

The Mat Doctors



Brian Barnett, CPF



Tim Franer, CPF, CMG



John Raner, CPF, GCF

Editor's Note: Beginning this month, three leading mat designers in our industry will be here to answer some frequently (and not so frequently) asked questions about mat cutting 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 and The Mat Doctors will prescribe a remedy.

Q. With the popularity of 6- and 8-ply matboard and now the recently introduced 12-ply board, I'd like to know how to effectively cut a mat opening in these boards without hooking the corners?

Tim replies:

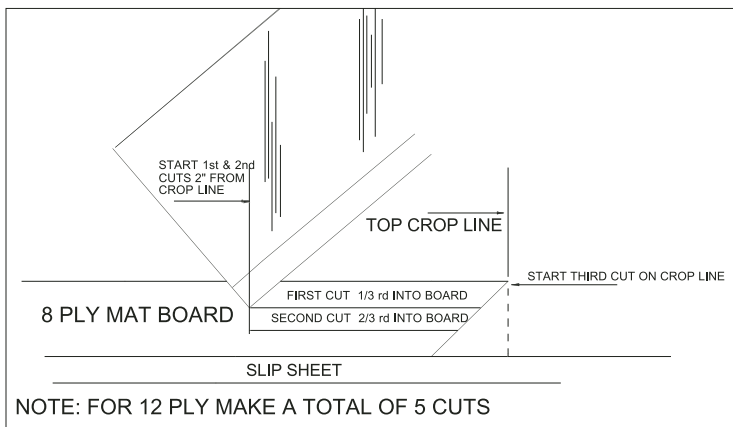
A. Cutting a 6-ply mat is no different from cutting a standard 4-ply mat. Set your mat cutter blade depth so it will cut through the 6-ply board and penetrate about a third of the way into your underlayment (slip sheet), using only one pass to make the cut. I recommend using a #1200SE single-honed blade versus a #1200 double-honed blade.

To cut openings in 8- and 12-ply boards, I have found the following method works well: Place the matboard in your mat cutter, face down on a new underlayment. After determining your border width, mark the crop marks for each corner.

Here is the secret—To cut an 8-ply mat, we need to make three passes, extending the blade depth in thirds after each cut. In other words, start with the blades set to one-third of the depth of the matboard thickness. Cut only one border at a time. After making the first cut, extend the blade to two-thirds of the mat thickness without moving the mat from the mat guide. It is important to leave the mat in exactly the same position until all three cuts per border are completed. (Otherwise, you will end up with uneven cuts.) (See diagram on next page.)

On the final cut, extend the blade until it touches and penetrates the underlayment. Continue the three cuts per side process for the other three borders of the opening to complete the mat.

Here's where to start and stop your blade: On passes one and two, insert the tip into the board 2" before the top crop mark and retract it 2" after the bottom crop mark. On the third and final cut, insert and extract the blade directly on the crop marks.



For cutting 12-ply matboard, use the same method as above but make five passes per side. The #900SE and #1500 blade have limitations when cutting 8- and 12-ply boards.

Points to remember:

- Use as many #1200 single-honed blades as needed for a perfect mat.
- Make several passes at different blade depths until your blade touches the underlayment.
- Keep your mat in the same position while cutting each cut per side.

Q. I sometimes have to cut mats larger than my 48 inch mat cutter can handle. I've heard that some framers dismantle their machines to accomplish this job. Is this a good procedure? What would you recommend?

John replies:

A. Although, if done with care, the results of that technique can be acceptable, I would still not recommend taking your machine apart. First, let's examine the machines. Most of the major manufacturers make mat cutters in three popular sizes: 40", 48", and 60". All three refer to the outside dimensions of the largest mat they can cut. Standard North American matboard is sold in 32"x40" sheets, and the most common oversized matboard is 40"x60". The 48" machine has become the most popular, and although it can cut oversized mats in the 40" to 48" range, a dilemma still exists when the framer has a 54" mat to produce! My recommended solutions to this problem would be to:

1) Purchase a 60" mat cutter to eliminate this problem. Even if you elect to keep the 48" machine on your workbench as your default machine, having a 60" machine pack-

aged under the table ready for emergencies will pay off in the long run. Granted, the return on investment might take a couple of years, but then most of us plan to be in business for the duration.

2) Contact a nearby competitor who either owns a 60" mat cutter or a CMC, most of which accommodate 60" mats. It is often more efficient to farm out this part of the job to someone else. In addition, this produces some professional goodwill amongst fellow framers. You probably won't make your full margin of profit on the mat, but you still will have this profit preserved in the remainder of the framing order.

3) A third solution is to cut the mat on a manual machine meant for consumer, not commercial, use. Two examples are the Alto EZ mat cutter and the Logan hand mat cutter that attaches to a long clamp bar. Both are "open ended" and can accommodate mats of infinite length. This would not be my first choice of mat cutter for the retail store owner, but it is a great problem solver for the occasional oversized mat.

4) Another option would be to dismantle your existing machine. This is the least practical because the time it takes to dismantle, reassemble, and calibrate, translating to lost time and revenue. Murphy's Law says that as soon as this machine is taken apart, a customer will ask for a dozen simple 8"x10" mats that they need within the hour! In addition, a dismantled clamp and cutting head requires clamping to secure it to the oversized mat, which may also damage its construction. I consider this a last resort. ■

Brian Barnett, CPF, an industrial designer by profession, has spent the last 25 years in custom framing sales, product and graphic design, merchandising, operations, production control, and financial management. He appears in many training videos and has authored numerous training manuals and magazine articles, as well as teaching 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 more than 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.