

Handling Ilfochrome Photos: A Photo By Any Other Name...

Photo credit: Photographer Earle Hoyt, Flagstaff, AZ



This landscape photo showcases the crisp colors of an Ilfochrome Classic.

When a customer brings in a photo to be framed, you evaluate its condition and try to identify what type of photo it is. Often, the materials used to create the frame package, and to what extent it will be preserved, depends not only on the value (both sentimental and monetary) of the photo, but its actual chemical makeup.

Some people are confused about the difference between an Ilfochrome and a Cibachrome. We spoke with Ilford Imaging USA, Inc., located in Paramus, New Jersey, to clear up the facts for those who might be unsure. Ilfochrome Classics are those which were formerly called Cibachromes. In 1989, the Ilford Company was separated from parent company Ciba-Geigy. Ilford then changed the name of these products in 1990 since Ciba-Geigy was no longer involved with them. As such, the name change did not indicate any actual changes in the product, and the physical properties of the Ilfochrome and the Cibachrome were the same. Today, the differences between a Cibachrome and an Ilfochrome are those resulting from the natural course of development over time.

The films that produce these color photos are made from materials based

on a silver dye bleach system that uses pure azo dyes which are incorporated during manufacture, rather than when the film is developed. The azo dyes and the process by which they are infused into the film results in a photo that is highly color saturated and very stable for color.

Identifying

There are several versions of an Ilfochrome photo, each distinguished by the base it is printed on. The two most commonly seen in a frame shop are the Ilfochrome Classic Deluxe and the Ilfochrome Classic RC Paper. The RC Paper version, printed on a resin-coated paper base, has basically the same make-up as RC photos in general. They should be handled with the same care as all RC photos that you frame.

The Deluxe is the more delicate of the two. It has a polyester base which gives it a very smooth, high gloss appearance. The polyester base also can be a tip off when identifying. It is strong, yet flexible to the touch.

The Ilfochrome Classic RC Paper photos are labelled on the back to say "Ilfochrome Classic." On the other hand, the Deluxe version do not have any printing. However, the high gloss and vibrant colors can serve as a clue.

Because of its delicate nature, we are focusing on the Ilfochrome Classic Deluxe in this article.

As with all projects, communication with the customer is key. Framer David Menne, who owns The Franklin Gallery in Flagstaff, Arizona, makes communication a central part of the identification

The features of the Deluxe make them attractive photos to display. And because of their appearance, they are often used in gallery and other exhibits.

process. But customers often don't know what type of photo it is. After checking the back of the photo for a company name, Menne proceeds to the next step. "If they don't know what it is," says Menne, "I ask if I can use the edge of the photo as a test area for how it will handle heat, pressure, etc... .

Handling

The features of the Ilfochrome Classic Deluxe make them attractive photos to display. And because of their appearance, they are often used in gallery and other exhibits. They are relatively expensive compared to many other types

of photography.

This all means that you need to take special care when handling and storing these types of photos. Photographer Richard Jackson of Hance Partners in Flagstaff, Arizona, says, "Because the surface is very high gloss, they will not handle the same degree of abrasion as another type of photo might."

It is important that you wear white cotton gloves to avoid getting fingerprints on the photo if by some chance you touch the image. This is the case for most photos, and some types of artwork, but with the Deluxe, you can actually alter the emulsion because it is so soft.

Framing Considerations

The mounting method used for these photos is an important part of the process. A rigid smooth substrate is most desirable. These can include foam board, a sheet metal like aluminum, acrylic sheet, and glass. The smoother, the better, is the general rule.

In an article entitled, "What To Do With Ilfochromes (aka Cibachromes)" (*PFM*, October 1992), Chris Paschke wrote, "Spray, wet, cold, vacuum, and pressure sensitive mountings are all possible solutions to dealing with Ilfochromes. Though these methods are also very effective visual solutions and maintain the desired glossy surface, since adhesives do not soak into polyester these methods will not create the desired long term

bond you may wish to achieve. For a long term bond, dry mounting using heat is the most permanent.”

However, Paschke asserts that static mounting is still more highly suggested and recommended as a mounting method for these materials. (See this process described later.)

A primary concern with any mounting that involves heat is that orange peel may occur. Orange peel is the appearance of bumps on the surface of the image due to extremes in the mounting process. It looks like the bumpy surface of an orange peel, hence the term. The measure you can take to prevent this is to first use the smoothest substrate possible, and to carefully monitor the time, temperature, and pressure used.

During his 26 years of framing, Menne has found one element of the mounting process to be significant—pressure. He agrees that while the mounting substrate used certainly has an effect, it makes less difference than the amount of pressure applied. “You can mount something on aluminum, or even glass, and still get orange peel if you use too much pressure,” Menne says.

To determine what the correct pressure is, Menne says he has learned by doing testing before working on a customer’s project. He uses remnants or “seconds” of these photos to perform these trial runs.

He often performs these tests

using adhesive mounting methods; whether it is a spray or heat mount adhesive tissue. He does not use vacuum presses or pressure-sensitive adhesive tissues because he finds they require too much pressure, causing a noticeable amount of orange peel.

While these photos
may sometimes
be a challenge
to handle,
the end result
when framed is quite
eye-catching.

If you find these photo-to-substrate mounting methods intimidating, the preservation methods of hinges, corner pockets, and edge strips are all viable options. They enable you to frame the photo without having to affix it to a backing. Instead, you create a “sandwich” of backing, artwork, and window mat.

As mentioned earlier, static mounting is the suggested method for mounting all polyester Ilfochrome Classic photos. It is 100% reversible and non-invasive.

Basically, this process uses a sheet of acrylic for the mounting surface, and the photo is held in place by static, and photo corners

or flange hinges are used as “back up” attachments.

Menne notes that it’s important to create adequate space between the photo and the glazing (using matting or spacers) because the static can often “suck” the photo to the glazing.

For more information on static mounting, see, “Mastering Mounting” (*PFM*, February 1997).

Design

Despite the special care that these photos require, their vibrant colors can make it a joy to create a frame design for them. Menne framed the photo that appears on page 28.

When asked about his design approach, he said that the mat colors were chosen because they harmonize with the colors in the image. Menne thought that they do not distract from the photo itself. The color of the top mat also highlights the center area of the photo as well.

A simple moulding was chosen, and he decided on the dark brown color duplicated the shadows in the image, while also repeating the darker, inside mat. The image is 20"x30", with overall framed dimensions being 30"x40".

While these photos may sometimes be a challenge to handle, the end result when framed is quite eye-catching. And since these photos are often used planned for use in a gallery or some other type of exhibit, being able to handle them can be lucrative for your business. ■