



Pretty as a Picture – Tips and Tricks for Engraving Photographs

By Mike Dean, vice-president of sales and marketing, Epilog Laser

Photographs are one of the most popular items for engraving purposes. Taking a captured memory and engraving it upon a different material such as wood or marble truly takes photographs to the next level.

In this article we'll cover the basics that will give you a solid foundation for all of your photo engraving activities.

Practice Makes Perfect

Keep in mind there is no one correct method of engraving photos. The more you engrave photos, the better you will become, so don't get discouraged if at first your engraved photographs do not display the perfect results you're looking for. The tips below will help you prepare for the photo engraving process and provide the tools you need to engrave quality photos that last a lifetime.

Materials Matter

A single photograph will engrave differently from one material to the next. Many users like to use black marble for photo engraving, while others choose black anodized aluminum, black plastic, clear acrylic or wood for their pictures. Even if you use the same photograph, keep in mind that each material will produce a different engraved look. We recommend testing a variety of materials with the same photo to determine which material creates the look you want.

Selecting Artwork

It's important to keep in mind that not all photos are fit for engraving. When laser engraved, the photos that produce the best results feature a wide variety of shading that goes from light to dark. Photos containing large areas of a single color typically do not engrave well – especially when working with wood. We recommend avoiding pictures with expansive backgrounds containing only one or two small subjects. Note the photo below – it is an excellent choice for laser engraving because most of the photo is a gradient pattern of light to dark. There is not an abundance of large blocks of a single color and it contains a good amount of detail.



Software Selection

Virtually any graphics software has the ability to modify a scanned or digital photo for engraving purposes. Some software such as PhotGrav and PhotoLaser include advantageous features that might make photo manipulation easier than working solely with your graphics software.

Resolution Reminders

The resolution at which you engrave does not have to be extremely high. Most of the samples we produce are engraved at 200, 300 or 400 DPI. Only occasionally do users need to use a high resolution, such as 600 or 1200 DPI for photo engraving.

Next we'll cover some tips to ensure you're engraving optimal photos. Before you start your next photo engraving project ask yourself these questions:

1. Does the photo show many gradations of color from light to dark?
2. Does the photo show good definition and detail?
3. Does the photo have a good contrast and focus?
4. Does the photo contain a good number of elements to view?

Whether you're using high-resolution digital images or scanned images keep the following tips in mind when acquiring the photograph you wish to engrave:

Scanning Resolution – Scan your photos at a low resolution such as 200 or 300 DPI. If you are going to engrave your photos at 200 DPI, there really is no reason to scan it in at a higher resolution. Scanning photos in at a lower resolution also will ensure your photos are small enough to work with when manipulating in your chosen graphics software.

Choosing Color or Black and White – If you have the option, color is always the way to go with photos. If you're scanning a photo you should always scan it in color; even if the photo is

black and white (most scanners give you this option.) The color process generates useful data that comes in handy when you go to manipulate the photo.

Digital Internet Images – Be sure to obtain the highest resolution digital image you can from the Internet. Low resolution photos and graphics copied and pasted from the Internet are almost never suitable for engraving. If you look hard you can occasionally find high resolution graphics online, but the vast majority of images are low resolution and too small in size to be useful.

Digital camera images – today's digital cameras usually always produce high-resolution images that engrave nicely. If you have an older camera (2.0 mega pixels and smaller) the images produced may not be suitable for engraving. Additionally, photos snapped with a camera phone often do not produce high resolution photos that produce a well-engraved look.

Size: Get the largest size image available, especially if you are scanning it. Simply stretching a photo in your graphics software will reduce the resolution of your image. Additionally, if your photo is stretched too far, it will become too pixilated to engrave.

Whether you're just beginning to engrave photographs or you're already familiar with the process, these tips and tricks will help ensure you make the right choices to get the high-quality, professional results you're seeking.