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HOW TO SELECT A RUG HOOKING FRAME



Many rug hookers acquire the same frame that their teacher uses, or decide on a used frame that happened to be for sale. There is nothing terrible with either of these options except that the frame you start with might be the one you use for the next 20-30 years — and it may not be the best one for you.

Considerations for finding the perfect frame include:

- ◆ Ability to keep both hands free for hooking.
- ◆ Ability to keep your backing taut.
- ◆ Ability to readjust your backing as you work.
- ◆ Ability to turn your work easily.
- ◆ Affordability.
- ◆ Comfort: how the frame fits you.
- ◆ Craftpersonship: visual beauty.
- ◆ Durability: how well it is made.
- ◆ Optimum square inches of work-space for you.
- ◆ Portability: weight and ability to fold.

I recently conducted a mini-poll in a Facebook group of about 6,000 rug hookers. I asked three questions:

- 1) What is your favorite frame?
- 2) Why?
- 3) How long have you been hooking?

I received over 100 responses from hookers with rug hooking experience from one year to over 40 years. I also held a discussion with my LOOPY LADIES GUILD, Lake County, Illinois, Region 8.

This Pittsburgh Frame was only mentioned by one hooker, but it is a favorite for her. It is a metal folding frame and was very easy to set up. It sets up in a tilted position and you can adjust the tilt. It does not swivel. It is lightweight and durable.



This was a conversation not a “vote.” The results are from a specific Facebook group and include only those who happened to respond to my inquiry with some additional input from LOOPY LADIES GUILD members who were available to give their opinions. These results are not an endorsement of any frame. Quite the contrary, there are many favorites.

In response to: “How long have you been hooking?” some answered with two numbers. First, how long they’ve been hooking and secondly, how long they have been using the frame they currently recommend. I used the length of time hooking.

In the mini-poll, I didn’t explicitly mention that hoops are part of the universe of “frames” used when hooking. I wasn’t thinking about those who prefer to use a quilting hoop. Gail Dufresne is one of those people. Her body of work and passion for hooking is a strong endorsement for the hoop. But, since I didn’t mention hoops in my instructions, they may be under-represented in my results. Hoops are the simplest, least-expensive, and most portable solution for a rug hook “frame.”

BASIC” RUG HOOK FRAME

The purpose of the frame is to keep the backing tight and to aid the hooker in working on the grain.

The archetypical rug hooker’s frame is wooden, usually rectangular with gripper strips on the top edges of the four sidebars. To elevate the “window” part of the frame on the hooker’s lap, a frame generally has legs or braces measuring from a few inches to several inches high.

TYPES OF FRAMES

Traditional rug hooking teachers have taught that the hooker needs to hook efficiently and beautifully with the frame fixed in a stationary position. It was up to the hooker to change the position of her hooking hand, rather than to turn the frame.

More recently, hookers have realized that they can move their frame if that helps with the enjoyment of their hooking or with the outcome. To accommodate that trend, many frames that swivel 360 degrees are available.



*This is a **Puritan Frame**. It is a traditional and popular frame. Some hookers have been working on this style of frame for over 30 years. It is created so the window tilts toward the hooker. The “legs” are shorter in the front than the back. It is bulky. The author owns this frame and considers it uncomfortable since it is too big for her body type. An advantage of this frame is that it has two levers that can be turned to rotate two of the stretcher bars outward. This tightens the fabric substrate on the frame effectively.*

The Needleworks frame, and stationery frames mounted to a swivel floor stand, such as the K’s Creation Swivel Stand, are a few that swivel.

Some swiveling mounts also tilt. That function is sometimes accomplished by mounting the window part of the frame to rotate on a ball joint, usually a wooden sphere. By loosening the screws that hold the window to the ball joint, one can rotate and/or tilt the window part of the frame. One tightens the screws before resuming hooking.

Another method to tilt is by adjustments made on the pillar holding the window part of the

frame. Usually these adjustments are made by tightening and loosening knobs.

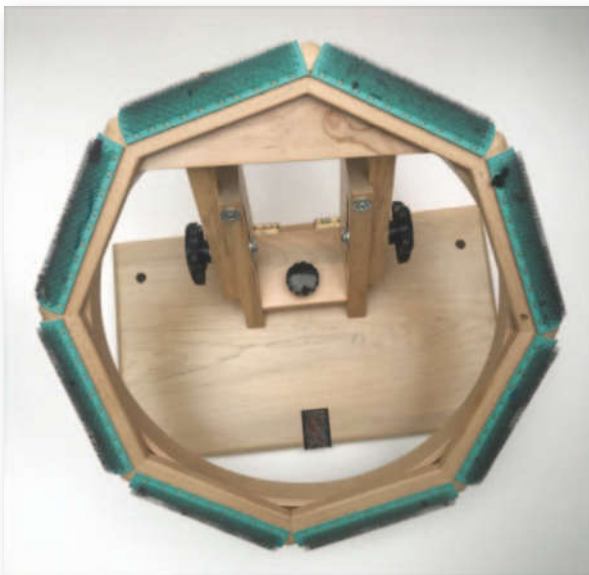
The swiveling and tilting can come with their own challenges. Some respondents said the screws attaching various pieces were not up to managing the weight of the rug. Complaints stated that the screws loosened frequently. This was irritating and interrupted the work. Solutions to this may be available, but it is worth asking about this issue if considering a swiveling or tilting frame.

One rug hooker found the sound of the swiveling of a metal frame was so disruptive that she couldn’t hook on it. She even objected to

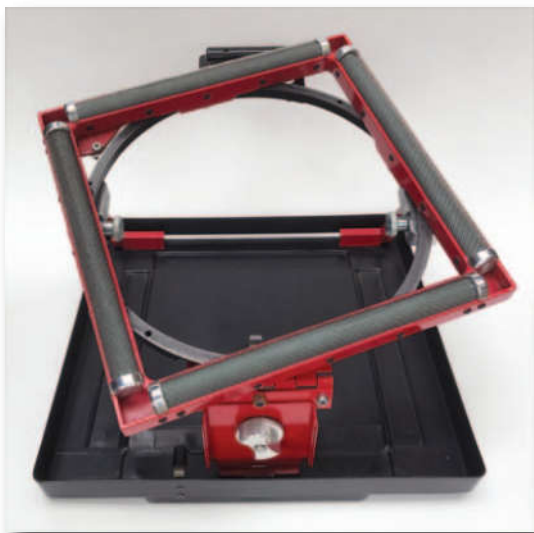
other people at a hook-in having a noisy rotating metal frame.

With non-swiveling frames, you either reposition the work, change hand positions, or manually pick up and turn the frame.

There are lap frames and frames on floor stands. A hybrid is the lap frame that has paddles attached to the frame that slide under your thighs, like the Searsport. It’s called sit-upon, or sit-on, but actually you are not sitting on it; you are stabilizing it with your thighs. The paddles come in a couple of sizes. The frame with the larger window surface area has larger paddles. This appears to be a popular option with few drawbacks.



*The **Needleworks Octagonal Lap Frame** swivels and tilts easily without any adjustment of screws. Floor stand with wheels is available to fit this frame.*



A Collapsing Metal Townsend Travel Frame is a very durable frame. It swivels easily and is lightweight for travel. This is the frame that one hooker said was too noisy for her. There is a note on the Iloverughooking.com website that there has been a changes as compared to the previous models. “The only change is an improvement in the mechanism that rotates the frame top.” So perhaps the improvement is to minimize the sound. If interested in this frame, please check out a new model to see if that noise issue has been resolved, and be aware of the potential noise issue if considering an older used frame. Or, the noise may not be a factor.

Most hookers praised their frames for keeping the backing taut—a key goal. Two stand out: Snap Dragon™ and Puritan. They both allow the positioning of the backing fabric on the grippers and then the tightening of the backing. The Snap Dragon has magnetic latches to tighten the gripper strips. Consider any restrictions about working near magnets before you buy or test a Snap Dragon frame.

The Puritan has two spring-powered levers that tighten the backing fabric on the frame with a simple turn of each lever. Both frames maintain a tight tension.

AFFORDABILITY

Affordability was a concern of

mine as I started this article. A good quality new hoop may be about \$40. An adequate and simple new frame with grippers may start at about \$70. The higher-end frames would include the highly praised Beeline-Townsend 14” Orbiter Standing Frame, constructed of steel and aircraft grade aluminum, for about \$900, or the handcrafted wood Needleworks “Papa Bear” frame at about \$1,600.

A good quality frame is an investment. With that in mind, the extra cost for a floor stand, or for the frame to swivel, tilt, or fold, or for a more expensive woodworker, may be well worth the additional cost, especially if you spread that cost over the decades of use.

Another benefit of a good quality name-brand frame is that frequently it can be sold online or through a guild, even after having been used for years.



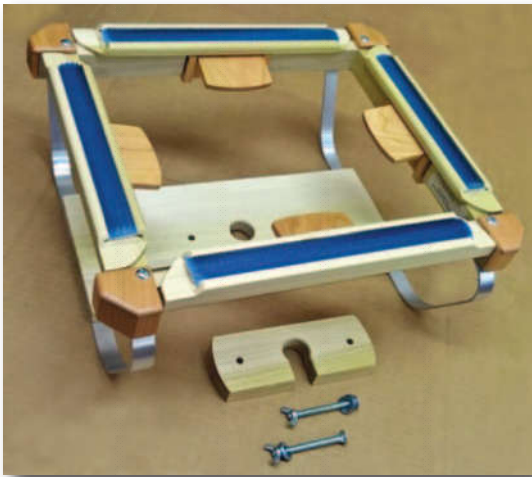
This frame is not labeled and the hooker does not know the brand. It looks very similar to a K’s Creation Octagonal Sit-on Frame. It tilts and turns on a ball joint. Adjustments are made by loosening and tightening the screws.

PORTABILITY VS WEIGHT

Portability is a plus and a minus. To accommodate the weight of a large rug, some prefer heavy duty floor stands and the convenience of a large work surface. The Cheticamp is probably the best-known frame that handles a large surface area and very large rugs. This is the type of frame that Deanna Fitzpatrick uses. It generally does not tilt, so one needs to be able to comfortably sit while working on a flat top surface. This is one of the less frequently used frames. The Cheticamp is not considered portable. (The K’s Creations Z- frame has a similar configuration, but is a lap frame.)

Some hookers like a big surface area so they can continue to hook a passage without moving their project as often. Some like a smaller surface area because it is easier to reach around a smaller frame. Big surfaces will generally mean a heavier frame, but may allow you to hook faster since you don’t move your work as much. Well-made, heavier frames are durable but less portable.

Since many rug hookers travel to camps and workshops, the portability of a small folding frame—or a hoop—is hard to beat for travel.



The Snap Dragon™ Lap Frame is pictured with the ball socket option. The frames can be fit to a variety of floor stands, if desired. The frame and floor stand are sold separately. Snap Dragon does not manufacture floor stands. The Snap Dragon, like the Puritan, can keep the fabric backing especially taut.

Photo © Snap Dragon™. Used with permission.

There are metal folding frames and wooden ones. One wooden folding travel frame (no brand name) is compact, folds easily, and has a flat bottom which can serve to keep your noodles from getting tangled in your lap. It is similar to the Searsport Fold Flat frame and the Laurena frame in the Needleworks line. Because these frames have a tray with an edge, they can catch wool lint as you work, as well as keep scissors or spare hooks at hand. These are examples of wooden folding frames.

A metal frame is generally lighter and less bulky than a wooden frame. Two metal folding frames are shown in the photos accompanying this article.

FRAME AS OBJET D'ART

As artists themselves, many hookers appreciate the artistry of a hand-made wooden frame. Some frames have been made, as one hooker said, "by my Sweetie." Some are made by a local craftsperson and others in small production batches by experienced award-winning woodworkers. For some hookers, the idea of a well-crafted frame, a "beautiful piece of furniture," adds to the value of the frame.

Many of the manufacturers are small American or Canadian companies. Many are family businesses. One company, W. Cushing & Co., has been around since 1879, the same year that Thomas Alva Edison developed the light bulb. In other words, many have been around a long time.

In my Facebook poll, the Acadian floor frame received the most kudos as a beautiful frame. Although in studying the Talon website, it is also a work of art. The "Anatomy" page for the Talon shows the craftsmanship that goes into each wooden frame.

RECOMMENDATION

Which frame is the "right" frame? The biggest category differences are:

- ◆ Floor vs. Lap
- ◆ Stationery Top vs. Swivel vs. Tilt

Think about "must haves" and body position. Review the criteria at the beginning of this article.

Carefully read the "specs" for the frame. Sometimes the frame itself is purchased separately from the floor stand, the "sit-on" paddles, and other customized adaptations. Most frame "windows" can be fitted one way or another to a floor stand.

Over and over I've heard, "try as many frames as you can before you

buy one." I've also heard, "Don't buy the cheapest frame to start – buy the best frame for you that you can afford."

Since comfort and the likelihood for a quality hooked rug is partially dependent on a frame, make a point of testing various frames. At a hook-in or camp, ask to work on different frames. Bring a project drawn out on a piece of linen, a hook, and wool. Spend a few minutes sampling each frame.

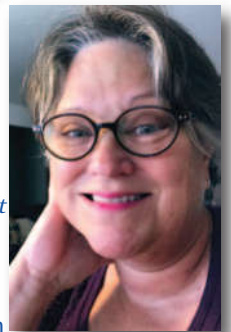
In opposition to other components with rug hooking, the best frame is not necessarily related to its cost. A hoop may be the favorite frame.

I've summarized a bit of what is on the market and how to select a frame. Keep in mind that innovations and upgrades are made on frames. Get current information before you decide. Have fun, try a variety of frames, and find one that works for you!



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Jane is a professional artist teaching drawing and watercolor. Rug hooking is a new passion she has added to her creative journey. Visit her Facebook page [WatchingPaintDryLLC](#) or email her at: janemason123@gmail.com



The Facebook Poll →

The chart accompanying this article shows the summarized results of a mini-poll on a Facebook group page for the "Out of Hand Rug Hookers." There were over 100 responses, comments or questions. These are not necessarily the most important aspects of the frame and do not necessarily apply only to the frames listed. When possible, comments are in the hooker's own words. Some of the "cons" may be due to user error or lack of familiarity with the equipment. The responses are not weighted.

Results of a Facebook Mini Poll

Poll conducted with the “Out of Hand Rug Hookers” Closed Facebook Group, September 2019. Approx. 120 responses.

Questions asked: 1) How long have you been hooking? 2) Favorite Frame? 3) Why?

# of users	Avg. # Of yrs hooking	Name of Frame	Pros	Cons
16	14	Needleworks Frame and Stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Easy to transport. * Swivels 360 degrees. * Top quality. * Spins easily and smoothly. * Wheels (floor stand) slide under a chair. * Folds beautifully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy and awkward.
15	19	Snap Dragon Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds wool tight. • Extension arm keeps project off ground. • Can handle large or small projects. • Like Big Foot stand with extension arm. • Like High Snap with frame to sit on. • Like many other frames it sits on a K-Creation floor stand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have to tighten corner pieces because screws come loose. • Have to lean forward too far with Big Foot stand. • Don't like stand; hold frame between table and chest instead. • Don't like octagonal shape; hard to hook corners. [Author's note: 4+ " of border gives enough margin so octagonal shape shouldn't impede design.] • Replaced Snap Dragon with Talon. • Work area is too small. • Magnets are problem for me.
8	33	Puritan Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fits on lap. • Used for 30 years; love it. • Always dependable. Very durable. • Tilted top for ease of hooking. • Has levers to tighten the fabric backing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not comfortable; too bulky.
4	15	Acadian Floor Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tilts, swivels without loosening anything. • Beautiful, like a piece of furniture. 	
3	“Long time”	Talon Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have used many frames; favorite because it is adjustable height and tilt. • Fine craftsmanship 	
3	15	Beeline-Townsend Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is heavy but great for big rugs. • Used K's Creations window and floor stand and switched to Beeline/Townsend. • Easy to adjust and swivels 360 degrees. • Extremely durable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Expensive.
2	14	K's Creations Swivel Stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like floor stand with articulating top position. • Like Big Foot floor stand. • Removed swivel base so it works like a frame with grippers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The screws don't hold and need continual adjustment, especially on big rugs.
2	3	The Spinner with Floor Stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spins easily. 	
1	N/A	Tomorrow's Heirlooms Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lightweight and folds flat. 	
1	19	Going Gray Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A favorite. . . . but no longer in production. 	
1	18	Searsport Sit-on Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good customer service. • Stable to sit on with paddles. 	
1	20	Pittsburgh Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to set up and fold. • Lightweight, portable. • Metal. 	
1	20	No Name	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a ball socket joint so turns and tilts • Good size. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hassle to move screws to loosen and tighten ball joint. • Loosens while hooking.