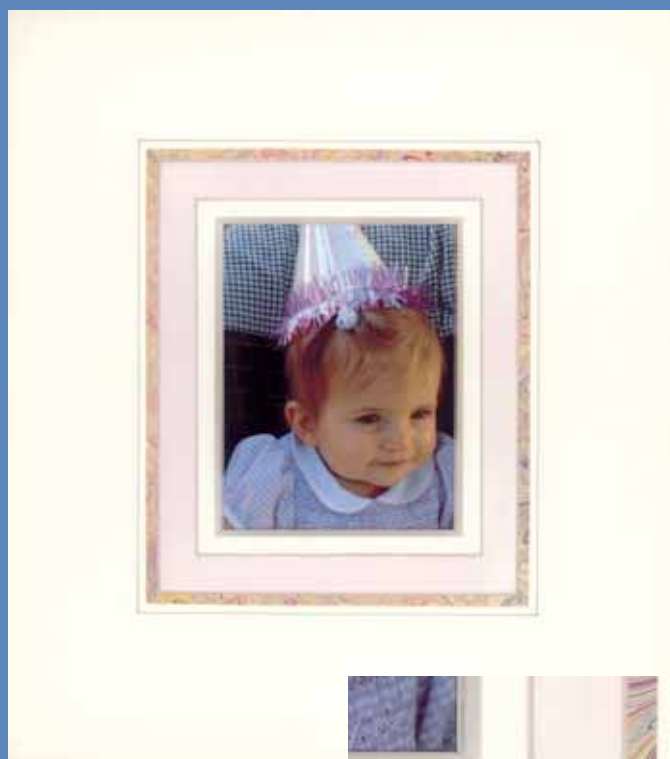


**Y**ou spend time with your customers designing and creating a quality custom product. Why not add services to elevate custom to super custom? The economy has caused the lower- and middle-end sales to falter for many framers. Out of necessity consumers are shopping more and more at the major retailers. The big boxes have basically homogenized the retailing experience by offering the same products. Their average customer is looking for the average product; they spend conservatively and may not have stepped foot into a custom frame shop. But those who can spend more are looking for products that can't be found in major retail stores. They're looking for things they didn't know they needed and they're willing to pay for it.

French matting is not just for antique prints anymore. Certainly the two go hand in hand; they originated from the same period and have served each other well. But consider fresh colors on crisp rag mats to update the look and make it suitable for all types of images. Develop the skill in yourself or one of your employees. You may have a hidden talent in your midst



*Everyone loves a beautiful baby! Try a pretty pastel watercolor wash panel and marbled paper around a color photograph.*



# Fresh Ideas FOR FRENCH MATTING

BY MARIA NUCCI

from whom you can profit.

Using a burst of color not traditionally seen on French mats adds to the uniqueness of the custom piece. The prevailing thought on this design technique is that it is only meant for antique prints. Certainly, French matting was developed in the age of engraved bookplates. And certainly, if an antique print comes into your shop, you should be offering French matting as the perfect fit! But this design can also look great on watercolors, wedding photos, and documents. It's good-looking, it's cultured, and it can work. Take the ceiling off your thinking!

Another thought on French mats is that the look is old-fashioned. We can use crisp rag mats, fresh colors, and bright gold accents. Voila! It's now contemporary and classy. If you're going for a vintage look, a French mat might also be appropriate in the design. Tap into

the American re-discovery of our culture and our history... the good old days. Sell some nostalgia with that French mat. But consider using some "untraditional" colors in the process.

**Yellow** — Even a monochromatic black and white etching or charcoal drawing can be set off with a wide band of buttery yellow and charcoal lines. Add a black moulding and the elegant contrast of yellow and black is complete. A stronger ochre yellow with black can have a decidedly masculine feeling. Try this combination on a cigar box label, a wine label, ticket stubs from the rodeo, or anything a man might collect.

**Lavender** — Think fun and bright. Think of all the things a child might inspire you to collect and frame; a special child's drawing, paper dolls, a birth announce-

## TIPS FOR SELLING FRENCH MATTING OF ALL KINDS

- \* Have French matted samples on the wall and corner samples at your design counter.
- \* Keep your samples clean and treat them with care. But keep them out and available for your customers to see and touch.
- \* Tell customers these designs are done by hand. Not much is these days and people love that.
- \* Decorators and designers tend to be familiar with French matting. If you have them as your customers, let them know you offer the service.
- \* Give your customer a bit of the legend of French matting. Know how the design is produced and speak about it intelligently.
- \* Use the elements of French matting to sell for you. Point out that “the gold leaf bevel adds light” and the green panel “softly accents the green in the artwork.”
- \* Keep the mat widths generous. Nothing looks more awkward than lines and panels crammed into a 1" mat. It distracts more than it adds. If it must be a narrow mat, make the panels narrow and keep the design in close to the opening.



*Vintage postcards, prints, and photos from the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's tend to have some interesting colors. Lime greens, sea blues, and bright pinks are showing up again in home décor and fashion. Use them in matting!*

ment. A wash panel that is just barely lavender on a crisp white mat can be sweet on a newborn's photo.

Green — Use light green panels and lines on a wedding invitation. A soft sage green invokes a wistful memory of that special day. Use a brighter lime green for fun on a treasured recipe from Grandma. Or try a gray-green when framing foreign currency or documents.

It's good salesmanship to offer the most beautiful design first. But, offer only what you can produce easily and in a timely manner, giving you enough margin to deliver great service. Once you create value, you can command higher pricing. Don't wait for them to ask for ultra services like French matting. They probably didn't ask for conservation glass, but you offered it because it has a technical benefit. The added benefit of decorative matting is simply that it's beautiful. Why not channel some of the energy you use to sell a technical benefit into selling an aesthetic benefit?

Consumers have become more interested in unusual framing treatments. Truly unique and well-crafted designs, usually costing a premium, are driving consumers desire to purchase high-end framing. Those who have the ability to spend more are even more willing to do so if the product you are offering cannot be had elsewhere. Be able to tell your customers how a high-end mat or frame treatment is special. More education in design creates more interest.

What's old has become new again. And what's beautifully crafted and unique has become more valuable in the high-end framing market. n

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.

