

Another Dimension

Add Flair to Mat Designs with Composition Ornaments

by Jennifer Semple

People go to custom framers because they want something special and unique. Adding composition ornaments to matting is a quick and easy way to achieve that. With thousands of composition (or “compo”) ornaments available, you can be as traditional or untraditional as the art and customer require.

To sell a custom service like this it's best to have a framed sample displayed in your store. “You must show what a difference the compo can make,” says Linda Wassell, CPF of Frame Craft/Lampros Gallery in The Woodlands, TX. “The samples help the customer to see the skill you used to put all the elements together. They can see how complete it looks.”

Compo is available in numerous designs from industry suppliers. These motifs range from organic figures to architectural elements. Whether the ornaments are applied by being steamed, or with glue, they can be adhered to virtually any mat surface, including paper, fabric, glass, ceramic, and metal.

This technique does not involve a steep learning curve. “People are usually surprised with how easy compo is to use,” says Ed Semple, owner of Bomar Designs, a manufacturer of compo.

Following are the steps to take when adding compo ornaments to your mat design.

#1: Select the compo pieces you want to use, paying close attention to their size. You do not want the compo to get lost in the design, or to dominate it.

#2: Finish the compo to complement the moulding and/or mats you are using. Compo ornaments can be stained, painted, gilded, glazed, faux finished, or antiqued. In the



Photo 1: This artwork was nicely framed, but the designer wanted to add another element.



Photo 2: Composition (compo) ornaments were prepared on a steaming screen. The steam activates the glue in the compo.



Photo 3: The compo was then applied to the mat surface and left to dry for about 30 minutes.



Photo 4: The compo ornaments—selected for their patriotic motifs—help to embellish the simple image.

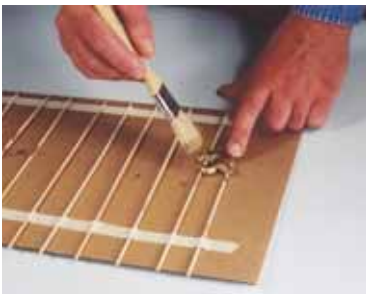


Photo 5: Before being applied to the mat surface, the compo can be finished in a variety of ways. Here, it is painted.



Photo 6: Before — This print is nicely framed.



Photo 7: After — The addition of compo enhances the design.



Photo 8: Shown here is another application of compo. The frame also has been adorned.

example on the opening page, the ornaments were finished with acrylic paint to match the matting elements. In the example above, the compo was finished to match the moulding.

Finish the top and sides of the ornament, but not the underside. One trick is to tape wooden skewers to cardboard, then lay the ornament on the skewers to finish it. (See Photo 5). This way, it won't stick to the cardboard.

#3: Steam the ornament. Steaming activates the glue contained in the compo and makes it flexible. You'll need

a steaming screen, which can be created by stretching a piece of cotton over a wooden frame (see Photo 3). You'll also need a pan and an electric burner, or crock pot, or hot plate to create the steam.

Once the water is simmering, place one finished ornament at a time on the screen. (The screen should be over the pot or pan.) When you touch the ornament and it slides, it is ready. This may only take a few seconds. Lift the ornament carefully with a spatula or pallet knife, being careful not to stretch or bend it too much. Once steamed, compo ornaments are pliable and can be curved—to complement an oval molding or an oval cut mat, for example.

If you do not plan to bend the compo, you can use any wood or white glue, instead of steam, to adhere the ornament.

#4: Place the ornament into position. Apply light pressure to create a bond between the surfaces. Steam-applied compo will bond almost immediately. Then, allow about 30 minutes of drying time before proceeding with framing.

#5: Frame, using a spacer so the compo doesn't touch the glass.

Pricing

Compo can give your designs a customized, high-end look that also adds to your bottom line. How much it adds depends on the specific project, but you can typically expect to add the cost of the actual ornaments, plus approximately one billable hour of labor. The hour will be spread over several small increments of time, but once you're comfortable with the finishing and applying process, this is sufficient for most shops. ■

Jennifer Semple and her husband Ed Semple own Bomar Designs in Louisburg, KS. Their company offers more than 1500 composition ornaments and has served the custom picture framing and gilding industries for 25 years, with Ed and Jennifer owning the business for the past eight years.