

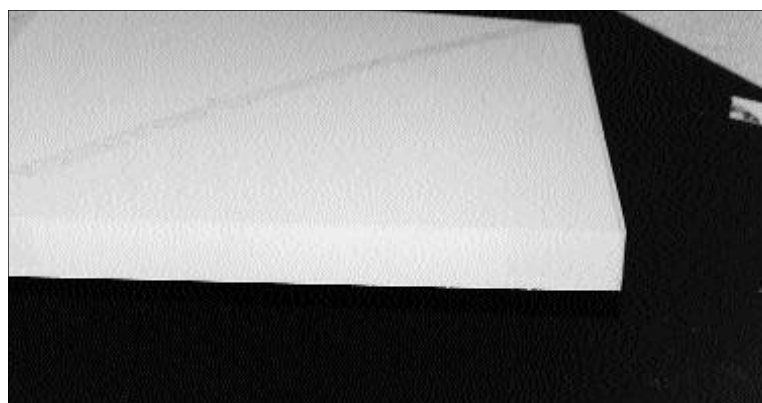
Instant Shadow Box

By Stuart Altschuler

I am often asked what is the most versatile material to have in the frame shop. I never hesitate to say that matboard is the one product that I find most useful. If I were to list all of the different things that could be done with matboard, it would fill many pages. In this article I won't discuss any of the usual and popular techniques that involve cutting mats that lay over artwork but, rather, I will deal with some of the applications that are less traditional and more creative. All the techniques discussed below work equally well for conservation framing. Just use acid-free matboard (instead of paper mats) and appropriate tapes. Because matboard is available to meet all archival standards it can easily be used without worry.

Frequently I am asked to frame things in a shadow box frame. I can often use what I call an instant shadow box that serves the needs of most projects. To make an instant shadow box, first measure the opening of the frame. Next, measure the depth, not width, of the rabbet. Add twice the rabbet depth minus $\frac{3}{8}$ " to both the length and width of the frame and cut your board to size (figure 1). Now, place the cut board face down in the mat cutter and mark to cut $\frac{3}{16}$ " less than the rabbet depth as previously measured. Carefully adjust the straight cutting blade of your mat cutter so that it doesn't cut all the way through the face of the board and cut all four sides from end to end. This will result in four corner squares that are cut on the inner sides. Gently peel away the back of the matboard leaving only the facing paper. The four sides can now be folded up and taped creating a shadow box mat that fits perfectly in the frame leaving room behind for a backing board. I generally charge $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the mat price plus a double fitting charge for attaching the artwork. This technique works regardless of the type of matboard used—paper, acid-free, fabric or custom made. If the piece that you are doing is large, you can laminate any matboard to foamcore or gator foam and employ the same procedure.

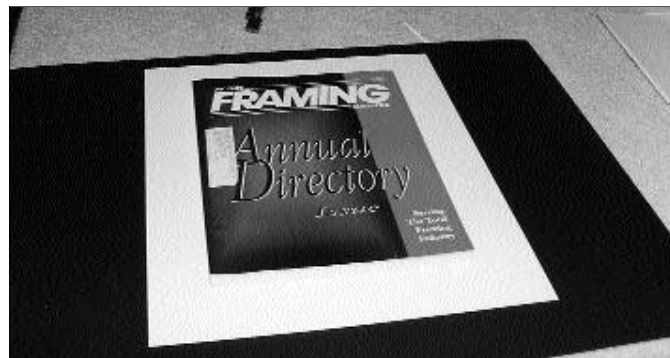
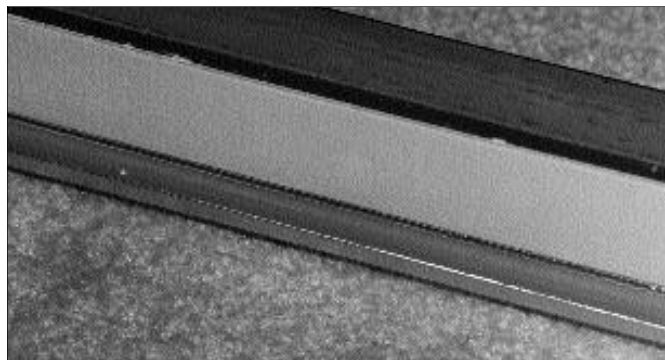
As previously seen on these pages, in my shop I regularly use frames with similar finishes and different profiles to make display and jewelry boxes. If I can't back the frame in the regular way, which would occur in all cases where the frame had to be able to open, instant shadow boxes aren't the answer. In those cases the unfinished and unsightly inner sides of the frame are visible. Some framers paint the sides. I



Top: Score foamboard on all sides end to end. The far sides can now be folded up to form a box.

Bottom: The sides are taped in place and the box fitted in the frame.

Shadow Box



Top left: Matboard can be used to finish the inside of a rabbet.

Top right: Cut the matboard strips to the depth of the rabbet and attach with ATG.

Bottom left: To create a mount for a book or similar item, first place the book on the matboard and take the measurements.

Bottom right: Measure from the side edge of the board to the inside of the spine of the book.

think that this is both messy and time consuming since you have to wait for the paint to dry. Matboard provides the perfect finish for those sides. Simply cut strips of mat to fit and attach them with ATG tape. As an adjunct to this technique, glass can be inserted into a frame and if cut to fit tightly a single or double strip of matting for each side attached with ATG tape will hold the glass in place. Remember to clean the glass before installing the matboard strips.

I make a practice of framing unusual things, which sometimes includes articles of clothing. Certain clothes benefit visually from hanging free in the frame while others appear better if stiff and rigid. A matboard, acid-free if necessary, can be cut to any size or shape and inserted into the clothing to hold it stiff. Mats can be scored, and folded to three-dimensional shapes to conform to the needs of the job. Sometimes it is easier to cut and size several sheets of matboard stacking to achieve the desired thickness than to work with other, less familiar materials.

Matboard, particularly suede, can also be used to provide a finished backing. In boxes or displays that are designed to sit on a table, the bottom is regularly overlooked. The mark of a true professional is attention to details. A fine cover for the bottom is just as important as using quality materials for the more visible areas of the project. I always use suede for the

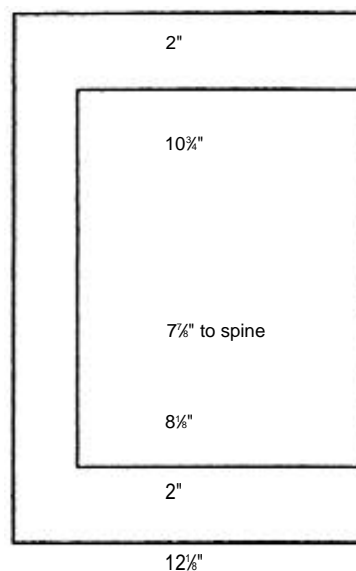
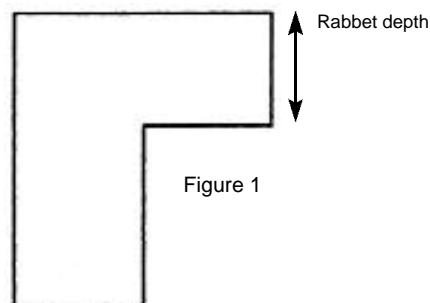


Figure 2

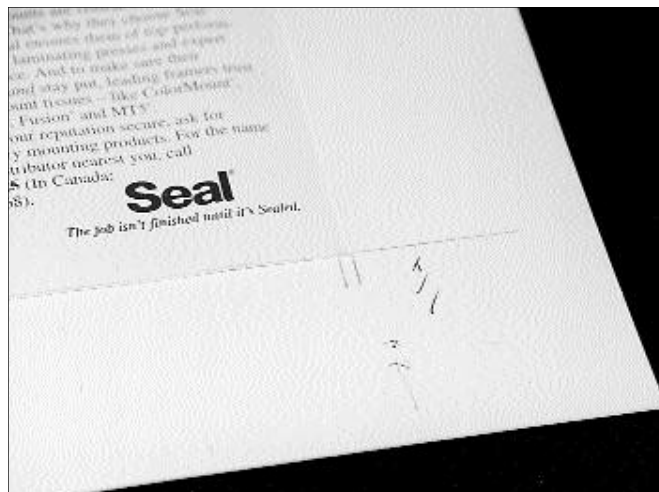
Shadow Box

backing in any custom double and triple photo-style frames that are made to stand on a desk or table.

One of the challenges of framing odd-shaped objects is to find ways to hold down and attach them to backings. Matboard can be used in creative ways for this purpose. If your project is a book, for example, you can make a mount from matboard. Cut a piece of matboard to the size that you want the finished piece to be. Place the book face up on the matboard. Measure from the side edge of the board to the inside of the spine of the back cover of the book (figure 2). Now, cut a $\frac{1}{4}$ " opening the length of the book, centered vertically and positioned as measured above. Flip the board over and slide the back cover of the book through the opening. Turn both the matboard and the now inserted book back cover over so that you are looking at the back of the matboard and the back cover of the book. Cut and attach several strips of matboard approximately 1" wide and the size of the book cover to raise the board to the thickness of the book and attach them with ATG tape. Finally, cut a piece of board a couple of inches larger than the book cover and attach that with ATG tape to the raised surface of the backing. Not only can books, comic books (which are becoming increasingly more valuable) and pamphlets be mounted in this way but also, neckties, scarves and similar objects of clothing.

Finally, a note on all of the techniques that I have discussed. In some cases there will have to be a visible seam or slit. Never try to conceal something that cannot be hidden. It won't work. Find some way to incorporate what you will need to do structurally into the design. And, remember to point out to your clients exactly how a piece will look when finished. The only acceptable surprise to your customers is that the piece has exceeded expectations.

Whenever you use any of these methods you must charge accordingly. And, most of the charges are going to be for labor. Determine how long it will take and then add a little. I've never met a framer who doesn't underestimate his time. It is important to charge enough—you don't want to regret having taken in this type of work. Also, the clients will pay. The more custom work that you do and the more you charge for it, the better reputation you will have. Remember, like I always say, if you don't lose a sale once in a while because of price, you're not charging enough. ■



Cut a $\frac{1}{4}$ " slit in the matboard the length of the book and slide the book over it.



The book with matboard (slit already cut).



Place 1" strips of matboard on the back to hold the book in place.