

Creating Gilded Mats

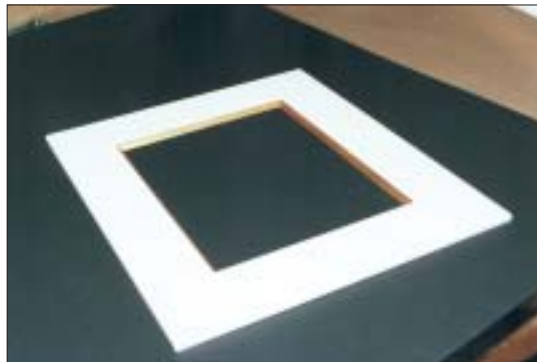
By Stuart Altschuler



Gilded mats are an easy way to create a classic look for your clients. Previous experience with gilding isn't necessary for you to master the technique.

Often times, clients will bring work into my shop looking for something special. In many cases they have come to us as a referral from a friend or neighbor for whom we have framed a piece. I treat each customer's art or memorabilia with the same special feeling that they attach to it and most importantly, convey that to them. Therefore, most of my clients insist on my creative concepts to design just the right thing for their work. In order to do that and not fall into a rut, I am always thinking of new things. Mat gilding is a distinctive addition to a high quality framing job.

Within the last couple of years a new product was introduced to the industry – bevel board. This product allows the framer to do interesting depth treatments in matting. In



my shop, we offer a gilt deep bevel edge as an alternative to fillets. Because of the depth aspect, many feel that this gives a richer look to their artwork.

In this article, we will focus on three gold edge preparations. The first preparation is done with a gilt cream. The second technique involves gold metal leaf. The third

technique is more traditional and can use either metal leaf or real gold.

Before we begin with the procedures, a brief explanation of the bevel board and its construction is necessary. Bevel board is a stiff foam product 2 3/4 inches wide, sold in 8' lengths. It is available with either a 1/4" or 3/8" deep bevel. Some framers chop and join it like a frame, but others have dif-

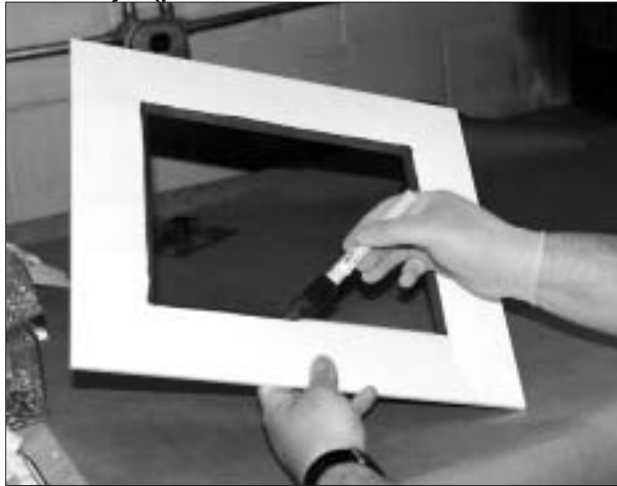
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faculty with this. Another means of construction, much easier and less wasteful, uses a special cutter and is proprietary. The methods that are explained here will work regardless of the construction method.

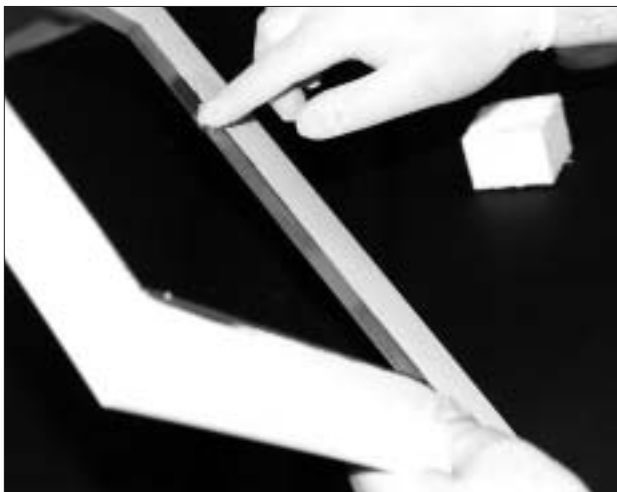
Before putting gold on the bevel edge, you must prepare the surface. Our first technique uses gilt creams. These creams are available in several shades of gold and it is best to have a sample of each made up to allow your customers' input to the selection. In order to apply the gilt creams, you need to paint a fontenay base on the bevel edge. The base is available in two colors, red and yellow. The choice of colors is an aesthetic decision, and while there really is no show through, the base color does have a slight effect on the overall color of the gold.

Shake the jar of fontenay base and then stir it with your brush to make sure all of the clumps are dissolved. I use cheap synthetic disposable brushes available at any home center. The fontenay base cleans up with turpentine and to avoid using the turps, I'll do a number of mats at one time and then discard the brush.

Use a nice even stroke to avoid puddling, especially in the corners, and move along quickly. Don't worry about splashing over the top or bottom of the bevel board, as this will not be seen. When you've finished, set it aside to dry. I usually put a piece of kraft paper or scrap cardboard down on my bench before starting and then just pick that up with the painted bevel board atop and set it aside to



If covering the deep bevel with gilt creme, the surface must first be covered with a fontenay base.



The gilt creme can simply be rubbed on with your finger.



Metal leaf can be adhered to the bevel board with ATG tape. The entire bevel must be covered with ATG.

dry. Drying time, although dependent on the humidity, is usually less than 30 minutes.

When dry, open your jar of gilt cream and apply it by putting some on your finger and lightly rub onto the bevel edge. I use a latex glove to eliminate clean-up. In less than five minutes you can cover a 20 x 24 inch opening bevel edge beautifully. The gilt cream is a wax-based product and will dry to the touch in a few hours and set up totally in about 18 hours. I always gild on one day and finish up by attaching the mat to the now gilt bevel board with ATG tape the following day.

The second technique is quite effective even though traditional gilders might cringe at its use. No preparation of the bevel board is necessary. Merely take a roll of ATG tape and apply it to the bevel edge leaving a small portion on the top and bottom of the board. Do not use an ATG dispenser and be careful that coverage with the tape is complete. If there are any spots that don't get ATG, the gold will not stick. Once you have applied the ATG, the bevel board is now ready to accept the gold.

Take a book of metal leaf and, using a sharp scissors, cut it into thirds. Now take one of the pieces of the book and carefully open it to a page with gold. Place the bevel edge of the board down in the center of the gold sheet and lift gently. You will find that the gold is nicely

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attached to the bevel edge. The best way to smooth the rest of the gold and apply to the top and bottom of the board is with your fingers. But wait! If you touch this gold metal it will tarnish unevenly over time. It is best to use white cotton photo gloves (reusable) for this. Continue to apply the metal leaf until you have covered the entire bevel.

Some prefer to smooth the gold and eliminate any excess using cotton balls or cotton swabs. While you now have a beautiful edge, the job is not complete. Metal leaf will tarnish over time and must be top-coated to prevent this. You may use a clear shellac, a microcrystalline wax or a gold metal leaf top coat. This attractive bright finish always draws favorable comments.

Our last method is the most traditional. It can be used to apply metal leaf or real gold leaf. For this article I will discuss the use of metal leaf because it can be easily handled with gloved hands. For those adventurous sorts who want to try this using real gold leaf, there is a gold leaf product called patent leaf that would be easiest to start with. Patent leaf is real gold that is attached to a paper backing.

The board should be coated first with the fontenay base as described above. Alternatively a japan color could be painted on. When this is dry, use a brush apply a coat of oil size (I use Wunda) to the bevel edge, leaving a small amount on the top of the board as well. This gold sizing requires approximately 30 minutes to



Once the metal leaf has been cut in thirds, it can easily be applied to the ATG.



If you'd like to use real gold but are a little uncertain, patent leaf is an easy-to-work-with alternative. Here patent leaf sheets are cut in thirds like the metal leaf was.



Photo 6: The patent leaf is easily applied since it will stick to its base paper until adhered to the bevel.

“come to tack” (is ready to gild). Once ready, take the strips of metal leaf, cut as above, and gently place them on the bevel board. If using patent leaf, you could cut this into thirds and then press the patent leaf to your sized bevel edge. If you work with metal leaf you must put a finish coat on top of the gold. The use of a cotton ball is recommended. Real gold will never tarnish, so no top coat is necessary.

As with most creative techniques, the procedures are all relatively easy once you are familiar with them and can be done in little time. The results, however, are far from routine and you can charge appropriate prices for these spectacular looking effects. Not only will your customers gladly pay extra, but they will brag to their friends and neighbors about what a great framing job they had done. And, they'll come back for more.

While prices vary depending on your location and your clientele, I charge the following per foot.

With gilt creme:	
1/4"	\$9.00
3/8"	\$10.00
With metal leaf	
1/4"	\$9.50
3/8"	\$10.50

If I use real gold, the price will depend on the cost of the gold. ■