

THE **E**ssence of **D**esign

Part IV: Texture

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Line is the most fundamental of the design elements. Color elicits the greatest emotional and expressive response of all the design elements. But texture is the most tactile, or touch oriented, of the principles in the essence of design.

Definitions of Texture

Texture is defined as the surface character of all materials determined by their actual physical structure. Everything surrounding us has an internal, structural texture (ie: grain within a wood moulding holding it together); an external, tactile texture which is directly affected by the internal composition (ie: glass is smooth, but engraved glass is rough to the touch); and a visual texture or design which may be manually applied to the surface (ie: printed fabrics or marbled papers).

Texture and pattern are intricately intertwined (i.e. a brick wall has a distinct pattern which can also be felt when touched). People often react to textures in psychological ways. This psychological reaction allows us to mentally “feel” without ever actually touching the item. This establishes the difference between tactile and visual textures.

Tactile Textures

Actual alterations in a plane which may be felt when touched are tactile textures in the strictest sense of the word. Examples would be lava rock in nature or a tiered mat made with soft handmade surface paper in framing (see Photo 1). Many commercial matboards offered today are tactile. They are three-dimensional and depend on touch or the familiarity of previous contact to establish texture. Most framing fabrics fall into this category.

The tactile texture of a given surface may also be manually created from a smooth surface by using various

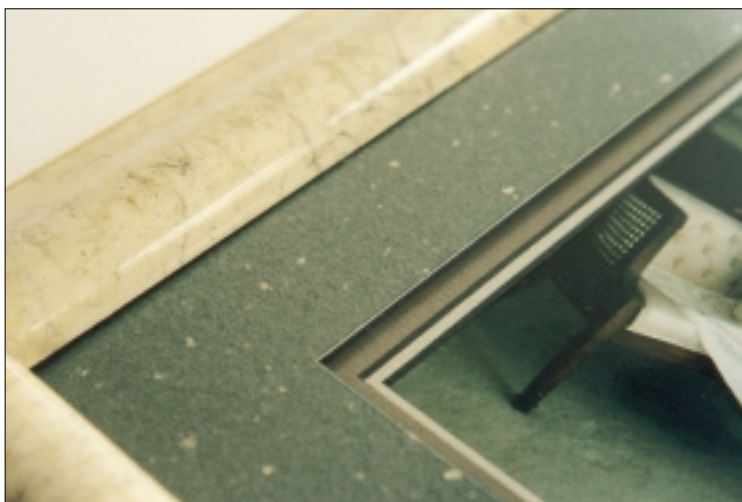


Photo 1: This tiered surface mat has a piece of soft textural green Larroque handmade paper with natural off white paper specks mounted to a piece of white Blackcore mat board. There is a double liner mat of Medium Gray and Mist Gray with a 3/16" foam spacer between. Line, color, texture, and intensity (upcoming in Part Six) are the four elements counted.



Photo 2: The texture of a given surface may be created from a smooth surface by initiating various techniques such as deep bevel wrapping the smooth surface and bevel with wrinkled rice papers.

techniques such as deep bevel wrapping the smooth surface and bevel with wrinkled rice papers (see Photo 2) or creating designer mats with various handmade papers either wrapped (see Photo 3) or surface mounted (then cut into mats as in Photo 1). In Photo 3, the Ogura (left) and leather-look (center) are tactile, while the Unryu (right) has more a visual texture.

Textures may stimulate feelings of cool elegance with smooth, polished marble, or warmth and romance with soft, frilly lace.

Visual Textures

Variations in light and dark on either a smooth or rough surface, which are two-dimensional in nature, are visual textures, such as the flecks in a smooth piece of granite. The surface of the rock remains smooth to the touch but is visibly textured by the physical composition of the stone with flecks of color under its surface. Matboard examples would be flannel, palazzo, or faux marble finishes which remain smooth to the touch yet appear rough. Visual textures are most common in framing design, if for no other reason than the inability to touch the inner parts of framed artwork.

Tactile textures may also be visually textured. A four-ply museum board can have both a slight visual roughness and does indeed feel slightly lumpy to the touch. Conversely, the granite paper applied to the museum board in Photo 4 gives a visual sense of texture (as a flannel mat) even when no tactile texture exists. It does, however, remain an element of texture. These two boards in Photo 4 have very distinct visual and tactile textures.

If you look back at Photo 1, you will see the moulding selected for the frame has a distinct threaded marble pattern that is smooth and hard to the touch. Although it can be touched, it is much more a visual texture than the tactile texture of the inner green surface mat which is actually very soft and tactile.

Texture Through Structure

Variations or inconsistencies in materials create texture through structure, a form of textural contrast. In a monotone (single-colored) weaving or wall hanging, varying widths and thicknesses of threads used in the art would create a “tone on tone” or physical variance within its texture without resorting to the use of color. Textural imagery, intrigue, and interest is created simply by using all the same colors with different weights and/or fibers.

A commonly used and successful framing design fea-



Photo 3: Handmade and imported papers, as well as fabrics, make excellent materials for wrapping mats for creating both tactile and visual textures.



Photo 4: A sheet of granite gray paper was surface tiered to a piece of four-ply gray museum board to better match the photo reproduction being framed. It gives a visual sense of tactile texture even when none exists. It does, however, remain an element of texture.

tures monotone coloration, allowing all the other elements besides color to showcase their potential in a powerful and unified design. Shadow boxes would be an ideal candidate for this type of presentation. By using the same color family, yet varying the surface textures for design interest, the framer would maintain concentration on the subject within the box and continue to control the use of the elements.

Texture Through Light

Using light to create texture often requires tactile textures to set the stage for highlights and shadows to be created into visual textures within a design. Stacked mouldings, fillets, and spacers naturally create three-dimensional spaces and reflections where two-dimensional shadows are a result. Though this concept is generally reserved for architecture and interior design, it could become a conscious use of visual texture in deep acrylic boxes for three-dimensional sculptures, masks, and textiles.

Emotional Effects of Texture

There are two different ranges when considering textures—smooth to rough and soft to hard. Viewers react in an emotional way to colors, tints and shades as discussed in *Essence of Design, Part Three: Color (PFM, June 2000)*. They react equally to textures in a psychological or emotional way. Textures may stimulate feelings of cool elegance with smooth, polished marble pillars, or warmth and romance with soft, frilly lace.

Smooth textures are often unobtrusive, undemanding, and may be understated enough to allow showcasing other elements as form, color, and space without becoming an additionally counted element. Remember, in design we must begin with a “given” and when considering texture, often begin with smooth. It is cool, tranquil, and precise, almost feeling unfriendly like an austere, contemporary, white living room with cathedral ceiling and all chrome accents. Another example would be the smooth surface of a hot press watercolor paper, which also appears unfriendly, nonabsorbent, and hard, even if it is not.

Rough textures will attract attention and activate eye movement, but can overshadow the use of form and color. They emulate the natural aspects of the earth and make people feel more at ease. Rough surfaces can often appear warmer and informal as fabric wrapped mats can contrast with a plain four-ply matboard. Ogura, papyrus, and bark papers are great textural examples to intrigue and stimulate one’s visual texture.

A soft texture beckons to be touched. It is friendly, cozy, appealing, and inviting like a Victorian family por-



Photo 5: The mat corner detail is a double mat with a hand-painted sandstone 1/2" panel painted using two colors and silver. There are two 1/16" embossed lines to the outside of the painted panel. Color, texture, and line are all to be counted.

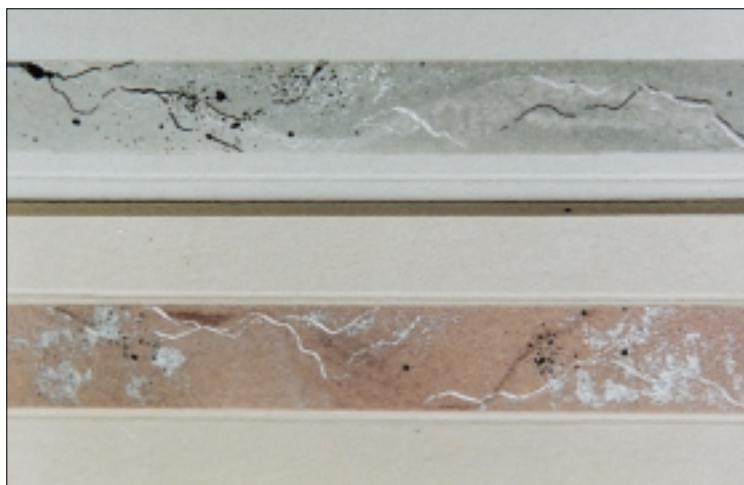


Photo 6: If more than one color is used to create the pattern texture, color is still only counted once. In these two samples of hand-created marble, there are pastel shades and tints as well as highlights of silver veining and black specks. Color still only counts once. These are two separate corner samples placed side by side; not a close up of an actual frame design.

trait incorporating velvets and laces. Softness need not portray only a feminine or juvenile subject. Always keep an open mind, for velvets may appear quite masculine and dramatic in the right color.

A hard texture will evoke emotional reactions of strong, vigorous feeling, often masculine in nature. By adding brilliance, such as with crystal, or polish, as with the fine look of expensive marble, to the concept of a hard texture, the result could feel much more tactually and visually satisfying. Bare wood feels hard and rough, very natural and aggressive; but strength and elegance is achieved through hard, smooth, waxed, and polished burls.

Texture as a Framing Element

Intermixing textures to stimulate a viewer's emotional response to a framed artwork is rarely identified, though we subconsciously select materials on that basis all the time. Lace for weddings, flannel for babies, and leather for men are used routinely to set a mood just as with color. Since texture is creatively used by artists and designers to gently visually stimulate or evoke a particular mood or feeling within a viewer, we must also control our desire to use too much of a good thing.

Textures are seen as mats, fabrics, and mouldings, as well as all in the items or artwork being framed. If more than one color of the same texture is selected to be used (ie: blue and green flannel matboard), the element of color will be the only one counted. If, however, various textures of the same color are used (ie: green flannel and green marble matboard), then only the element of texture should be counted. If new mat colors and surface textures are introduced, and perhaps a panel design, then color, texture, and line will all be counted.

Texture as a Panel Design

Texture can be easily understood and integrated as a new fabric or paper-wrapped mat, surface-tiered mat using handmade papers, or a heavily gessoed texture to emulate a stucco wall. But texture also comes into play if a narrow $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " cut or painted panel is introduced onto the mat surface (see Photo 5). I discussed in, "Essence of Design, Part Two: Line," (*PFM*, April 2000) that

a line can be anything from a narrow hairline to a wide panel.

Anytime the base "given" texture is modified, the texture must be counted as an element in the design. The panel in the photo is a hand-painted Sandstone with two embossed accent lines to the outside. This is absolutely a new texture added to the mat.

The new Wizard daVinci surface painting system of applying French mat lines and panel designs to blank white matboards clearly integrates this concept into mat designing. Since the computer system encourages the addition of colors, lines and textures, overdesigning can easily occur.

Whether accenting these visual textures of colored marble paper, slate stonework, or crumpled Kraft paper, any two different textural panel designs must be counted. The same goes for colors used within the textural designs. If more than one color is used to create the pattern texture, color is still only counted once (see Photo 6).

If there are three mats that are off white and of the same smooth texture, only line would be counted. If a panel design is introduced in any new color, both texture and color will be added to that single line element for a total count of three. They can add up quickly, but are only counted once. Multiple panels with various textures and colors will still only count once for the new element introduction.

If the items being framed are very busy with visual texture and color, it is far better to limit the total number of additional elements introduced into the framing design. Per-

haps more neutral or like colors to enhance and support through a more monotone textural approach. Be careful because textural contrasts, though generally only counted once, may require additional recognition when they appear to be screaming for attention. A perfect example is the textural white marble moulding vying for visual dominance with the green mat in Photo 1. This will end up being additionally counted as emphasis, which will be discussed in Part Ten of this series.

Not Simply the Matting

Textures can set a mood, reinforce a pattern, or emulate an era. Both tactile and visual textures are used in framing, for there are many wonderful materials at our fingertips. Creative moulding designs, refinishing, and retexturing mouldings are perfect examples of tactile textures working from the outside in. Always consider everything you do in a framing job, the whole of the presentation, not simply the matting. When it comes to texture, it all counts.

The more you learn about the elements of design, the more you may feel you don't know, but subliminally it often all comes together. Placement, pattern, color, contrast, and line all begin to work together as you design with limitations in mind. Remember to control the urge to showcase everything all at once; often the best designs work with the most subtle presentations, especially when introducing texture as a principle of your design. ■