

Preservation Practices



by Hugh Phibbs

Using Supports Instead of Hinges

Edge supports made from conservation quality paper can take the place of hinges when the edges of the work will be overmatted. Replacing hinges eliminates the possibility that the item being matted will cockle or become

deformed. Furthermore, the paper support ensures that the item can be safely removed from the mat without any change to its condition in the future.

Many framers are familiar with the edge support designs detailed here and in preservation supplements which are

available on the *PFM* website—pictureframingmagazine.com. Previously described edge supports may function well, but their design can always be improved. Since the goal of preservation is lofty, we may consider evolutionary improvements to support designs as vital to its pursuit of that goal.

Edge supports made from individual strips of paper can carry loads with thicknesses up to the depth of two plies of mat board. Thicker items benefit

most from supports made from a single sheet of paper rather than from strips. The previously described model for this type of support is made by laying the item to be supported on the paper and folding it over the edges of the item so that its outer dimensions are encompassed by the folds.

The item is then removed and cuts are made which bisect the corners created by the intersection of the folds. These cuts run up the side folds and in along the top fold from the upper corners (see Figure 1). The previous design then requires the trimming away of the paper outside the folds so that the final shape looks like what is shown in Figure 2.

When the item is situated in the support, the tabs at the corners are interlaced and secured with linen tape. This design has one major disadvantage. The tabs

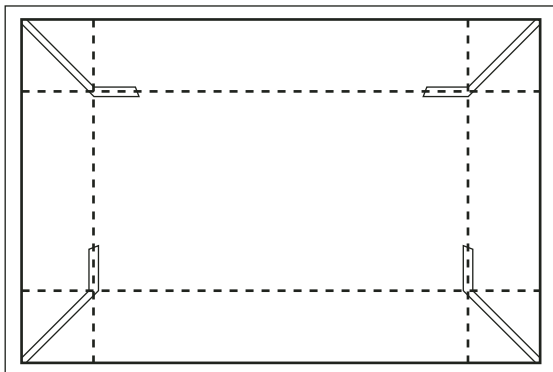


Figure 1: Cuts are made which bisect the corners created by the intersection of folds.

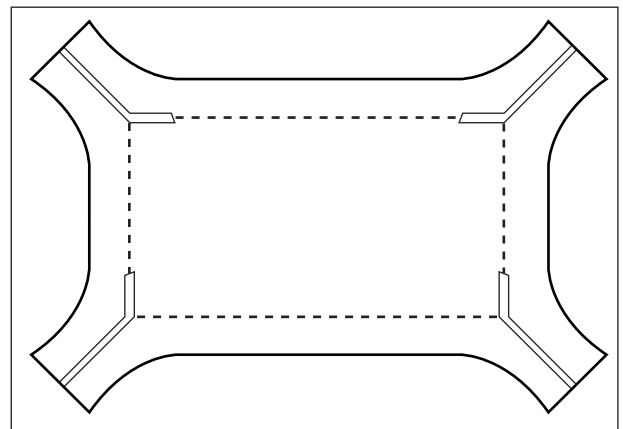


Figure 2: The paper is then trimmed outside the folds. The result looks like this.

which are folded to cross the corners of the item do not extend straight out. Since they are created from portions of the paper which have been cut on the diagonal, they extend out diagonally. This means that when they are pulled taut before taping, they can only be given a modest tension and cannot be counted on to maintain a taut edge in the center of the support.

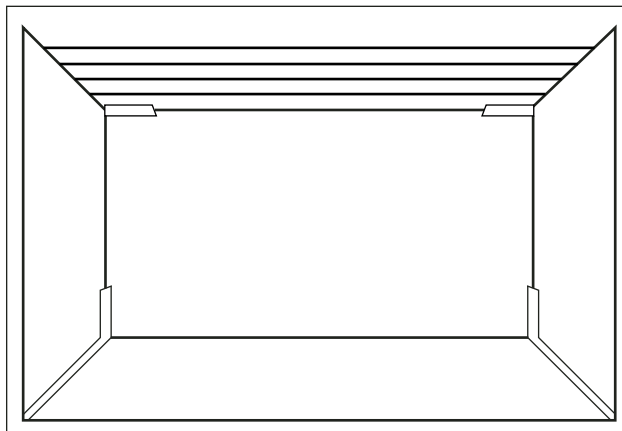


Figure 3: In this alternative design, cuts are also made to bisect the corners. However, the paper is not trimmed; it is folded.

Another Approach

An alternative design begins with the same basic structure. Once the folds, which correspond to the outer dimensions of the work being supported, have been created in the support sheet, the portion of paper beyond the corners is cut with bisecting. These slits are extended along the folds from the bottom corners up the sides and along the top fold from the corners in.

At this point, the portions of the sheet outside the folds are not trimmed out; rather they are folded like an accordion so that the longest part of the strip will be at the top (see Figure 3). Once all four of the sides have been properly folded, the ends of the bottom strip can be threaded through the slits in the sides of the support and the top of the side strips can be threaded through the slits in the upper part of the support. The result will be a

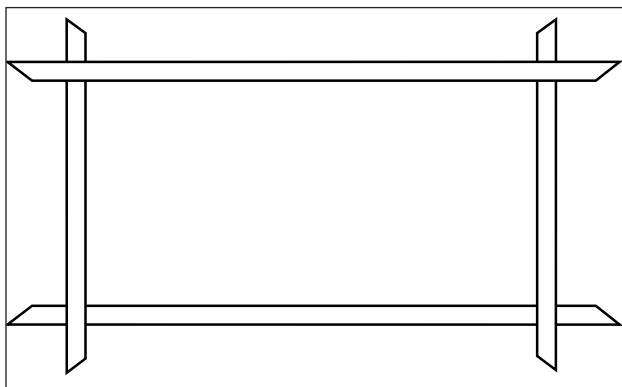


Figure 4: Once all four sides have been folded, the ends of the bottom strip are threaded through the slits in the sides. The top of the side strips are threaded through the slits in the upper part of the support. It will look like this.



Figure 5: When supporting a thick object, a shim mat can be used in conjunction with the support. Here we see how the shim mat is attached to the back side of the window mat to raise its level above the surface of the artwork.

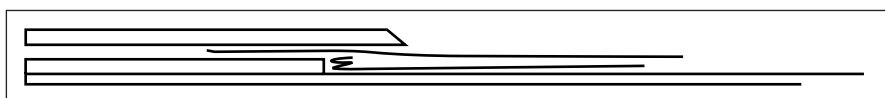


Figure 6: A sink mat can also be used with the support for a thick object. Here, the depth of the sink mat compensates for the thickness of the artwork.

one piece support which will have the form shown in Figure 4. Its accordion folded portions which overlap the front of the object being supported will be strong because of its multiple layers and because its design permits its ends to be pulled tense along a straight line.

This sort of support is best suited for use with thick objects. This means that a window used in conjunction with it will need either a shim on its back side or a sink on the back mat to which it is spined. Whichever is used, it will need to be slightly thicker than the supported object. This added thickness is needed to accommodate the thickness of the folded paper at the edges of the support. In cross section, a shim mat with this support would look like Figure 5, and a sink mat used with this support would look like Figure 6.

Whenever works on paper are supported by their edges, the support should be steady, gentle, and nonconfining. The use of paper in the creation of this and other such supports allows them to expand and contract as relative

humidity changes in a manner which accommodates the reactions of the item, itself, to such changes. As support designs are improved, they will permit preservation framers to house more delicate

and demanding objects with confidence and greater ease. Ultimately, it is the framer's judgment which will tailor the support to the physical demands of the object and will ensure that the support provided is as responsive to the needs of the object as possible. ■