

# Fabric Wrapped

**F**abric mats are a sure way to add elegance—and value—to a custom frame design. Their texture adds dimension to the frame design and helps to set the tone for the artwork it surrounds.

For ease of use, it's hard to beat the many fabric-covered mats available from matboard suppliers. Silks, suedes, and other fabrics can be found in a vast array of colors on a range of matboard types.

There are times, however, when your custom design will call for a fabric mat that you wrap yourself, perhaps if you are looking for an unusual fabric or color. Since fabric-wrapped mats are relatively easy to complete, you should not shy away from these opportunities to make your customer something special.

There are almost as many ways to make and use fabric-wrapped and fabric-covered mats as there are types of fabrics to



*This frame design seems simple, but rich details like the fabric covered mat and v-groove make it special.*



# Mats

*Adding a sophisticated look is surprisingly simple. We outline several methods for you with this article.*



*This fabric mat is embossed: an advanced technique generally achieved with a heat press.*

choose from. We've compiled instructions for several methods, so no matter what your preference in materials or supplies, you'll be able to create fabric mats of your own without much trouble.

## **Customizing Pre-covered Fabric Matboards**

Pre-covered fabric matboards are usually cut with a bevel, reverse bevel, or straight cut. If you'd like a more custom look, there is a way to hand wrap the bevel of the board.

First, cut your mat to the desired outside dimension. Next, cut the window opening, with the blade set for a regular bevel, but cut it one inch smaller on all sides. Then adjust your mat cutter blade depth so that you can

cut into most of the matboard, but will not cut all the way through to the fabric. Now cut the mat opening to the desired size. A one-inch band, all around the window, should stay intact instead of falling out like the first, smaller, opening did.

Carefully peel the matboard away from the fabric on this band until all that is left is the mat border with one inch of exposed fabric around the opening. Then miter cut the exposed fabric from the corner of the mat. Finally, wrap the excess fabric behind the bevel. You may choose to use ATG tape, glue or some other

mounting option. You may also want to finish off the back of the mat by taping the surface of these fabric flaps securely against the matboard.

## **Wrapping Your Own Mats: Selecting the Fabric**

Almost any type of fabric can be used to cut a mat. Some fabrics are easier to work with than others, however, and some are better for certain wrapping methods.

- Heavy fabrics can be too bulky to wrap easily, and may also be difficult to adhere to the mat, no matter what method is used.
- If you are wrapping the bevel, avoid fabrics with open weaves or any others where fraying is a problem.

Fabrics that create too much lint can also be frustrating to use.

- Carefully study the fabric to see if the weave or pattern of the fabric is crooked or running at an angle. If this is the case, it can be difficult to mount the fabric on the board in such a way that it will look good.

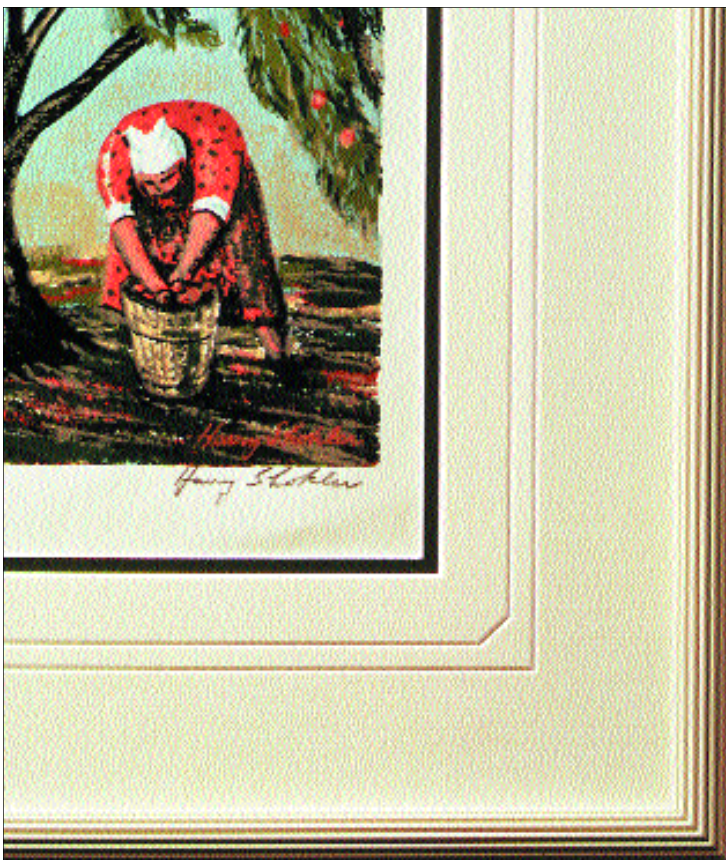
- Depending on the type of adhesive used, sheer fabrics can be difficult to adhere without the adhesive showing through.

- If you choose a fabric with a distinct grain, be sure to orient the fabric and mat so that the grain runs horizontally, from left to right. This is the usual treatment of textiles for wall covering and draperies and will assure that once your client hangs the piece in their home it will not clash with other furnishings.

- Be sure to test the fabric before using it for the first time in a project. Some have a backing or are treated with stains or water repellents or other finishes that can inhibit adhesion.



*It's important to make sure the weave and texture of the fabric on the mat doesn't compete with the artwork. This bold image is balanced by an unassuming fabric that adds just a hint of texture.*



### **Adhesive Options and Mounting Methods**

The method you chose to mount your fabric will depend on the materials and equipment you have available, as well as the types of fabric you use most often. Here's a simple list of pros and cons for each commonly used method.

Heat-activated mounting tissues are intended for use with a mechanical or vacuum heat press. Since this method involves pressure, it would be a poor choice for fabrics which could be crushed, such as velvet. Some of these tissues have a shine to them, and this may show through sheer or open weave fabrics. They provide a strong bond, however, and work well with most fabrics.

Pure film adhesives are another option when mounting in a heat press. This type of material is pure adhesive, with no carrier so it has the advantage of being flexible enough to conform to the shape of the mat. This means the fabric will adhere more easily to the bevel, as well as any relief pattern

of an embossed fabric mat.

Spray adhesives are another option, as they also work with a variety of fabrics. You'll need to weight down the fabric mat as the spray adhesive is setting up to insure a good bond. If you have a vacuum press, you may consider using spray glues made for use with a press. Remember to always read the manufacturer's instructions when using spray glues; this will eliminate many potential problems.

Wet glues may also be used to mount fabrics, and there are, in fact, wet glues that have been formulated specifically for the purpose of wrapping mats and liners. They are generally applied with a roller and should be allowed to dry to a tacky state before placing the fabric on the board. (If you place your fabric against wet glue, you will likely have problems with glue stains.) Their open time also allows a brief window of time during which the fabric can be manipulated to make sure it is positioned correctly. Some wet glues can be heat re-activated. This allows you the freedom to apply the glue, allow it to dry, and then do your mounting in the heat press.

Pressure Sensitive Mounting Boards have the advantage of providing a quick, clean alternative for mounting fabric of any type.

### **How to Wrap a Fabric Mat: Basic Instructions**

There are some basic step-by-step instructions that remain the same no matter what mounting method or adhesive option you choose.

- Cut your matboard to the correct outside dimension.

- Cut the mat opening. Use a regular bevel, unless you plan to add a fillet or have other design requirements—then use a reverse bevel.

- Cut a piece of fabric slightly larger than the outside of the mat. Generally, it is recommended that the fabric be sized about one inch larger on all sides than the outside dimensions of the mat. Fabric can often contain imperfections. Be sure to lay out the piece of fabric you intend to use over the mat to be sure all of it is usable.

- Choose your adhesive and mount the fabric to the board (exact instructions will vary by method and some methods require additional instructions; see below).

- Once the fabric has been mounted, place the mat on a clean cutting surface and cut away the excess fabric that extends beyond the outer edges of the mat (with an X-ACTO® knife or similar tool).

- Fabric will still cover the mat opening. Cut a hole in the fabric inside the mat window, leaving approximately one inch of it beyond the mat bevel. This raw edge inside the mat window will now be used to wrap the bevel of the mat.

- Next, cut the fabric inside the mat window diagonally at each corner, taking the precaution not to cut beyond the bevel of the mat. If you cut the fabric too far, the bevel of the mat will be exposed when you wrap the window bevel. (Remember that you will not be able to have sharply wrapped corners when you use fabric; fabric is soft so expect the corners on a wrapped mat to be slightly rounded—the heavier the fabric, the more rounded the corners will be.)

- Wrap the extra fabric over the

bevel. You may secure these flaps to the back of the mat by using the same method you used to adhere the fabric to the front of the mat (see below), but another option is to use ATG tape.

- Flip the mat over and examine the front side. If your corners aren't sharp and square, now is the time to correct them. It may be necessary to slice slightly farther into the fabric in each corner so the fabric can be pulled tighter. Then you can glue down loose threads or make other minor adjustments to improve the overall appearance.

### **Additional Instructions**

While methods such as using pressure sensitive mounting boards and spray adhesives require only basic instruction, we have included here more detailed instructions for using wet glues and a mounting press.

### **Using Wet Glues**

Cut your mat and fabric as described above. Put your fabric aside and place the mat, face up, on a piece of cardboard or other scrap.

Next, pour a generous amount of adhesive into the paint tray. Most wet glues, especially those specially formulated for fabric wrapping, do not need to be diluted. Be sure to read the instructions on the bottle carefully. Using a small paint roller, apply a moderately heavy, uniform coat of adhesive to the face of the mat, making sure to include the bevel. A normal coat of adhesive has a two to three minute open time (this may vary by manufacturer; check the instructions).

Take the precaution of eliminating runs or other concentrations of

adhesive that might bleed through the fabric. If using a sheer fabric, such as a fine silk, apply the adhesive in exactly the same way, then blot it by gently pressing a piece of kraft paper to the mat, and quickly removing it while the adhesive is still wet. This procedure leaves a thin film of adhesive which is appropriate for a fine fabric, while at the same time minimizing the possibility of bleed-through. Please note that a thin, blotted coat will dry faster and have a shorter open time (one or two minutes). Also note that some wet glues work better than others with a lightweight or sheer fabric. Experience and your supplier can help you determine which suits you best.

Remove the mat from the cardboard while it is still wet and place it carefully on a clean surface. Lay the fabric onto the mat and, using your hands, gently press the fabric against the bevel and face of the mat to ensure adhesion. Continue to massage the fabric in this manner for two to three minutes, or until a firm bond is attained.

Trim away the excess fabric from the outside edge of the mat as described above, and cut the fabric inside the mat window in preparation for wrapping the bevel.

Apply a one-inch band of adhesive around the back of the window of the mat, using the paint roller. Begin the wrapping process by starting in the middle of each side and working toward the corners. Wrap one or two inches at a time, making sure the fabric is wrapped smoothly all along the bevel. Finish by paying extra attention to the corners. If

necessary, add a little adhesive at the corners to guarantee a better bond.

### **Using a Heat Press**

First cut the window mat (reserve the fallout), then stack (from bottom to top) the release material, mat, adhesive, fabric, fallout and release material into a sandwich. The release materials are necessary to protect the press platen (or glass) and base from adhesive migration. Positioning the fallout back inside the mat opening is important because it will force the fabric down into the window opening to establish the shape of the bevel.

Once the mat is out of the press, trim the excess fabric along the outer edge of the mat and inside the mat opening. The shape of the bevel should already be established after the mounting, but you will still have to reinforce the bond. Ironing the bevel (with either a household iron or a tacking iron) will melt any unbonded adhesive to ensure a clean smooth bevel wrap.

Once the bevel wrap is complete, turn the mat face down and iron the flaps to the back or inside of the mat window. Begin at the center when turning back the flap and work toward the corners, pulling lightly from the center toward the outside. This should ensure a clean bevel without puckering. If you use a removable adhesive, you can always reheat and shift any areas of fabric that aren't perfect. ■

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