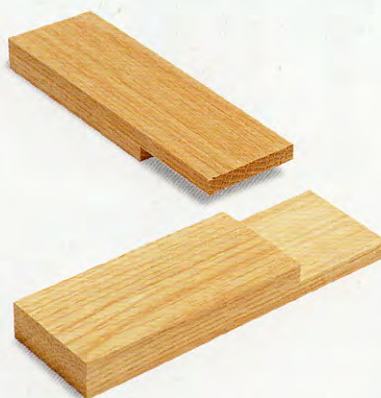
Stretcher bars act as a frame to support a stretched canvas, providing a painting support that is light, reusable, and inexpensive. Manufactured stretcher bars are usually made of pine and are sold in pairs at various standard lengths. For stretchers larger than approximately 24 x 30 in. (60 x 75cm), crossbars may be needed to provide support against the tension of the stretched canvas.

Stretcher bars tend to be wider than they are deep and get progressively wider and deeper for longer lengths of stretcher bar. Unframed abstract works are usually painted on stretchers between 1 and 3 in. (2.5 and 7.5cm) deep, and the canvas is stapled on the reverse. Small- and medium-sized framed paintings tend not to exceed 1 in. (2.5cm) in depth, as the combined hanging weight would be too heavy and the depth too great.

The canvas must be wrapped around the side of the stretcher bar but must not touch it on the front side. If the inner edge of the stretcher touches the canvas during painting, an undesirable mark will occur on the painted surface. For this reason, stretcher bars are beveled or angled toward the inside, or more commonly have a raised lip on the outer edge. For unframed paintings this outer edge often forms a sharp, clean edge, but for framed pictures a rounded lip that places less wear on the canvas edge is preferable.



Slotted expandable lap joint with wedges



Fixed lap joint (without beading)

STRETCHER-BAR JOINTS

The slotted, unfixed joint, for framed or smaller canvases, can be expanded slightly once stretched by tapping the small wooden wedges inserted into the joint. The fixed lap joint is used in heavier stretcher bars for larger, unframed works and requires the addition of beading to lift the canvas off the stretcher.

PROFILES OF VARIOUS STRETCHER BARS



Standard stretcher for framed pictures



Simple tapered profile of stretcher



Quality stretcher for abstract paintings



Large-scale stretcher with attached beading

PROFILE OF STRETCHED CANVAS

