

Mastering Mounting



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Wrapped Mats: Utilizing Mounting Skills

The practice and technique of wrapping mats with fabric has been around for a very long time; in fact, that method was used long before fabric surface matboards came onto the scene. Creating a basic wrapped mat with either fabric or paper is quick and easy, and it's a technique that should be in every framer's repertoire. These designs can be completed with either cold or hot methods of mounting. For the cold method, they may be done manually, or with the assistance of a cold vacuum frame that draws air out to create pressure to make a bond; the hot method can be performed in a dry mount system.

Basic Wrap Materials

When wrapped and embossed mat designs are chosen for fine art, always take into account the degree of acidity and lightfastness of any chosen decorative paper or fabric. Many beautifully colored materials that are dyed, rather than pigmented, can rapidly light fade even under normal tungsten lighting. Whatever the materials and visual textures, the focus should be on choosing something that will enhance and protect the art without overpowering it.

For decorative art, there are times when a material may be selected because of its visual texture, pattern, or color regardless of acidity or lightfastness issues. Some fabrics don't absorb, and some papers are tough to bend. Just remember that you have to deal with the issues surrounding whatever material is selected.

Fabrics

Most fabrics adapt well to wrapped or

embossed mats, but there are a few basic considerations. Thick fabrics are more difficult to force down into a deep beveled foam window without being left with a bulky clump of fabric at the corner. Thin fabrics have a tendency to color tint, by picking up the ghosted color of the matboard it is being mounted to.

A woven pattern can make the threads appear pulled, distorted, or out of alignment when forced into a corner. Synthetic materials don't absorb adhesive, and the adhesion of objects will pull from the substrate as a result of gravity. Natural animal-based materials, such as wool and silk, may require mounting specifically to unbuffered boards to better retard the acceleration of fabric deterioration with the higher levels of alkaline in buffered boards. Be familiar with selected fabrics, their properties, wrapping potential, and limitations. There are fabulous fabrics available that are neutral pH and highly recommended for preservation wrapping.

Papers

The mounting technique for wrapping with paper is virtually the same as wrapping with fabric. Essentially any paper may be used for wrapping, from acidic, light fugitive newsprint to wallpaper to Mexican bark to Strathmore charcoal paper. Some are better suited to wrapping than others. The thicker or stiffer the paper, the tougher it is to wrap. Some papers are very soft and flexible, which enables them to adapt well to surface embossing (see "Part Two: Embossed Mats"

next month). Others may require wrinkling techniques to soften the fibers allowing for additional flexibility.

There *are* a few additional things to consider with paper. For one, thin

Japanese papers with long fibers may be wadded into a ball to create the wrinkled paper technique as mentioned above. This technique softens the fibers of thin, stiff papers allowing them to contour around corners. This process applies well to long-fibered Japanese papers as well as thick, short-fibered Western-made papers (see Diagram 1). Crush the selected paper into a ball before dry mounting to the window mat, open flat, and then mount with film adhesive.

Adhesives

Dry mounting is the most time efficient and long-term mounting process for wrapping. By selecting a 100% pure film adhesive, the melted adhesive is allowed to contour and adhere the materials around, and into, all the nooks and crannies of the window mat design. An average mounting temperature of 185°-200°F for three to five minutes may vary with the press used, thickness of wrapping materials, and dimensions of the mat.

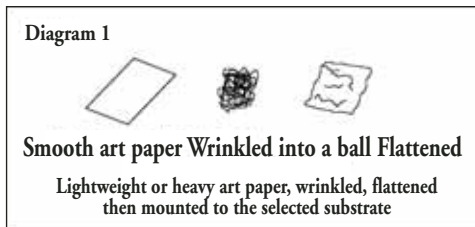
Time held within the press will also affect the end-product. Adhesive is drawn towards the heat source in a dry mount press so this also increases the absorption process as adhesive is pulled by heat into the paper. The longer the mounting package is left in a press, the more transparent a porous paper or fabric will be as it becomes more saturated with adhesive.

Many synthetic fibers such as polyester and acetate will not absorb adhesive. Once mounted, even a properly mounted fabric may be peeled from the adhesive/substrate without damage. Mounts using films may appear shiny when viewed at an angle. This may be mistaken for adhesive absorption, when it is merely the melted adhesive beneath the thin open weave of the sheer fabric.

Wet glue and cold mounting may also be selected as the adhesive and method of choice. Since many wet glues reactivate when heated, the fabric flaps and edges will be adhered with an iron after initial bonding.

Substrates

Selecting a substrate that is stable, buffered, unbuffered, white, black, or colored will depend entirely



upon the wrapped project itself. Papers and fabrics need to be matched to their appropriate substrate so as not to accelerate deterioration of framed art or textiles. Whether you select a 4-ply matboard, black on black foam, or a 3/16"

colored foamboard, any time a colored substrate is used beneath a thin mounting, the color of the substrate may alter or tint the original mounting. Match materials carefully.

Acid-free and black foamboards make good substrates for wrapping. These two types of boards have a "toothy" surface that absorbs adhesive to facilitate bonding. And while acid-free foam may be selected more for its tooth and texture than for its acid neutrality, it remains an added bonus to be neutral pH. Its porosity has a greater ability to hold when mounted to regardless of the adhesive used.

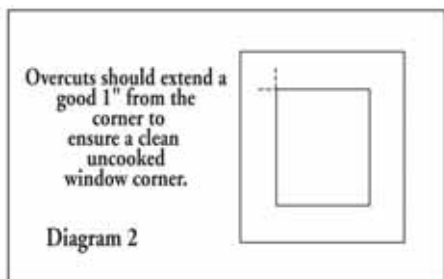
Clay-coated regular foam may be used, but the coated surface can transfer or rub off during wrapping. These clay-coated boards are also not as absorbent as the other possible substrate choices. Foamboards with soft cotton paper surfaces are receptive to wrapping; however, they also have a tendency to drag when bevel cutting. Matboards of 4-, 6-, or 8-ply work well and may be the substrate of choice for many projects. These boards may be the only choice for smaller projects or shallow mouldings.

Overcutting

When performing a wrapping project, choose a foamboard that can be cut with a very clean edge with little or no bunching or pulling. There are numerous reasons why foam will bunch when cut. A dull, burred, or broken tip blade; a blade not extended far enough or extended too far; or a foamboard with a soft center prone to pulling can all create frustrations during cutting.

One way to avoid bunching is to begin with a new .012" blade and extend it to accommodate the thicker substrate. It is important to overcut the corners at least 1" to ensure a clean cut corner; more is fine, just do not weaken the sides by cutting too close to the outer mat perimeter (see Diagram 2). When extending the blade to accommodate

the thicker board, it will be more prone to hooking during initial entry because of the lack of blade support when extended beyond traditional 8-ply thicknesses. Overcutting allows the hook to straighten out by the time it reaches the actual window corner for a clean, crisp cut.



Step-by-Step Technique: Dry Mounting

There are two steps required to achieve great wrapped mats in any mount system: first, fitting the fallout back into the window before mounting; and second, ironing the bevel to reactivate or reinforce the unmounted adhesive and adhere it to the bevel edge.

Size and cut the basic mat, or foamboard, window to its desired dimensions; then size the fabric 1" larger than the window mat (see Photo 1). Assemble and stack the mounting package, bottom to top: bottom release paper; window mat; adhesive; fabric; fall-out; and top release paper (see Diagram 3). Make certain the fall-out is well seated into the window opening (see Photo 2). Mount at 190°-200°F for one to three minutes in a softbed mechanical press, or two to four minutes for a hot vacuum press. Remove and cool under weight to allow the adhesive to cure.

Once it is cooled, place the window mat face-up and cut the inner window opening leaving 1" of fabric to raw edge, miter corners, and prepare to reinforce the bevel (see Photo 3). Hand iron the bevel edge to mount loose fabric or papyrus (see Photo 4).

Remember that foamboard is an insulator, rather than a conductor, of heat so the bevel will not fully mount the wrapping material due to the inserted fall-out. You may use either a commercial tacking, or household, iron set to just below the wool setting (no steam). Foamboard melts at 230°F so setting the iron just below "wool" melts the adhesive and not the foam. Too far below "wool" won't melt the adhesive.

When the bevel is ironed and all the corners are nicely pressed, turn the mat face-down and iron the flaps (or turnbacks) to the back of the mat window (see Photo 5). When turning back the tabs to complete the wrap, begin at the center and work toward corners. Pull lightly from the center toward the outside mat border as you work into the corners. This prevents most bevel puckering. One of the best things about removable adhesive is the option to reheat and shift small puckered bevels, even after turnbacks have been ironed to the back of the mat.

Cold Mounting

When performing a cold mount with wet glue, follow the same steps above. Make certain to evenly apply the adhesive to prevent moisture bleed and stay away from mounting materials that may be too thin. Place in vacuum frame or under weight until dry; then cut window opening with mat face-up. The bevel will be mounted

when the adhesive dries (unlike the above dry mounting) as long as it was properly applied to the bevel edge. Since the glue reactivates when heat is applied after drying, iron the flaps to the back of the window as above.

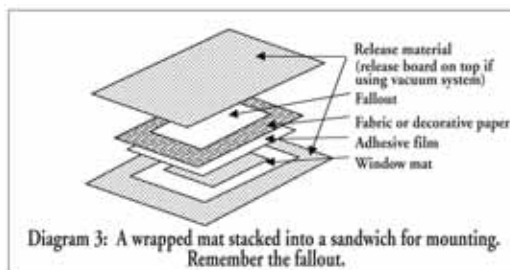


Photo 1: Window Mat—Size the mat and cut the window opening. Reserve the fallout for mounting.



Photo 2: Seating the Fallout—By seating the fallout back into the window opening the papyrus will be forced into the shape of the opening, ensuring all the deep 3/16" foam bevels will be covered once wrapped.



Photo 3: Removing the Window—Once it is mounted and cooled, remove the excess window material leaving about 1" to the bottom of the bevel. Always cut this with the mat face-up.



Photo 4: Reinforcing the Bevel—Since foamboard is a heat insulator, iron the bevel edge, making sure the flat of the iron is in total contact to the flat of the bevel in order to reactivate the adhesive and bond the papyrus to the bevel. Work well into the corners with the edge of the iron.



Photo 5: Ironing the Tabs—Once the bevels and corners are perfect, turn the mat face-down and iron the adhesive-backed tabs to the verso side of the mat opening.

Pricing

When calculating the pricing of a basic wrapped mat, consider the materials and time involved. Then, add in the charge for the specialty nature of this technique and the additional labor it requires. The price of a wrapped mat completed in a heat press should include an additional mounting charge to any standard wrapping charges. Often, suggested retail pricing is available through industry fabric supplier or distributor price lists. Sometimes it's as simple as doubling or tripling a specialty mat column in your point-

of-sale system. But always verify that all materials are covered and profits are added in.

As with any technique, the beauty in true custom framing is the excellence and skill with which the framing is completed. Never offer a technique when you are still in the learning stage for it, and don't display an in-store sample unless you are prepared to execute it for a customer.

Next month I will delve into embossed mats. Once the basic wrap is conquered, then applying a decorative surface design to that mat is

simply one more step towards a true unique custom design. Let the creativity continue! ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, Mounting Editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring commercial custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and industry consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, design creativity, and fine art, she works with industry leaders and has taught for the National Conference. She has written two books on mounting: [The Mounting and Laminating Handbook](#) (now in its second edition) and [Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating](#). She can be contacted at www.designsinkart.com.