

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 pfmeditor@hobbypub.com and The Mat Doctors will prescribe a remedy.

Q. When using a double or triple mat in each opening of a multi-opening mat, it can be difficult to align each mat parallel to each other. Is there a technique to ease the process?

Tim replies:

A. Yes, there is a method I use when manually cutting multi-opening mats, with double or triple matting in each window. This technique is especially useful when cutting an oversized mat that will not fit in your mat cutter. This is because the concept here is to use the outer mat drop out as a guide to cut the subsequent inner mats; therefore you can achieve parallel mats within each window without relying on your mat guide. And it makes each mat cut parallel to the outer mat opening regardless of how exact (in square) the outer mat is to begin with.

In the following photos, I've shown an example of cutting a single-opening, triple mat. The method can be used whether you have one or 10 openings in the matboard.

First, determine the size window of each opening in your mat. This example shows an 11"x14" outside dimension with a final opening measuring 4"x6". A 1/4" of each the two inner mats will be visible. (Throughout, I refer to the white outer mat as #1; the red mat as #2; and the blue mat #3.)

Let's begin: Begin by creating a Template Guide. I used a sheet of red matboard cut down to 6" in width using the straight side cut. Photo 1 shows the 6" template board cut and set 1/4" away from the mat cutting rod.

The size of the completed window opening will be 4"x6" centered in the white 11"x14" white mat. Therefore, we will make the opening in the outer mat (white) measure 4 1/2"x6 1/2". We cut the first opening with top and bottom borders of 3 1/4" and side borders of 3 3/4" (see Photo 2).



Photo 1: Creating the template for the process

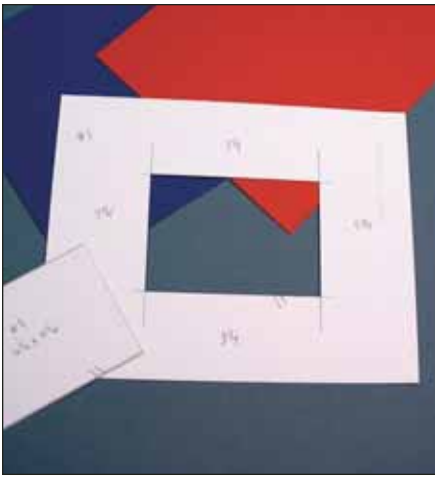


Photo 2: The window for the outside, white mat has been cut.



Photo 3: The drop out of the white mat is taped, face-up, to the face of the second, red mat.



Photo 4: Red mat face-down under the clamp, with drop out underneath aligned to template.

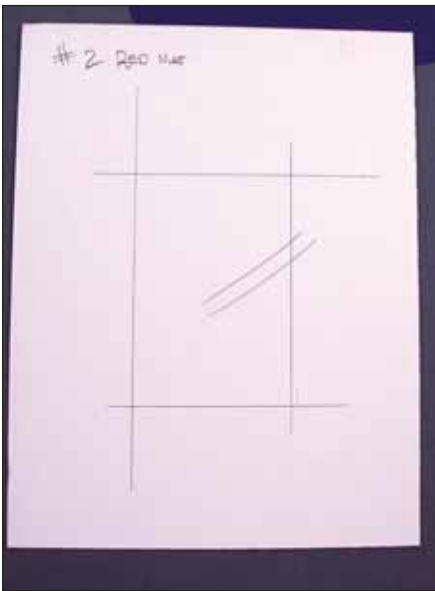


Photo 5: Marks made on back of the red mat.

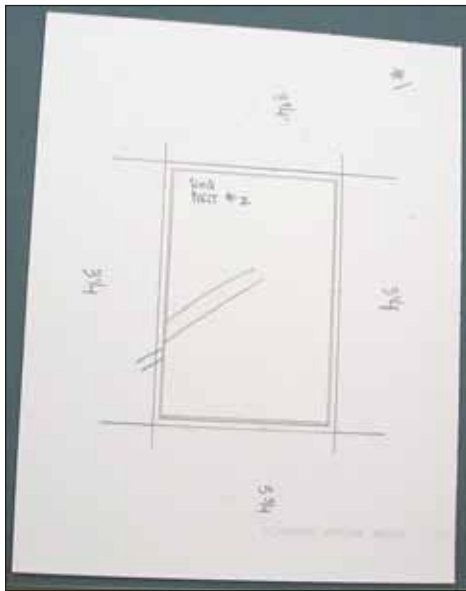


Photo 6: Attached drop outs from mats #1 and #2 are inserted back into mat #1.

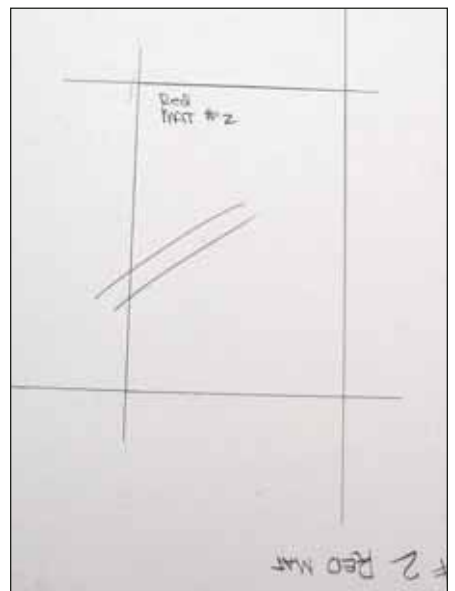


Photo 7: Mat #2 is then placed on top of the package (in Photo 6) to check alignment.

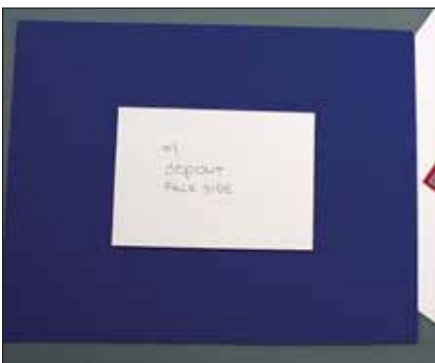


Photo 8: Tape drop outs #1 and #2 to the face of mat #3; prepare to cut window.



Photo 9: The result is a triple mat opening with parallel components. Repeat the process described in this tip to tackle the next opening in the outside mat.

Next, tape the drop out—face up—centered on top of the face of the next mat (red) as seen in Photo 3. Place this bundle face down, aligning the edge of the attached drop out with the edge of the template guide (see Photo 4).

In Photo 5, you'll see pencil crop marks with double placement marks on backside of mat. Next, cut the window in the mat #2. The attached drop outs that result are then placed in to the window of mat #1 (see Photo 6). Mat #2 is then placed and double-sided tape on top of the package (in Photo 6) to check perfect

alignment with mat #1 (see Photo 7).

You will now cut the third mat. Prepare by moving your mat guide outward by $\frac{1}{4}$ ". With both drop outs taped together it is placed to face side of mat #3 (see Photo 8). The crop marks are referred to for the window opening to be cut. Photo 9 is the final mat showing the three mats perfectly parallel to each other.

(Editor's Note: Last month, John Ranes replied to the question below with one technique on cutting a V-groove design on a manual mat cutter. This month, he offers another method.)

Q. I really would like to execute V-grooves on my manual mat cutter. I know there is a technique. Can you demonstrate?

John replies:

A. In the April column, I outlined the "traditional" method of cutting V-grooves on your manual mat cutter. The Surface V-groove, which I discuss this month, is really very similar to what was executed last month. It has the same number of steps and effort, and is just another method. It produces a very delicate V-groove.

Begin by cutting an opening into your mat blank in the traditional manner with the mat guide and measuring stops set to $2\frac{3}{4}$ ". This time cut two opposite sides; then stop. (It does not matter which opposing sides you cut.) Before going to the other two sides, tape the mat back together using 3M 810 Magic tape. After cutting the final two sides, tape those back together also. (In essence, you've cut half of the V-groove, but you didn't allow the fallout to drop away. We are going to trim the fallout while it is attached.)

Without moving the mat guide, move the stops out of the way, and turn the matboard over so the face side is up. Place it under the clamp. We now trim the V-groove while the guide is in the same position. However, we cannot see the stop and start marks very easily, so we're going to define these with a graphite pencil just along the edges of the fallout. These corners can be pushed up to easily mark (see Photo).



Marking the Mat.

To make the stop and start marks, place the edge of

your pencil against the corner of the fallout as you push from the underside—slightly raising the fallout off of the tape. This mark will be in the area that is cut away in the V-groove.

Lightly bring the cutting head and blade down to the pencil reference and cut out the V-groove. You'll know that you are deep enough, when the material peels out of the groove. Set the mat guide and measuring stops to 3" and cut the standard opening into your mat.

Caution: This method produces a V-groove that is not deeper than one-half the thickness of the mat, due to the technique of flipping the matboard from front to back. However, the flipping procedure does mean that the mat guide has to be absolutely perfect. It's always a good idea to test on a scrap mat before executing for a customer. ■

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.