

# Mastering Mounting



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## *Plaquing: Where It All Began*

**P**laquing is not new. In fact, it's been part of the framing industry for decades. And although it is a contemporary approach, it emulates classic 18th century *découpage*. This is the art of applying cut paper images to furniture and accessories, layering it with 30 to 35 coats of lacquer, sanding it smooth between every five coats, and making it appear to be hand-painted.

Thirty years ago *découpage* was very popular in the craft market. By the end of the 1970's, traditional *découpage* layering techniques had evolved into the more expeditious method of mounting stripped

posters to painted boards (much like canvas transfers) using acrylic mediums that cleaned up with water and dried quickly. Still known as *découpage*, the process is now much faster and user-friendly.

### *History Revisited*

The current method of mounting and laminating a certificate, photograph, or open edition reproduction (a.k.a. poster) onto wood has been around for a long time, but doesn't quite date back to the 18th century. The concept of plaquing was first introduced to the mass production and framing markets in North America in the early 1970's by Drytac Corporation, located in Canada.

Ever since its introduction, plaquing has been a huge industry in Canada and Europe. However, it never really took off in the United States. Then, in Atlanta last September, I noticed Hunt Corporation had begun teaching plaquing with their tissues and laminates. Although it is commercially done with hydraulic heat presses in Canada, this technique has always been possible in mounting presses in the U.S. but it had never really been promoted until now.

### *Richard Kelley and The Birth of Plaquing*

In 1963, Richard Kelley moved from London, England, to Canada and started a manufacturing company called Drytac Corporation. He was set upon serving the creative needs of the mounting and laminating customer. In 1971, Kelley began



Photo 1: These placemats and coasters are samples of the original type of laminated materials produced by Richard Kelley in the early 1970's. These particular images of the author's have been licensed to Pimpernel International, England, by Wild Apple Licensing.

importing and distributing giftware from the United Kingdom. This giftware included mounted/laminated table placemats similar to those shown in Photo 1.

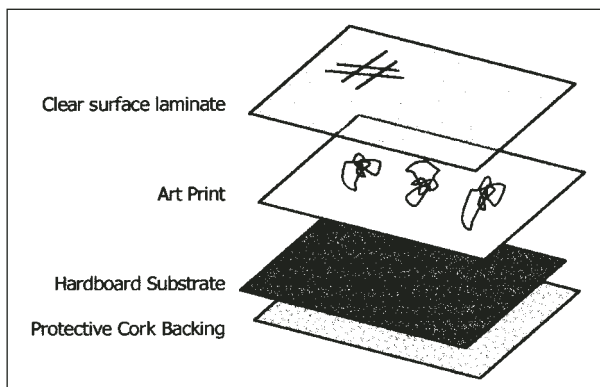
This type of product, not previously available in Canada, became a huge success. He began to manufacture them with a machine he had located in England and almost immediately received an order for 24,000 coasters. Soon after, he began to promote the idea of laminated pictures and photographs to framers and photographers, and the business really took off. Plaquing was born into picture framing.

### ***Off The Wall***

Placemats and coasters such as the ones seen here are upper-end, home decor products that remain very popular today. I currently have a series of images published and licensed by Wild Apple Graphics that are in production by Pimpnel International out of England.

A closer examination of them illustrates the layered construction of a protective laminate applied to the surface, designed to withstand temperatures of 230°F without damage or separation (see Photo 2). The art print is heat- and pressure-mounted to a substrate of hardboard made of eucalyptus wood backed with cork (see Diagram 1). These are often made in very high pressure, hydraulic mounting presses, not generally found in the U.S.

Besides the commercially produced placemats, framers can offer custom-made placemats, as well as coasters and serving trays. Old maps, lightfast wrapping papers, decorative papers, fabrics, and perhaps even wallpaper could be used if they are



*Diagram 1: In plaquing, the art is heat- and pressure-mounted to a substrate of hardboard of eucalyptus wood backed with cork.*

thin enough and free of copyright. Photographs may be used as long as the customer has taken the photo (whether traditionally or digitally) and owns the negative. Copyright-free, open edition prints may also be used. With a little imagination, the possibilities are nearly endless.



*Photo 2: This close up view better shows the layered construction of the placemat. They are constructed of a laminate applied to print to a hard-wood substrate with a cork backing.*

### ***Licensing and Copyright***

We must always remember the copyright issue when creating new products from images that have been published with the intent of being displayed in a picture frame. Preserving the dignity of the art by enhancing and protecting it is our job, even with open edition, decorative art.

Images you see on an array of commercial products, from placemats to drinking glasses to shower curtains to key chains, have all been approved by the artist and they in turn are paid

for that permission. When we take an image and place it inadvertently onto a placemat or turn it into a serving tray, we are breaking the artist's copyright if we have not received permission from their publisher.

I have discussed this issue when teaching how to canvas transfer an open edition image. Prior to turning any image into a plaque, you should obtain publisher permission. As an artist, I have been called numerous times by my publisher to obtain my permission to place my small Asian images onto

plates as decal transfers. My rice paper images worked on ceramic plates. But, just as a watercolor image does not belong on a canvas transfer, I would not approve of my

Asian images on wood grain. It's sometimes a simple matter of media and not technique that could matter.

### ***A Process By Any Other Name***

The process of plaquing has many names, depending upon the company promoting the concept. It originated, and I first heard about it, in the late 1980's when I first met Mr. Kelley in Toronto. Hunt Corporation calls it plaque art, and I have seen it advertised commercially in art stores and

trophy shops as plaque lamination as done by M.E.S. Lamination. And there must be other names for it too.

Whether known as plaquing, plaque art, or plaque lamination, the concept, process, technique, equipment, and most of the materials used are basically the same. Designs are modified by the edging and presentation. Let's examine...

### Plain, Float, or Flat Mounting

Plain mounts (a.k.a. float mounts in the photo industry) are the most basic forms of print presentation and protection. When a print or photograph is pre-mounted with a permanent adhesive, trimmed to remove outer adhesive to size, then mounted onto the center of a colored backing board, it is called float mounted.

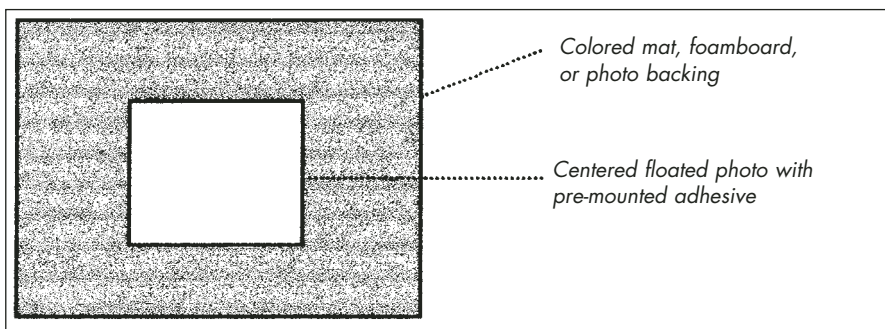


Diagram 2: Photographs are commonly float mounted as 11"x14" photo prints onto a 16"x20" display board. Borders are generally 2" to 3" around and although this is not the preferred method for glazing and framing, it is frequently used for photo storage.

desired. This is perfect for displaying photos, new product information, signage, and commercial announcements.

### Flush Mounting

When a mounted image extends clear to the edge of the substrate and is not matted, it is known as flush mounting. Popular in the 1950's, it has traditionally been used with photo-

because it makes it vulnerable to dents and bending.

### Materials

Plaques may be produced as boards or often appear to be boxes, but are often not boxes at all. They may be constructed to have the illusion of depth and to appear as a box. Poster art, open edition reproductions, and photographs may be mounted and

laminated onto a hardboard as a substrate and in turn be completed in a box-like form.

Rigid board surfaces most often selected for this technique include 1/8" Tem-

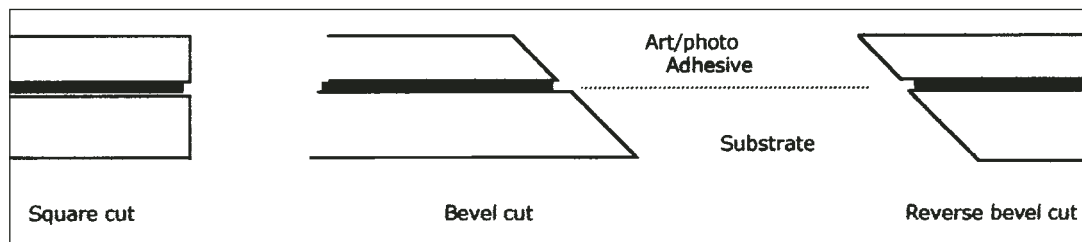


Diagram 3: These wood substrates may be blunt cut, bevel cut, reverse bevel cut, or decoratively routed to help create the illusion of either floating the image or outlining it as when flush mounting.

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This concept of float mounting also applies to plaquing. Float mounts are a lightweight, safe presentation. The absence of glazing both minimizes the weight and makes it safe for hanging around children. They travel well and may have frames placed around them later as simple mounted and laminated images if

graphs, but may also work with posters and cards. The process is achieved by either trimming excess white edges from the print prior to mounting, or by mounting everything slightly larger and then trimming down.

The mounted print/board unit may be bevel, reverse bevel, or square cut at the exact photo edge for increased dimension. If the mounted photo is to be floated in a shadow box frame, the edges will remain undamaged. If mounting photos for storage, flush mounting defeats the purpose of protecting edges by trimming the board to the image edge

pered Masonite (1/2", 3/4", or 1" pine boards; 3/8" to 1" MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard); and sanded plywood. These wood substrates may be blunt cut, bevel cut, reverse bevel cut, or decoratively routed to help create the illusion of floating the image or outlining it as with flush mounts.

Soft wood, with its edges routed and shaped, is generally painted or stained prior to mounting. Next it is laminated so the exterior edging becomes the pseudo frame. This is similar to découpage techniques popular in the craft industry during the 1970's and 1980's.

## Types of Edging

Although I am discussing plaquing here, which utilizes wood rather than foam board products, I have touted the use of thicker  $\frac{3}{16}$ " and more rigid foam products like MightyCore, SmoothMount, and Gatorfoam in the past to create non-wood mounting presentations called illusionary boxes (see *PFM*, May 1993).

The same effects of edging for plain, flat, float, or flush mounting may all be achieved using these boards. But they are not really plaques then; just mounted laminated images onto a mounting paper substrate.

## Equipment

Recently Drytac Corporation began selling a new edger called the DES-1. It is a large scale production unit designed for the serious plaquer. It shapes (routes), finishes, and applies the color to the edges of plaques in preparation for surface mounting and lamination. It is capable of bonding high temperature foils between 300-365°F for the ultimate in decorative application. It also boasts a continuous feed conveyor to move the plaque from the shaping station to the cleaning station.

## Where Does Plaquing Fit In?

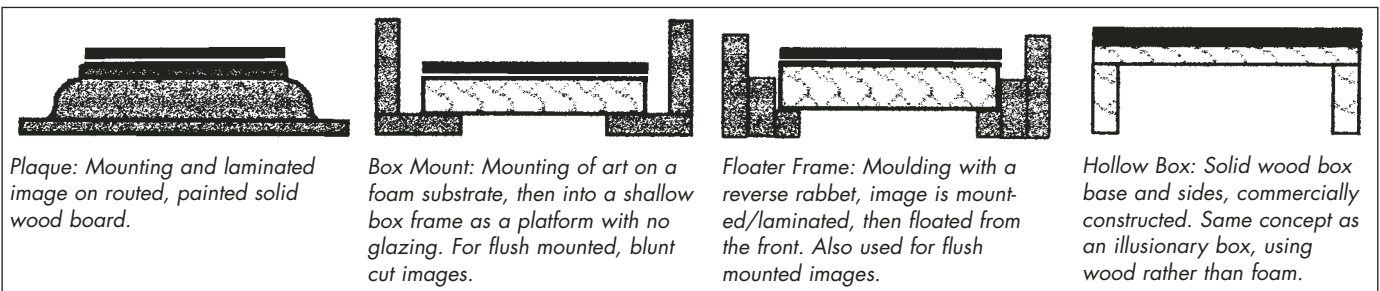
The technique of plaquing has been a part of our industry for nearly half a century. It will no doubt continue to have a presence in select markets, particularly the OEM (original equipment manufacturer) market that supply art to furniture and discount stores.

As professional custom picture framers, our goal is to glaze and place beautiful mouldings around gorgeous multiple mats for fine art presentations. So although we may question the validity of this technique, we should realize as we venture into the gift market that there is more to a gallery and framing operation than picture framing.

The real question here might be if offering plaquing as an option to framing will bring in additional revenue. Or if it will water down the desire for wider mats, fillets, and glazing on images for home decor.

Perhaps it is no contest. After all, this process is only suitable for copyright-free, open edition images—not fine art, limited editions. If all the options are presented to the customer by showing beautiful wall samples of all price points and options, the customer will select the presentation they like best.

Offering everything the customer may want, need, or



## Traditional Plaquing Versus Boxes

Plaquing is noted as the mounting and laminating of images to flat, decorative edged boards. There are also other types of mouldings and frames that can be used to create a different look for posters and photo prints. These are noted and compared in Diagram 4 as the basic plaque, box frame, floater frame, and hollow box.

The plaque and hollow box both have the structure and appearance of a solid board or box with an image mounted to the surface. The box frame and floater frame are obviously images mounted to a separate substrate, then affixed into the frame. Although the diagram notes these as foam board, solid wood plaquing may also be fit into the design.

never even considered will make you the very best source for them to consistently bring their treasures. Plaquing may not be for every framer, but if you've never considered it before now, keep an open mind. A few years ago we all thought that canvas transferring would be a flash in the pan too. ■

*Note: A special thank you is extended to the companies who helped with the historic information and current product information. Excerpts and information taken from The Mounting and Laminating Handbook, and Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating, both available from PFM PubCo. Additional information supplied by Drytac Corporation, Hot Press International, and Hunt Corporation.*