

Photo Frame

by Stuart M. Altschuler

It's nice when your clientele allows you the freedom to create exceptional pieces from the objects they bring in to be framed. Looking at the kind of frame shop that regularly completes this type of project, you might think its hard to acquire that kind of reputation.

It really starts with just one project. Once the piece is completed, call the customer and let them know that it is finished, but that you'd like to keep it on display for a week. Most will be flattered that you think the piece is good enough to display.

Use that week to talk up the display to everyone who comes into your shop. Presto! Your reputation has begun to build.

One such project was that of a customer who brought in some old photos that had been discovered in an attic. She wanted to have them framed nicely, and we quickly settled on an appropriate gold frame with archival matting. When I noticed there was a duplicate photo, I asked her if she would like me to do something special with it.

Her response was enthusi-



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astic. When she returned to pick up the framed pieces, I told her that I had an idea for the duplicate photo, but that it might be expensive. “Just as long as it’s nice,” she replied. Then I explained that I would frame the photo and use the frame as the top cover of a jewelry box. This could be easily accomplished using standard mouldings and framing supplies. In fact, some of the moulding manufacturers make families of mouldings with the same finish in different profiles. These are perfect for this type of project.

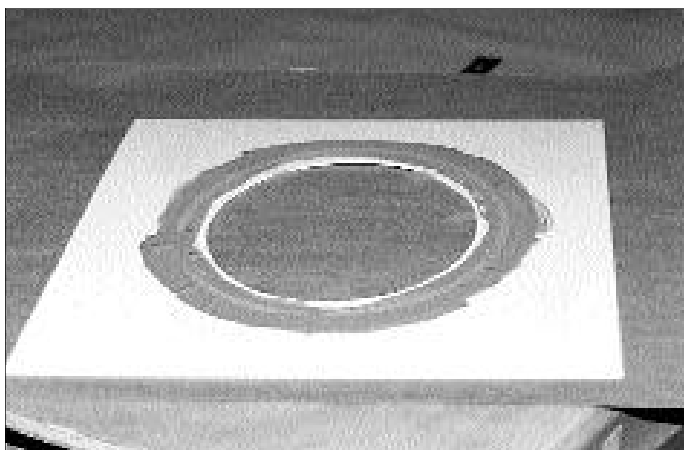
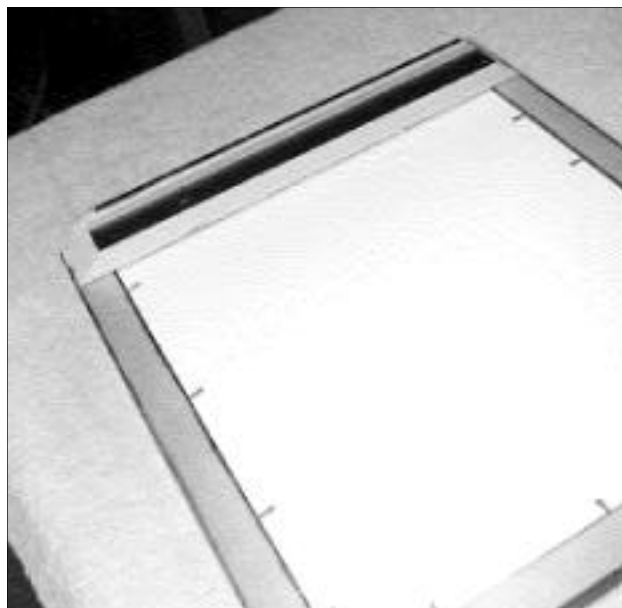
To begin, I selected a matting treatment for the photo. I chose an oval opening, off-white mat and decorated it with a French panel. I then double over-matted this in a square cut mat. To complement this I picked a moulding that was available in a deep shadowbox profile, which would be used upside-down to form the base of the box. The flat profile of the same moulding family was to be used for the top.

I assembled the top of the box first. To build the base, I carefully measured the outside dimension of the finished top piece. At my chopper, I cut the deep profile base to the exact outside dimension measured. This dimension is critical: remember that you are measuring and cutting an outside dimension, not an inside dimension; and be sure to test the exact measurement by placing each rail along the top piece when it is lying flat on its face. The rail should be exact.

Before assembling the base it must be machined for the hardware. The base has to be weighted as well, so that the box doesn’t tip back when it is open.

The top of the box will be attached to the base with two hinges. Since I didn’t want the top to go all

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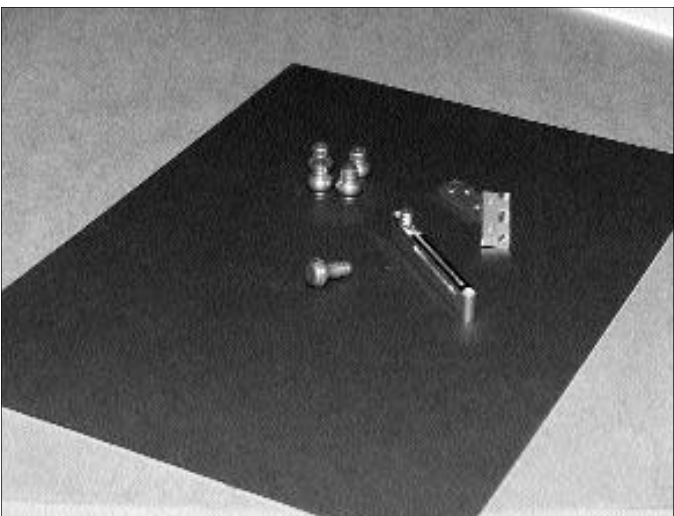
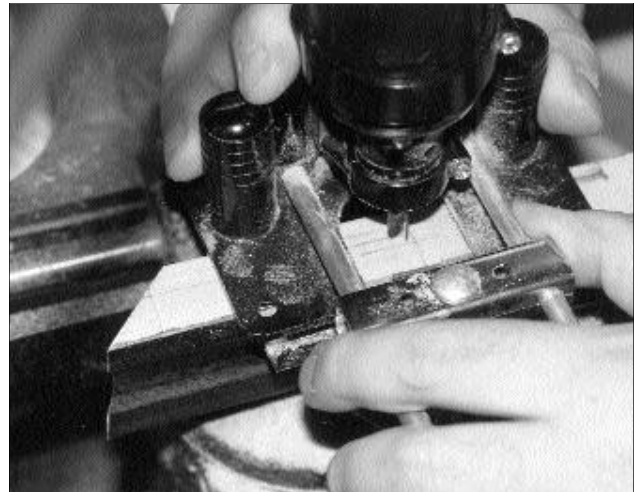
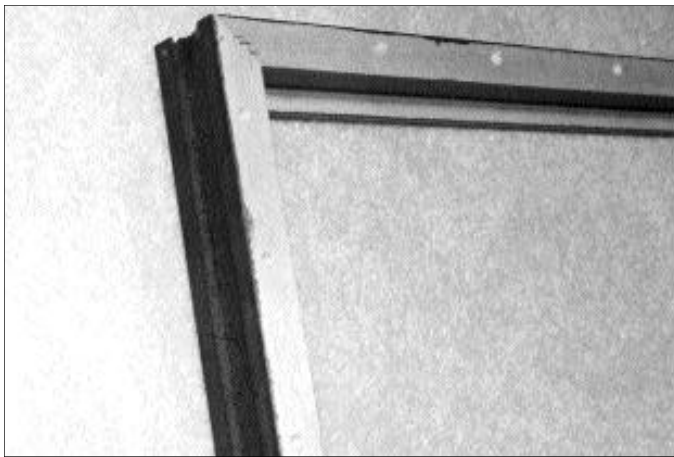
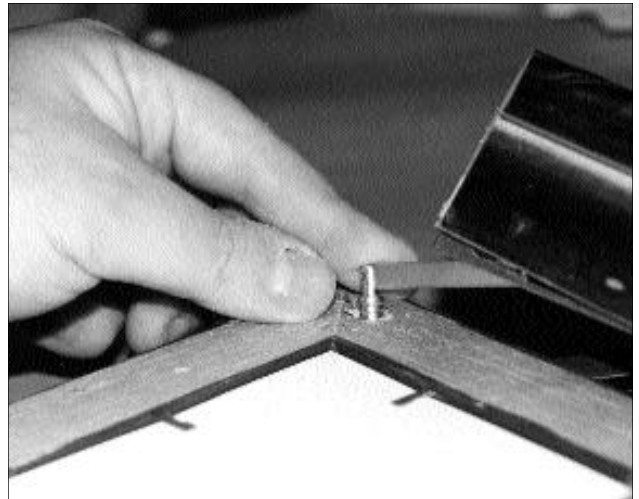


the way back, I used 100 degree positive stop hinges so that it would stop halfway. I chose a more expensive brass hinge that was more attractive and more durable. I also used a lid support to hold the top open. The created the handle for the top with a brass pull.

Next, I machined the rails of the base. First I marked and cut the mortise for the lid support to the manufacturer's directions. There are a couple of ways to make this mortise. The first is to use a drill, making repeated overlapping holes until enough material is removed and the lid support fits snugly. When the drilling is finished, a sharp chisel is used to clean out the mortise. The second alternative is easier, but involves the use of a router with the appropriate (I.e. One that matches the size of the mortise required) straight cutting

Top left: Carefully measure the dimension of the piece at your chopper. Top right: Remember that you will need the outside dimension, not the inside dimension. Center left: An oval opening, off-white mat with a french panel was chosen for the photograph. Center right: The matting package is assembled to be fitted into the top frame, the lid of the box. Bottom: The rails for the top and bottom of the box must be machined before they are assembled.

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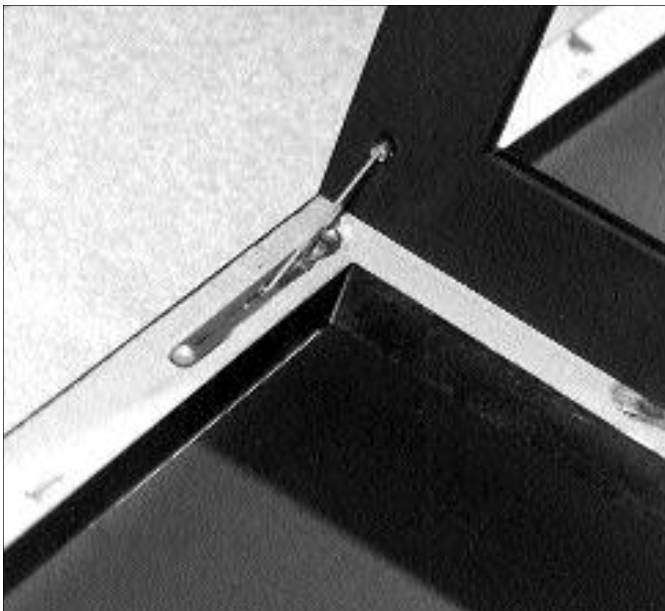
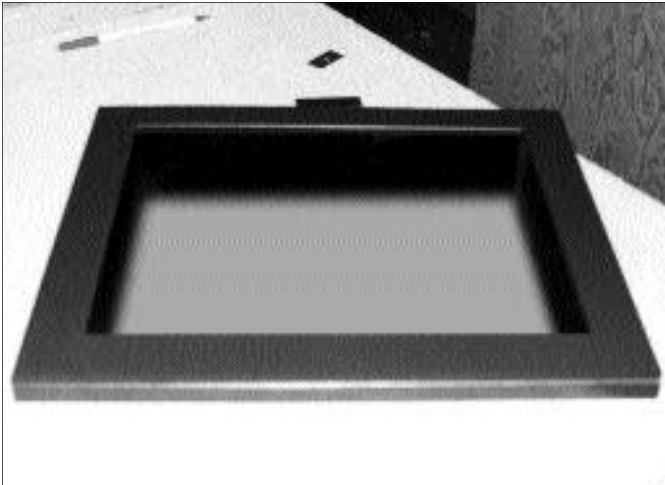


Top left: Holes in the rails, 1/4" wide and 1/2" deep, were filled with lead to weight the bottom of the box. Center left: When the lead cools, file the holes flush. Bottom left: Some of the hardware needed to assemble the box. Top right: Dry fit the box support to make sure it is correct. Center right: A router will be needed to cut the mortise. Bottom right: A bottom for the base was created with Gatorfoam®.

bit. One marks the start and stop point on the rail and cuts the mortise; no cleanup is necessary.

I weighted the base with lead fishing weights. First, I drilled eight holes 1/4" wide and 1/2" deep into the rails of the base. Then I heated the lead weights in a small pot until they were molten. Next, I carefully poured the hot lead into each of the small holes in the

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Top: The mirror is fitted into the inside of the box lid. Bottom: Once the mirror and artwork are fitted inside the box lid, and the base is configured with compartments made with Gatorfoam, the two pieces are joined together with hinges and other hardware.

rails. When the lead cooled, I gently filed it flush. Then I joined the base just like I do any other frame.

Next, I needed to create a bottom for the base; I decided to use Gatorfoam®. This was secured into the base with framers points. Then, with the moulding facing down, covered with a snugly fitting piece of black suede matboard attached with ATG tape.

Now I dry fitted the box lid support and carefully machined the top (the finished frame). Then I cut a 1/8" mirror to fit the back of the top, leaving a margin of 1/2"

all around. The mirror must be positioned so that it does not interfere with the box lid support. Silicon glue can be used to attach it.

Using black core, black suede matboard again, I cut a mat whose outside dimension to the exact size of the frame. I used a 2" margin on all four sides and made the appropriate cutout for the box lid supports. When attempting to place this over the mirror, it usually won't lie flat. I use some scraps of any black core mat to build up the sides, taking care to preserve the box lid support cut out.

I then decided on the configuration for the base. Unless my clients specify otherwise, I layout the base as shown in Diagram 1. I make the divisions by cutting a multiple-opening mat with 1" separating the compartments. The outside dimensions of the mat match those of the base and the outside margins of the mat cover the edges of the base. I support the internal mat openings and make the compartments by stacking black foam board to fit. It's important not to forget to make a cutout for the box lid support.

The final assembly is easy. I lay the completed box top and bottom on my bench, then mark the mortise and attach the hinges. Next, I install the box lid support. Finally, I install a small knob in the center of the front side of the top to serve as a handle. You can even add jewelry box feet if you wish.

For most special projects like this one, I first look at the materials and the estimated labor and ask, "Is this enough?" I have charged anywhere from \$500 to \$750 on jobs such as these, depending on the mouldings I used. At this kind of rate, you can take the time necessary to ensure that you are producing a quality product.

Clients are impressed when you produce a heirloom quality piece for them, and price is never an object for something that will be passed down through generations. Besides, if you don't lose a job on price once in a while, then you're just not charging enough. ■