

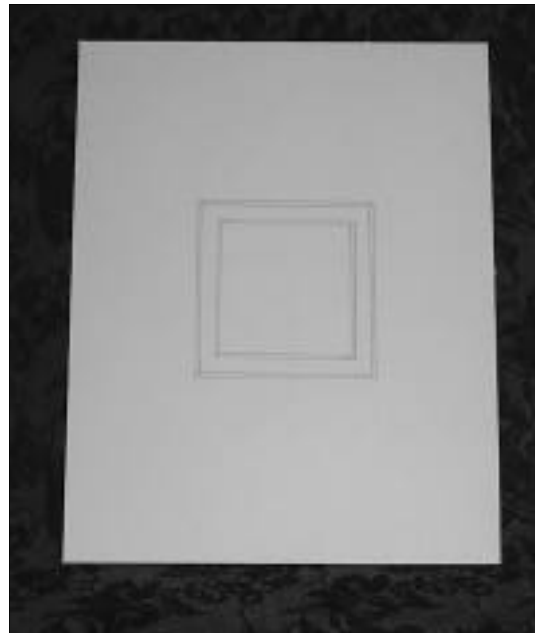
# Historically Correct Matting for Art

**W**ith the renewed interest in antique prints and works of art, quality custom framing is becoming synonymous with conservation and preservation framing. Today this means more than just a plain white or cream, rag or alpha-cellulose mat. Your customers come to you, the professional custom framer, for individualized service, quality products and creative design experience.

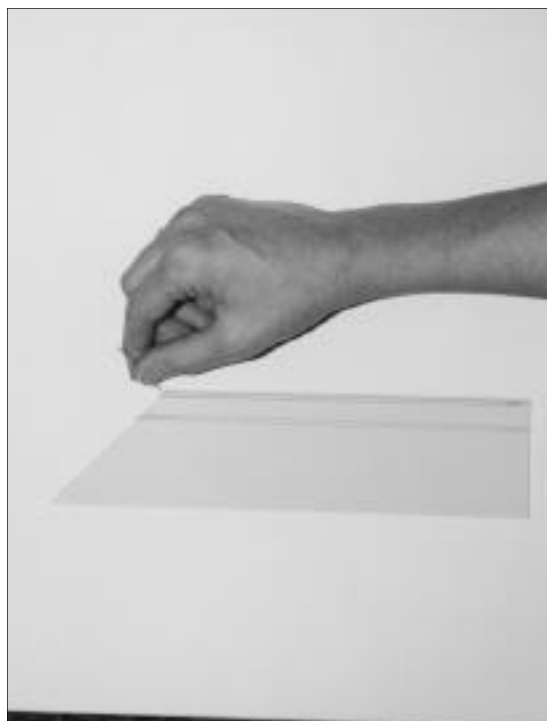
So, how can conservation framing include historically accurate, yet creative, design? There are several ways for the conservation framer to incorporate these elements into the presentation of art while still remembering, of course, that the care of the art is paramount. In the case of paper-borne art, the framing package must include proper hinging, a minimum of a 4-ply rag or alpha-cellulose backing board, a 4-ply (or thicker) top mat of alpha-cellulose or 100% rag and, of course, ultraviolet (UV) filtering glazing.

Having met these minimum requirements for conservation, there are plenty of creative opportunities to explore. For those customers who would like to add an historical or antique perspective to their piece there are several types of decorative mats that are appropriate. Watercolor lines, French mats, or New York style mats all incorporate similar design ideas by essentially adding lines and panels of color to the surface of the top mat.

For ideas on historical mounts and mats I suggest consulting a fairly new book entitled *Old Master Prints and Drawings*. The author, Carlos James, clearly explains



*Prepare the window mat decoration before mounting the art to the board backing board.*



*A pin or needle can be used to mark placement of the art. Use these as a guide when planing your line placement.*

the historical ideals behind different types of fine art mounts (or mats) in the chapter, “The History of Preservation of Works of Art on Paper.” This is good information and fun to explore with your customers; especially those customers who like an antique look or want to simulate old patterns and ideas. *(Editor’s note: Our 1998 Preservation Supplement, part of our February issue, also included information on creating historically accurate mat and frame designs.)*

Here is one such technique...Hundreds of years ago, great collections of art on paper were assembled, mounted onto paper, and then bound into albums. Some of these albums were very elaborately decorated. One famous collector, A.M. Zanetti, created albums with Red Moroccan leather covers and gilded-edge pages. He also drew borders on each page around the mounted art. Although Zanetti mounts are interesting to reference, considering what we know today about handling art, there are several precautions that need to be considered. For one: we know that, in order to preserve art, it should never be permanently mounted to any substrate. Nor should any borders be drawn after the mount and mat package has been assembled—lines must be drawn on the mat before it is attached to the mount.

To achieve a Zanetti-like look, use a plain color matboard and draw lines relatively close to the bevel of the mat. To get started, a good ruling pen is a must. There are several types of good mat inks to choose from, some made especially for the framing industry. One that is easy to find and use is common artists’ gouache.



Using a design sample cut from a mat, the mount can be marked accordingly.



Silverpoint drawing by Gretchen Mayo on “Zanetti” type mount in an Abe Munn frame.

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Gouache is a watercolor that is very easy to mix and blend. Use a brush to load the color into the pen.

When choosing your colors, consider the earth-tones: burnt and raw umber and sienna, yellow ochre, even deep versions of blue, green and red. Antique works of art were sometimes done in red or black chalks. The lines of old pen and ink drawings often are of brown inks that have faded over the years. Your new lines on the mat should resemble the faded colors of the original piece.

Worried about perfectly rendered lines and matching corners? Don't be! Most of the old mat and mount decorations were done freehand. Inks went on unevenly and, as the lines aged, the values of the ink changed and faded. To recreate antique mounts is quite easy and a lot of fun. Try not to be perfect in the execution of each line—this way you'll avoid the sometimes "cold" feeling of a perfectly machine-manufactured piece. In fact, to make the lines look even more authentic, once the watercolor gouache is completely dry, sand the mat with 400-grit sandpaper or use an eraser over the lines. Corners can even be overlapped slightly or have subtle blobs of ink. (No wonder framers love doing antique mats and mounts!)

Another decorative, yet historically correct, conservation package involves a double mat where the top mat is a medium blue-gray color. Some antique works of art were done a bluish-gray colored paper. These papers were actually made from old rags and one of the most common cloth dyes was indigo. It is, therefore, thought that the blue-gray color in some old papers is a result of the dye that remained in the rags after processing. Either a regular paper mat or a flannel finish mat would be perfect for this look, especially since flannel finishes make it even easier to create decorative top mats as the



*Start with a properly mounted piece of art using hinges and wheat starch paste and rag or alphacellulose board. Attach the window mat to the backing board only after the mat decoration is complete.*

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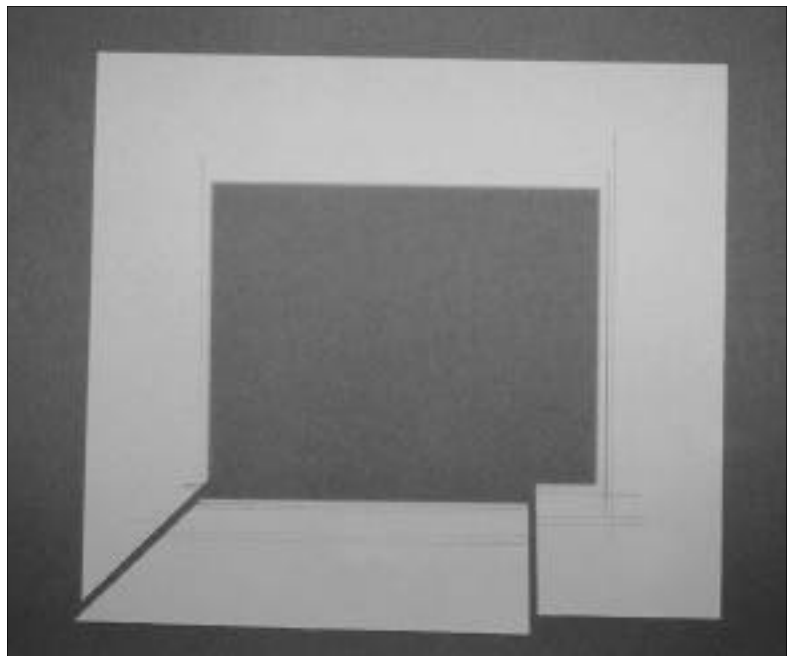
uneven look of the surface perfectly complements ruling pan blips and blobs.

For another great look, consider using lines of different thicknesses and a variety of line patterns. Look at old art mounts and mats to get some ideas; also reference historic frame catalogs or historic interior moulding design books and replicate patterns found there with your ink lines. Check out moulding manufacturers' historical product lines. This will help create a pleasant and appealing design as well as mimic the proportion and elements of the frame.

To encourage your customer, you must be able to show them samples of these creative projects. Take photos of your best decorative mats and keep them in an idea book. Do samples of ink lines and watercolor panels on a few of your corner samples. Always remember, your customers are looking to you for suggestions on what will make their art look its best. Make sure that your samples showcase your unique design talents. With your help, your customers antique works of art will be decorative historically correct masterpieces. ■



*In this example, the top mat of the double mat combination is decorated Lower left areat shows a sample a water color wash option. Tru Vue 1942 mat with guache watercolor lines. Frame by Abe Munn Picture Frames.*



*Article by Stacy Kirincic, Marketing Manager, Tru Vue Inc., and Shan Linde, CPF, Marketing Manager, The Small Corp.*

*There's a simple method to adapt the same line design to mats of differing proportions. First create the pattern on a mat, then cut the mat apart making one edge a 45° angle. You can then use the piece as a guide (as in the second photo on the first page), moving it at various angles until the line placement is correct.*