

Hot Tips For Cooler Days

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF



If we could learn through osmosis we'd never have to attend workshops, study how-to books or read trade magazines ever again. We could simply sleep with the printed information and get it ... but we can't. Occasionally, great little self-help lists are printed to help us shorten some of the study time by presenting assorted helpful tips. With the onset of cooler nights we might sleep better reviewing some of the basics, integrating new practices and realizing we can't absorb our knowledge as we sleep ... rather than leaving it to chance.

TTPM

The four elements of successful mounting, *time, temperature, pressure and moisture* should be comfortably understood and routinely practiced. Whether wet, spray or dry mounting, the answers to most problem mountings are often found within these elements. Over 90% of the time, non-successful mounts are the direct result of operator error.

Run your heat press at the lowest comfortable recommended mounting temperature for the chosen adhesive. A good average temperature is 185°F to 190°F for most dry mount adhesives. By selecting a good average time/temperature combination adjustments will only be necessary when special mounting projects occur or laminating is to be done.

Tapping All Moisture

In preparation for dry mounting, vacuum presses should be run once,

closed and without a project, to dry out the inner mounting materials prior to mounting the first project of each day. This not only pulls the moisture which may have accumulated since the last press operation, but will also test run efficient press operation.

After the final project of the day, run a cycle with the top of the press open. This will assist in moving air through the press and pump hoses to help clear them of any moisture build-up.

Shim It Instead

The pressure arm of your mechanical press should be set at 45 degrees to the table it sits on after *all* release materials and substrates to be mounted are inside the press. Each time a new thickness of substrate is introduced, the pressure must be reevaluated to accommodate the new materials. Constant readjusting of the press may be avoided by using 4-ply shims beneath the masonite for an occasional variance in substrate thickness.

Set the pressure of your mechanical press for the thickest commonly used substrate, probably 3/16" foam board. When mounting on thinner boards, slip a pre-cut shim *beneath* the masonite board in the press bottom to lift the pad and offset the space differential. For additional information on press adjustment see "TTPM: Pressure", March 1995 PFM.

Avoiding Dents During Multiple Bites

Never attempt multiple bites with-

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out proper preparation. Set the press for proper substrate thickness by beginning with materials the full size of the platen. Adjusting with an 8×10" substrate rather than the full platen 26×34" will not give you an accurate adjustment.

The second step is to use a release board rather than release paper when mounting in "bites" in a mechanical

press. The 2" to 3" overhang around the front three sides of the press platen will dissipate pressure at the platen edges, eliminating almost all possibility of dents.

Clean Process, Clean Product

Routine maintenance of mounting equipment and materials is essential for reinforcing predictable mountings

through good technique. By that I mean keeping the press closed (not locked) when not in use to keep dirt and alien particles from planting themselves inside.

Dust the platen each day prior to use and check release materials throughout the day, during use, to avoid bits of adhesive residue from being transferred to new projects.

Wrinkled Papers

Mounting with folded envelopes of release paper sized to accommodate various projects will prevent wasting larger pieces. When release papers begin to show heavy indentations from repeated smaller projects, it's time to get a new piece. Those wrinkles from earlier mounts can transfer into the foam substrate of a new project.

If you are using separate sheets rather than an envelope, pay attention to which piece is the top and which piece is the bottom, and consistently use them in correct placement. Since the dents are formed around the existence of a thicker substrate while the project is simply pressed against a flat platen above, normally the bottom sheet becomes wrinkled while the top remains reasonably flat. Generally the wrinkled bottom sheet will not effect the end project. Watch out for projects without substrates though, you could be asking for trouble using wrinkled release paper on the bottom!

Release Board Limitations

Release boards were a wonderful addition to the release material concept. They can be created in our own shops using single-sided release papers and smooth 4 ply mount boards or bought commercially, and they appear to be the perfect solution to the wrinkled paper dilemma. But enthusiast beware!

As wonderful as release boards are—they don't easily indent, wrinkle or fold over—I need to warn against using them *both top and bottom* as release materials. In either a mechanical or vacuum system, using



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a board on the bottom prevents the sponge pad or rubber bladder from conforming around the substrate during mounting.

In a mechanical press, the mount needs to nest down into the sponge pad to ensure constant, even pressure against the platen. Similarly in a vacuum press, the bladder or diaphragm needs to be allowed to contour up and around the substrate in order to automatically adjust its pressure to accommodate the variable substrate thicknesses. If a board is used both top and bottom, excess pressure can occur at the outer edges as the sponge or diaphragm attempts to conform to the shape of the desired inner project, thus bowing the board and possibly creating uneven mounting pressure in the project's center.

Board Exceptions

There are always exceptions to every rule. Occasionally, use of a release board on the bottom is acceptable, even advisable. When mounting an oversized project in bites, if the entire lower sponge pad will be compressed with each bite a bottom board may be used, for it will not deter from even pressure. It will not help eliminate the dents which show up on the surface and serves no real

Always store rolls of release paper away from your mounting tissue supply.

purpose, but will add bulk in the press.

Whenever anything is to be mounted in a vacuum press without a substrate, a release board on the bottom is advisable. A bottom board helps prevent unwanted wrinkling of the felt or rubber during the drawing of the vacuum, ensuring a smoother base for mounting. Wrinkles mounted into a non-supported soft mount (one with no stiff substrate) are often permanently set into that project.

Samples of non-substrate projects include premounting any adhesive for trimming prior to final mounting to a substrate, laminating to a non-mounted paper for leather-look, or mounting thin projects such as prints or photos during canvas transferring. In the case of using a bottom release board, the board is actually more of a substitute for a non-existent substrate than release paper.

Don't Create Problems Before You Begin

Since pre-drying is a necessary evil (when it comes to mounting in a mechanical press) sometimes attempts might be made to speed up the process by placing all items into a drying envelope at the same time.

All mounting materials and substrates should be dried independently of each other in absorbent Kraft paper. By loosely stacking all art, boards, or foam into one package during pre-drying, misaligned, unwanted indentations could occur which could impact the desired higher quality end product.

Release Paper Look-alikes

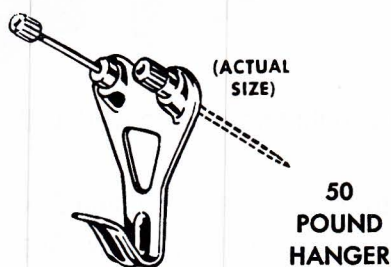
This is one that will really curl your hair! Thinner double-sided release paper looks very similar to ColorMount tissue adhesive, and horror stories of bonding projects face up directly to the platen surface have been reported to me.

I have two simple suggestions for preventing this scenario: first, always store rolls of release paper away from the tissue supply, and second, try working with a release paper envelope as opposed to a single top cover sheet. By regularly using a folded envelope of release paper you might not readily grab a large flat sheet to cover your poster. If however, you carefully create a newly folded envelope out of ColorMount . . . you're still in big trouble! You'll find the easiest solution for you . . . just pay attention. Either needing to clean the platen or replace the art could be the beginning of a really bad week!

Lists may never truly replace valuable hands-on education, but they might help alleviate some of these sleepless nights trying to digest the osmotic information layered under your pillow.

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, owns Designs Ink, Oxford, Connecticut, featuring commercial and custom framing, product consultation and design. She specializes in mounting, matting and design creativity and works with numerous industry leaders including Bienfang, Crescent Cardboard, Dahle, Fletcher-Terry, Larson-Juhl, PFM, PPFA, and Seal Products.

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