

Trends For 1998: Get In Touch

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF

Each year I attempt to analyze new concepts and trends based on what has been seen over the past twelve months. Through the years I've discussed canvas transferring, laminating, digital imaging and heat sensitive items to name a few. This year, I am going to approach the topic of mounting, adhesives, and product appropriateness from a slightly different point of view.

It is becoming more and more apparent that it is difficult to identify some of the items we are asked to frame. And, quite honestly, if we can't identify them, we can't decide on the appropriate method of mounting or even if they should be mounted at all! So the lecture for this year is to "really see what you're looking at; really feel what you're touching."



Five Stages for Five Senses

During the five basic stages of design ("The Design Process: Part One," *PFM*, January 1994) a frame designer must first (1) define the project, (2) create the design, then (3) analyze the limitations and guidelines. All this must be done at the design counter with the customer, prior to (4) producing the framed project, and finally (5) critiquing it during the last stage, called clarification.

During these stages of design the project to be framed must first be defined. Sounds simple. But if a framer does not know the difference between a

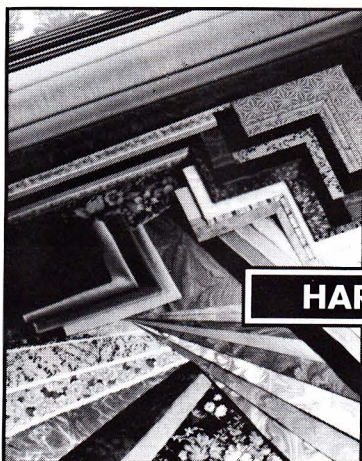
silk scarf and a polyester scarf, for example, he might fail to select the appropriate nonbuffered materials to best preserve the natural fibers in the silk scarf. During the analyzation stage, a framer's better developed sense of touch or "really feeling what is being touched" will help the designer know what boards to select.

Developing Framer Senses

We often think only of the technical skills required to be a good framer, such as skills for building a frame, cutting a mat and mounting a photograph. However, framers also use their senses; if they didn't, they might never be able to tell an RC photograph from a Cibachrome or even from a four-color toner copy. Most of the time use of these senses goes unnoticed. The senses a framer uses should not be unconscious, however; rather they must become more refined and more polished, like a fine wood moulding, and in turn, very conscious.

So let's begin with a recap of the five basic senses.

Sight and touch are perhaps the two most important senses in framing. Seeing the art (during definition) tells us what we will be framing, such as a scarf or a poster. Touching it may then tell us whether the scarf is silk or polyester (analysis). But looking at and feeling the project is only the beginning. Smelling a musty odor could determine potential mildew in an antique scarf, one perhaps in need of a conservator's professional opinion.



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"Hearing" a piece of art might sound odd, but an Ilfochrome Classic (aka Cibachrome) photograph is 100% polyester (as opposed to an RC photograph which is resin coated paper on either side of a paper core). Therefore, Cibachromes sound somewhat like a sheet of tin when held by the corner and lightly shaken. An RC photo has a softer, duller sound. It's not likely framers will be inclined to rattle and shake an expensive 20" x 30" Ilfochrome to determine its origin, but it would be a way to capitalize on the sense of hearing.

Tasting can also be used, though this isn't advised in front of a customer. Sticking someone's artwork in your mouth would be considered in bad taste—no pun intended. You can instead slightly moisten an item to determine if it is an authentic piece of parchment or vellum. That's because vellum (or parchment) is real animal skin, and when a dried skin is moistened it becomes slightly tacky.

Seeing Is Believing—Or Is It?

So how does all this apply to mounting? When a project enters the frame shop it is the designer's job to assess the art and its basic condition, and determine how it needs to be handled. In the late 90s, framers are routinely confronted by projects they can't identify. New types of art such as gicleés, thermographics, and computer-generated art are creating questions of what to do. A four-color toner copy is printed on various types of paper, all heat safe. But the gloss on its surface is sensitive to the heat and will be

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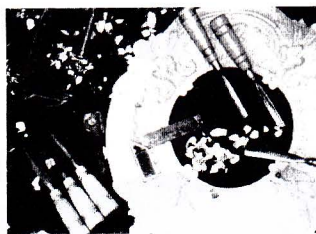
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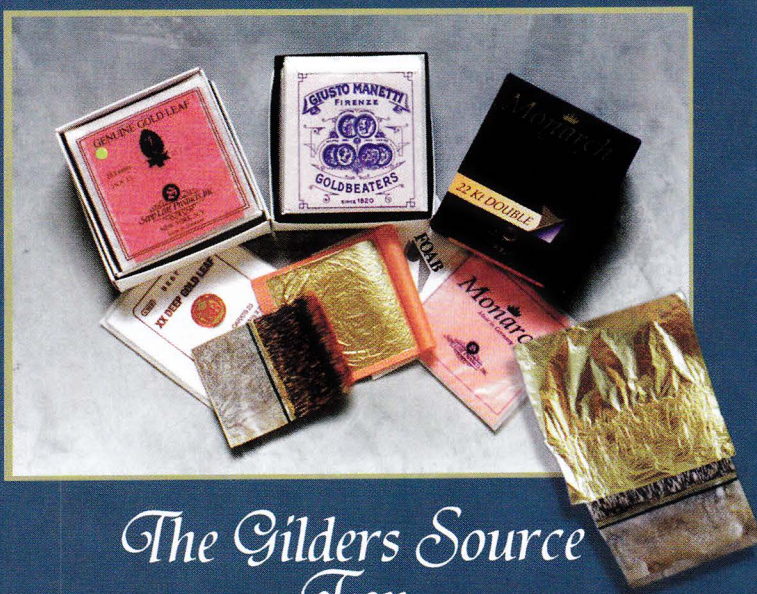
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damaged. So seeing a piece of paper and knowing paper dry mounts easily, does not always mean it is safe to mount.

Inkjet and laser printers create the toughest media currently being dealt with. Heat sensitivities are determined by the combination of inks, papers and printer used, making them extremely difficult to research. This is why there are few specific guidelines for mounting them. It often takes a trained eye and familiar fingers to determine the difference between an offset litho job of certificates (1 of 1,000 blanks) or a computer printer version. Usually there is a slightly raised surface to the letters when it has been produced by an inkjet printer, which can be noticed by a very light brushing of the flat of the fingertips across the lettering surfaces. Sometimes the inks have a slight luster to them, different from a print shop run.

These types of certificates or printed sheets are likely to transfer their printer inks to the surface of a release paper if subjected to heat. Two things result: the inks are partially or fully removed from the original, and the ink residue now lays in wait on the release paper for the next project. Often certificates are a combination of processes. The blanks are run by litho while the names and dates are computer additions. Routinely I suggest if the origin of the art is not known, don't mount it.

Feeling What You Touch

One of the best examples of polish-

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ing the sense of touch is when identifying thermographics.

The papers used with thermographic (heat created) faxes has a slippery texture or slick feel to its surface. So do thermographic theatre, sporting event and airplane tickets. These thermographic papers feel clay coated, like glossy Duralux litho papers that are often used as catalogue pages. These Duralux papers are not heat sensitive (like these magazine pages) but are much less porous than uncoated paper stock. Confused? You should be.

The real point I'm trying to make is that if there is any question about the materials, type of paper, inks, printing process—anything—then it probably is best left to an alternative method of mounting.

Alternative Methods for 1998

Is there such a thing as an alternative mounting method? Of course. Generally, an alternative method is anything other than the standard method selected for 80% of the mounting done in any shop. If most of the time hot vacuum presses are using a permanent, porous, tissue that is not acid buffered for mounting posters, then cold mounting a newspaper article onto a black substrate (to prevent ghosting) with an pressure-sensitive film would be an alternative method.

If however, pressure sensitive film adhesives are used 80% of the time in your shop for free-form cutout specialty cards that are being sold, then selecting a spray or mechanical press would be an alternative.

More than ever before there are needs for alternative methods of handling projects. I use the term projects because "art" may easily define a limited edition or original graphic requiring preservation methods of framing, while postcards, rocks, faxes, baby shoes, eyeglasses and scarves, though sentimental, fall into the decorative art category.

Seeing What You Look At

When concentrating on the dilemma of whether or not a printing method is heat sensitive, sometimes the more obvious reasons for selecting alternative mounting methods are overlooked. A photograph may indeed tolerate the application of heat, but the resulting problem of orange peel is the more pressing issue. If it doesn't look good after mounting procedure, it is probably not the best solution.

Seeing what is being looked at goes farther than determining what is safe to mount; it also includes deciding what is most enhancing visually. Remember, a framer's job is to enhance and protect. Orange peel is the lumpy appearance found when a photograph, inkjet image or even paper poster is mounted to an uneven substrate which in turn is reflected to the surface of the mounting ("More Photographs," *PFM*, November 1997). This can be very distracting, even ugly. Learn to feel the surface of a selected substrate with the flat tips of the fingers to better determine its smoothness. Then also learn to really see the orange peel lumps so it can be seen



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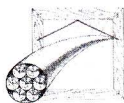
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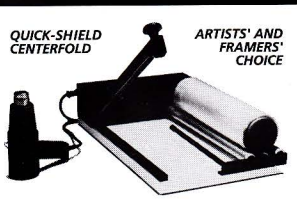


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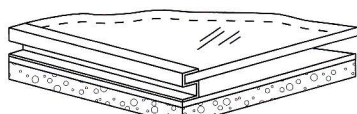
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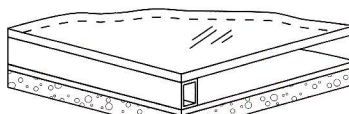
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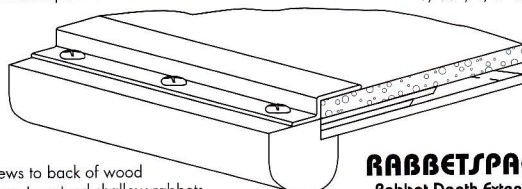
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whether the problem was eliminated by selecting an alternative substrate or mounting method.

Conservation as a Viable Alternative

When I talk about mounting methods I rarely include in-depth discussions on conservation techniques, because that's not really my job (we can leave that column to Hugh Phibbs). But I want to stress that you should never forget hinging, Mylar pockets, edge strips and other conservation alternatives.

If a computer generated print needs mounting it may be on paper too thin to comfortably handle wet or spray adhesives without cockling, especially if they are not knowledgeably applied. Perhaps the best alternative method would be one of the above mentioned preservation mountings. Hinging with an acid-free pressure sensitive tape may be a better choice than a spray or wet glue in cases of thin computer papers. Always consider all the options.

Trends in a Word

So what are the trends for the new year? They are more of the same. What the heck are we supposed to do with the digital stuff, photographs, and inexpensive Duralux posters? Trends continue to show more need for understanding alternative mounting methods.

There are so many items being framed that are difficult to identify, that it's better to be safe than sorry. I have repeatedly called for cold mounting sheet adhesives that are

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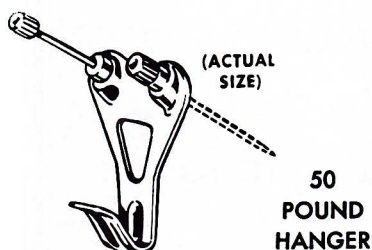
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sold on rolls like dry mounting adhesives that can be applied simply by the pressure within a dry mount press without using heat. I still see the need for this!

Classes are scheduled to be taught this year on "cold mounting." It isn't so much that the processes haven't been around long enough for us all to know them so much as there are lots of neophyte framers coming into the industry who need gentle guidance. There are very basic methods for successful cold mounting (which defined in the framing industry is, "any mounting method without heat"), and sometimes they just need to be reviewed.

With the development of hot vacuum presses, many cold mounting methods became the inexpensive mounting alternative (a cold mounting article is coming). Many framers stuck to wet and spray methods because of the investment expenses for new equipment—my Dad was a perfect example. But cold is definitely making a comeback.

When the poster, photo or digital piece could ultimately be affected by the application of heat, cold seems to be the smartest choice. Once a good long-term adhesive is developed for framers that requires no heat or moisture, is quick to create a permanent bond, is clean, healthy, and safe for iffy items, then life might be simpler. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF GCF, owns Designs Ink, Oxford, Connecticut, featuring commercial and retail custom framing, product consultation, design and education. Specializing in mounting, matting and design creativity, she works with numerous industry leaders, and has just released her first book, The Mounting and Laminating Handbook.