

The Mat Doctors



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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 and The Mat Doctors will prescribe a remedy.

Q. Can you give me tips for revitalizing suede mats that have crushed areas and/or scratched spots? Also, what is the best way to store suede mats?

Brian and Tim reply:

A. Brian: Following are a few techniques that can be used to address these problems that you may encounter with suede mats.

Revitalizing: Suede is very tightly woven and tends to flatten over time. There are small brushes that shoe retailers use to rejuvenate suede shoes. These brushes either have very fine brass or plastic bristles. Brushing the mat surface with this type of brush will raise the "nap" and bring back some of the original life to it.

Another method that can be used (with caution) is to lightly spray a fine mist of water about 12" above the mat, letting the mist settle onto the suede. Do not saturate the suede; just dampen it. Once it is damp, brush the surface with your hand.

Scratches: Scratched or scuffed suede surfaces should also benefit from the above treatment provided the substrate backing has not been exposed. If the substrate is exposed through the scratches, the only option is the same as with any matboard—design and cut around the problem.

Storage: Suede mats should always be stored vertically with the biggest off-cut or full sheet suede surface resting against a full sheet of foamboard, preferably acid-free board. All additional off-cuts or full sheets should be stacked with the suede touching the back of the adjacent sheet.

Tim: One of Brian's suggestions above is to revitalize the suede mat with a misting spray. To moisten the surface and remove wrinkles, or other imperfections, one option is to use the following product—Wrinkles Out Spring Mist from KF Enterprises, located in Orange, CA. I use this product when I encounter such issues with a suede mat.

Q How do I minimize the occurrence of overcuts with matboard—whether I'm working with a 4-ply, 6-ply, 8-ply, or 12-ply board?

Tim and John reply:

A. Tim: Overcuts are the cuts in the board that extend beyond where the corner of the mat window is designated to be. Following are several things you can do to minimize overcuts in your mats. As with most techniques of this nature, the old adage, "practice makes perfect" applies.

#1: Cutting a 4-ply matboard—Before you begin cutting the mat for your customer's order, practice cutting on a scrap piece of matboard that is the same type of board as you will use for the final mat. On the backside of the "practice" matboard, make your crop marks to indicate where you want to begin and end cutting. Next, practice inserting your blade into the mat at the starting crop mark and ending it at the final crop mark.

Knowing when to start and stop is something you will hone with practice. Some mat cutter blade holders have start and stop indicator line reference points to facilitate an accurate cut. After cutting to each crop mark, note where the overcut occurs and adjust your cutting accordingly.

If, for some reason, you do not have a scrap piece of matboard to practice with, try this method. Let's take an example of a design for which you want the final mat borders to be 4" on all sides. Set your mat guide to cut a border wider than that (5" or 6") and practice cutting out a window. This will allow you to practice your starting and stopping technique at a safe distance from the area of the mat that will be used for the final design.

After you've practiced cutting, set your mat guide back to the desired border width (4" in this case) and cut. If you feel you need to practice more, take the drop out, cut it into two or four pieces, and practice with these boards before making the final cut.

#2: Another (and often easier) method is to use measuring stops (a.k.a. production stops) on your mat cutter. Be sure to calibrate these stops for best results. When each stop is accurately set, overcuts should be minimal, or non-existent.

#3: When cutting a board with an 8- or 12-ply thickness, I suggest the "several pass" method. This means that you will perform the cut three or four times before you sever the mat. You can, of course, use your measuring stops as suggested above. The stops will need to be recalibrated to adjust for the

thicker ply. Following is a way to cut these thicker mats (and eliminate overcuts) by using crop marks, rather than using the stops.

When making the final pass, take note where you start and stop the mat blade. When cutting an 8- or 12-ply mat (for which you will make several passes), place the mat blade about one-third of the way through the board for the first pass. The first cut starts at least 1½" above the crop mark and ends about 1½" past the ending crop mark.

Begin your second cut at the same place that the first cut started, but insert the blade deeper—about two-thirds of the way—into the mat. The final cut should start just before the crop mark and end just after the ending crop mark with blade extended into the underlayment. Again, this takes practice to perfect. *Note:* When cutting 12-ply, you may need to make up to five passes.

Whether working with an 8- or 12-ply, practice by cutting the mat borders one or two inches wider than the final border (as discussed in Tip #1). Then, move the measuring stops to the final desired width.

#4: I find if the matboard has a texture, rather than a smooth finish, you can burnish an overcut on it easier than with a smooth board. The texture, combined with the burnishing, camouflages an overcut.

John: To add to Tim's recommendations in Tip #3, I'd like to note that framers who frequently cut mats with 8-plys or more have been known to purchase a second set of measuring stops for their mat cutter. You can calibrate this second set for the thicker mat materials, rather than have to recalibrate the stops each time you switch from 4-ply to 8-ply. This expedites the production of these mats in the shop. ■

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.