

# The Mat Doctors



**Brian Barnett, CPF**



**Tim Franer, CPF, CMG**



**John E. Ranes II, CPF, GCF**

Three leading mat designers in the picture framing industry are here each month to answer some frequently (and not so frequently) asked questions about mat cutting or design techniques. With an average of 26 years of framing experience, they bring a wealth of knowledge to this column. If you've got a nagging problem with an aspect of cutting mats, or simply want to find out what the experts have to say about a certain technique, send in your question to [pmeditor@hobbypub.com](mailto:pmeditor@hobbypub.com) and The Mat Doctors will prescribe a remedy.

**Q.** Are there any special considerations I should take when cutting matboard of varying surface finishes, such as paper, fabric, or glossy?

**Tim and Brian reply:**

**Tim:** *Fabric*—When cutting a fabric surface matboard with a straight line mat cutter, the first step is to make sure you have proper tools to get a professional look. These include: the correct mat blade, new underlayment (or slip-sheet), tape, erasers, marking pen or pencils. Equipment and hands must be clean and free of oil.

To determine what depth to set your mat blade to when cutting fabric mats I use the following method: Take a scrap piece of the mat to be cut and practice setting the blade depth. To determine where that depth is located, lay your fabric mat face-down on the new underlayment, extend the mat cutting head past the end of your fabric mat, and lower the head until the blade touches the underlayment. Theoretically this should be the correct depth for your blade but I always extend a little deeper into the underlayment so that I get a clean cut through the thickness of each fabric mat. The depth of your blade is sometimes misleading because the fabric varies so your blade will need to be extended more than normal.

Make sure you move your underlayment after each cut so the blade does not travel in the same groove from the last cut. If you don't move your underlayment per cut it will sometimes create an irregular line in your mat.



Photo 1: Lightly mark the corners on the face of the mat.

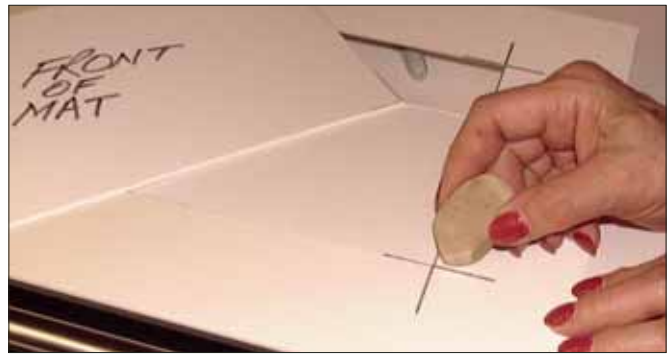


Photo 2: After cutting, erase the marks.

When cutting fabric mats from the face side-up (to create a mat with a reverse bevel), I suggest that when making your crop marks to cut from the top side you place Removable Magic Tape by 3M #811 on top of each cropping area. Make the crop marks on the tape and after cutting your reverse bevel and removing the fallout, remove the tape from the face of the mat. Be careful when marking the crop marks on top of the tape that you mark each crop line very lightly. Too much pressure will create an embossed area on the surface of your mat. When removing the tape, be careful not to release from the fabric too quickly; it might pull the fabric strands from the surface.

*Paper*—When showing a customer a matboard that is available in several patterns such as a plain surface, a linen texture or a tweed finish, and any one of these paper finishes work with the design, I suggest a texture finish instead of the plain. Why? If you have a slight overcut it can be burnished slightly to where you don't see it, but if you use a smooth, plain finish surface and you have a slight overcut, it will show regardless of how much you burnish it.

*Glossy Finish*—The best way to cut foils and glossy mat surfaces is to use mat stop guides to eliminate overcuts. If you can perfect cutting foils without mat stops consider yourself in the elite status; foils are the most noticeable when it comes to overcuts. If you have not perfected your cutting yet, you may not want to use a foil. Instead, try a paper mat in the same color. Glossy surfaces highlight overcuts even more than on a paper surface mat.

**Brian:** In his response above regarding fabric surface mats and cutting reverse bevels into them, Tim suggested marking your crop marks on 3M #811 Removable Tape

placed over the corners of the mat opening. This is an excellent tip and prevents having to draw pencil lines on the more delicate matboards. While we're on the subject, I've included here the instructions for one way of cutting a reverse bevel. (*Editor's Note: In December 2003, "The Mat Doctors," Brian illustrated three methods—including the one shown here—for cutting reverse bevels. Visit the PFM website, navigate to "Latest Issue," and click on "Mat Doctors" to view those techniques.*)

- 1) Set the matguide on your mat cutter at the selected border width.
- 2) Lightly mark the junctions of the opening in pencil on the face of the mat (see Photo 1) and cut from line to line.
- 3) Be sure to insert the blade tip directly on the line.
- 4) Make the cut and withdraw the blade when it reaches the bottom line.
- 5) The fall-out will hang up and should be trimmed out without disturbing the face of the mat.
- 6) Erase the pencil lines (see Photo 2). ■

**Brian Barnett, CPF**, an industrial designer by profession, has spent 25 years in custom framing sales, product and graphic design, merchandising, operations, production control, and financial management. He appears in training videos, has authored numerous training manuals and magazine articles, and teaches at educational venues. He currently is Larson-Juhl's consultant to the retail framing industry, consults with The Fletcher-Terry Co., and contracts for special projects with large industry retailers.

**Tim Franer, CPF, CMG**, has spent over 30 years in the art and custom framing industry. Known for his creative design and skilled craftsmanship, Tim is a former gallery owner and is currently a chairholder with the Color Marketing Group. He is currently development, design, and educational consultant for Nielsen Bainbridge.

**John E. Ranes II, CPF, GCF**, is an instructor of workshops and seminars throughout North America, Europe, South America, Australia, and New Zealand. He and his wife, Sarah, own a frame shop and gallery in Appleton, WI, which has won more than 60 framing awards. John also consults for The Fletcher-Terry Company.