

# Beautiful Bevels!

by Maria Nucci



The 8-ply bevel...that slender oasis between the art and the mat surface. As framers are using 8-ply matboards with greater frequency, the bevel gives us a fresh new surface to consider when designing. Like using a fillet, adorning a bevel can add an elegant accent to the frame design as well as draw the eye into the art. Using commonly found materials and moderate skill and patience, framers can add something unique to their design repertoire.

The two bevel treatments I'm about to describe are the striated (example at left), and the antiqued rub through (on opposite page). Both require the same materials—acrylic gesso, water-based tempera paint and watercolors. All are inexpensive and easily found in any art or craft supply store if you don't already have them in your shop. The key to these techniques is to create an acrylic base that dries to a hard finish, and apply a water-soluble top color that can be rubbed off to strategically expose the color or texture underneath.

## Preparing the Work Area

First, gather all the materials you'll need in a clean, well-lit area out of the way of other framing activities. There will be points at which layers of paint will need to dry undisturbed, so prepare space for that. Cover the table surface with paper.

Cut an 8-ply rag mat. I prefer to use Rising Museum Rag boards

## Materials

- 8-Ply Mat
- Acrylic Gesso (white)
- Tempera Paint (black)
- Acrylic Tube Paint (red)
- Watercolors (optional)
- Water Dish
- Palette Dish (or several cups)
- Bristle Brush (1/4"–1/2")
- Sable Brushes (various widths)
- 3M Ready Mask Painting Tape (available in hardware and home stores)
- Rags
- Sandpaper (fine)
- Steel Wool (fine)

because they're very dense and can withstand the moisture that these techniques introduce to the board. Some double-thick matboards may separate in the process. But experiment and see which boards work for you.

## Preparing the Mat

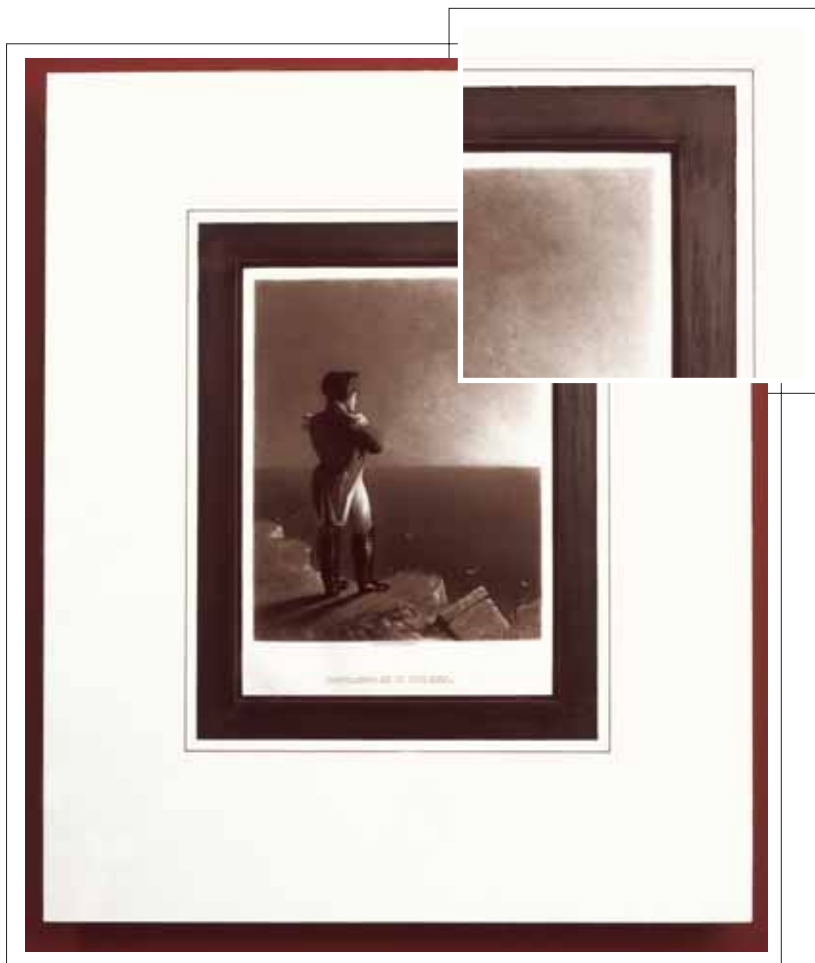
When cutting, be careful to avoid overcuts. They can cause the gesso finish to eventually crack in the corners. Use a fresh blade to prevent any rough edges, which can cause paint to feather or bleed on the bevel. Mask off the bevel with 3M's Ready Mask Painting Tape. This tape comes in a variety of widths, is removable, and rarely allows paint to creep under it when it becomes wet. The downside is that it has an aggressive tack, so remember to remove it slowly so you don't peel up your matboard. If you're preparing for the striated bevel, mask right up to the top of the bevel, exposing only the bevel (see photo below). If you're doing the antiqued rub through technique, rule a pencil line on the mat about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " out from the top of the bevel and mask it there (see photo on next page).

## The Striated Bevel

With a bristle brush apply the gesso on the bevel. Load the brush with a lot of paint and draw the brush from the top of the bevel down (see photo at far right). Keep loading the brush and stroking down as you move along the bevel. The idea is to create ridges with the paint. The more texture you create, the more nooks and crannies



*For the striated bevel, use the tape to mask flush with the top of the bevel. When applying gesso, draw the brush from the top of the bevel down.*



your accent color will have to get stuck in. Don't worry about the gobs of paint that will accumulate on top of the tape area. It will come off with the tape when it's dry. If your gesso is too thin and isn't holding its peaks, pour some in a dish and let it "dry" out a bit. You can also use acrylic paint in place of the gesso. Experiment with both.

Let the bevel dry, propping it up on blocks so the bevel doesn't stick to your worksurface. You may need to apply a second layer of gesso to get more texture and to make sure the surface is completely coated. After your second coat is completely dry, you're ready for a top coat of color.

Mix tempera paint of your choice with enough water to be the consistency of heavy cream. I often use white tempera with some watercolor to just slightly tint it. That's a more subtle effect, but you can use any tempera straight out of the

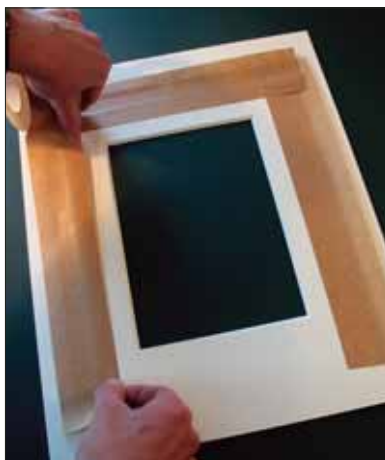


*Creating the striped appearance of the striated bevel takes finesse when rubbing off some of the color.*

bottle, thinned with water. Simply apply the color coat with a soft brush. The color needn't cover the high spots of the gesso completely, but make sure it falls into all the low spots. Let dry.

The last step takes a little finesse. With a slightly moistened rag, wipe off the bevel exposing the gesso underneath (see photo above). The color will remain in the low spots but will wipe off the high spots creating a two-toned texture. How much you wipe off is up to you. If you take off too much, apply a new coat of colored tempera and start again. After all is dry, carefully remove the tape. Scrape off any gesso residue under the mat with a razor blade.

Be creative and playful with this technique. Try using acrylic paint in different colors in place of



the white gesso undercoat. Experiment with your brush technique to create other textures or move your masking tape further away from the bevel for a wider panel of texture.

## Antiqued Rub-Through

For this technique, apply 3-4 coats of white gesso on the masked area with a soft brush allowing each layer to dry before applying the next. Sand very lightly with fine sandpaper after the last layer dries. The surface should be somewhat smooth, but some soft brushstrokes can remain. Be careful not to sand through to the matboard particularly near the top of the bevel.

Thin red acrylic paint with water to a creamy texture. Apply a heavy, smooth coat and let dry completely. The last coat is black tempera, again thinned to a creamy consistency and applied smoothly. Let dry.

The next step requires a light touch. With a moistened rag, rub off some of the black tempera exposing the red acrylic. Wipe an area lightly and let it dry. It looks different wet versus dry, so be patient. Little by little, remove black paint in subtle streaks on the surface of the mat and along the bevel (see photo below). If you rub off more black than you'd like, apply a new coat of the black tempera and try again.

Lastly, rub the surface with fine



*For the antiqued rub through bevel design, the tape is applied about 3/4" away from the bevel. Remove the black paint in subtle streaks to create the "rubbed through" appearance.*

steel wool. Be careful not to rub through to the matboard. The bevel will develop a slight sheen reminiscent of old lacquered wood.

Offering unique services differentiates you from the competition. Adding distinctive bevels to your design toolbox will add to your ticket price, but remember to do time studies; it's the only way to price your product. Create samples of designs you can produce quickly, easily and above all, profitably. Then sell the romance of a beautiful bevel! ■

Maria Nucci, is founder of Maria Nucci Designs and FrenchMatting.com. A graduate of Parsons School of Design, she spent 17 years in the picture framing industry as a custom framer, designer, and manager before launching her own company in 2001. Providing decorative matting services to the trade, she creates classic and unusual designs.



## Hints For Making It Easier

- Don't be afraid. The materials you're using are cheap, so experiment and have fun.
- Set up *all* your materials before you start.
- Make your first attempts simple.
- Use colors right out of the bottle or tube so you can duplicate them more easily.
- When making corner samples, make them 10"x13". Cut off the extra 3" when you're done and number both samples. The 10"x10" sample goes on the design counter and the 3" piece stays in the backroom. It's a quick reference and a place to note your paint colors.
- *Every time* you do something new, make a sample at the same time you're making the mat. You'll accumulate more selling tools!
- *Every time* you make a beautiful mat, keep track of your time. It's the only way to price your product.

## Tips for Selling Beautiful Bevels

- Have Samples. Corner samples and framed samples. Have them available for customers to "ooh" and "ahh" at.
- Keep your samples *clean!*
- Make samples *you* like. You'll sell a lot more of those.
- Make samples *they* like. Listen to your customers' feedback and make samples based on that.
- Try them on the unexpected. A black over red bevel on a diploma. A pink gesso bevel on a child's ballet photo. A bevel can make anything a little more special.
- When price is an issue and your customer is opting for a less expensive moulding, add a beautiful bevel. It'll add a few dollars a foot to your bottom line and still give the customer something special despite the compromise.
- Tell them it's *handcrafted*. Not much is these days and people love the idea.
- Pair a beautiful bevel with a fabric-wrapped top mat.
- If you're reaching for a fillet, try a bevel treatment instead.