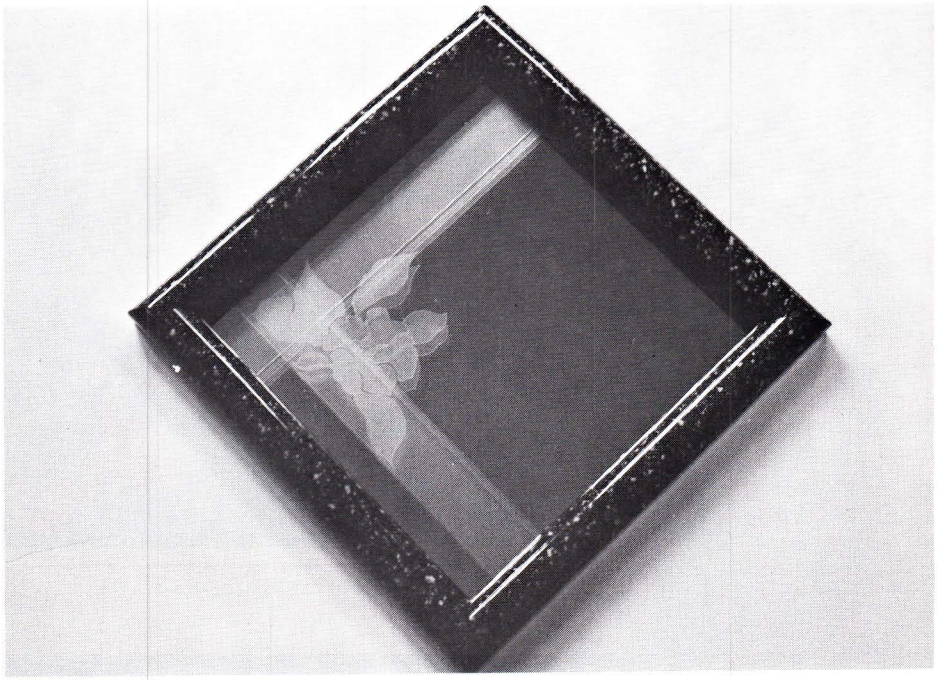
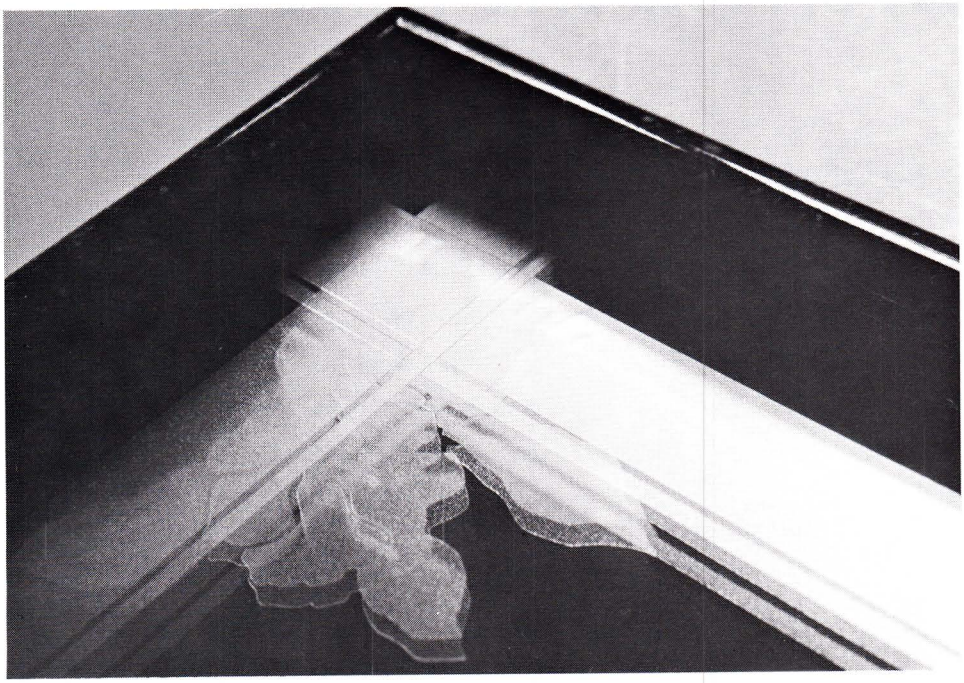


The photo is in focus, but the image reflected in the mirror and the added spacers between the glass layers and mirror contribute to its fuzzy appearance.

Glazing Creativity: Mirroring Profits

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF



Framing mirrors is an aspect of the business that is generally overlooked by many framers. If you use length moulding, or if some of your older, unwanted style numbers are in need of recycling, perhaps the mini mirror or decorator mirror is a good way to move out the old and bring in the cash.

Profit Potential

The featured project in this article is an 8″ square mirror tile, recycled from an old 60's planter using scraps of glass and end cuts of mica moulding, too short for a readymade 8″x10″, yet too long to waste on a 5″x7″ (see opening photo).

Two pieces of clear framing glass are mounted in a heat press with decorative strips and a floral motif, respectively, using scrap Print

Guard-UV Matte laminating film to create the etched glass look. The multiple pieces of glass are then layered with spacers and placed over the mirror to create an extremely effective, three-dimensional, designer "faux glass etched" mirror. By recycling the end cuts from matte laminating films, and using your heat press, you not only pull in profits from potential waste materials, but you will be making greater use of your mounting equipment.

Perforating

Since the glass and/or mirror (as well as the vinyl laminating films) is non-breathable, the vinyl must be perforated prior to cutting strips or patterns for placement. The perforating process involves punching little holes into the vinyl film prior to mounting with either a rotary tool (cleverly called a "perforator") or by buying pre-perforated laminating film, cut into sheets.

Perforations allow the air to escape from between the two non-porous surfaces of glass and vinyl during the actual mounting process. Begin with the press set at 180°, place the mounting sandwich in place, close or clamp the press and immediately turn the press to the laminating temperature of 225°. As the press temperature pulls up to the desired 225° to set the laminating film, all of the air will be compressed from between the surfaces and, as the press nears the desired 225°, the small perforation holes will melt back together and the actual mounting process will take only 3-5 minutes at the higher temperature. Thus, the entire time required for mounting a perforated piece of laminating film will average around 15 minutes, depending upon the overall size of the project.

Mounting Sandwich

From bottom to top, the project sandwich will consist of a sheet of release paper, a support or buffer board to protect your sponge or diaphragm from the corners of the glass, the glass or mirror substrate with the perforated laminating film pattern or design applied, blue overlay foam large enough to cover the entire project to create even pressure between the heat platen and the film,

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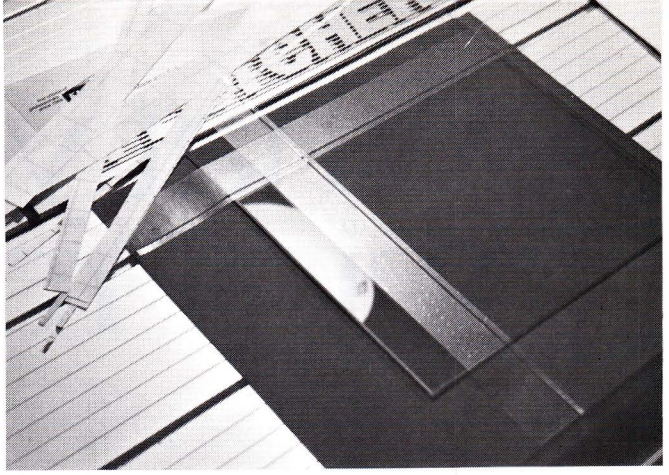
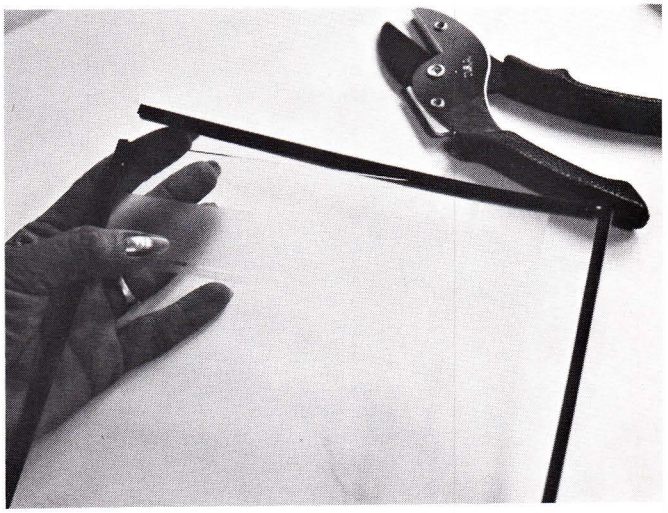
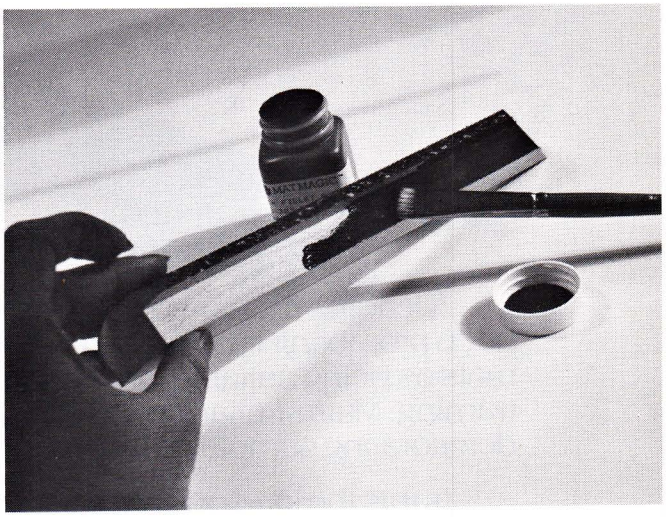


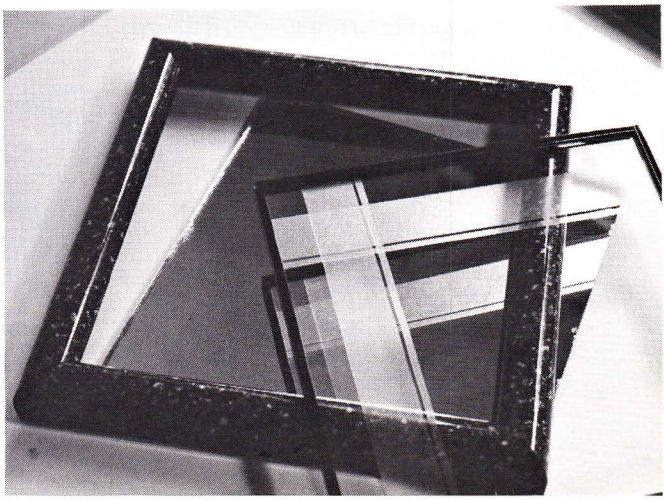
1. Cut strips of pre-perforated Matte Laminating film the desired width, using the cutter mat guide and bar to align the strips into the desired pattern. Trim off excess material, miter all corners and totally complete the pattern, prior to mounting.



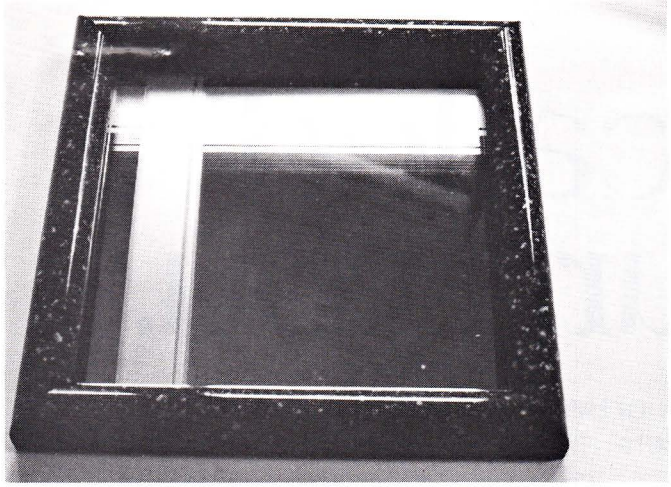
2. Trim the spacer material using scissors, fillet cutter or anvil pliers (as shown here). Black is used to match the painted black rabbet and prevent excessive reflection. Note the mounted laminate in the upper left corner, diffusing the fingers beneath. Spacers allow air circulation between the non-porous layers, preventing sticking and condensation.



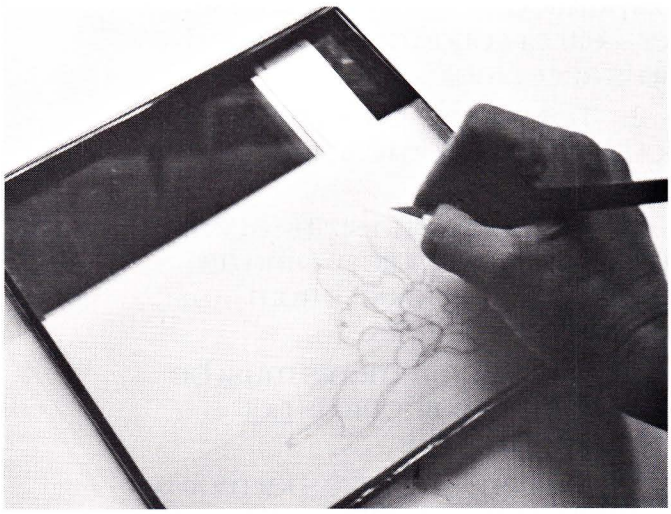
3. The completed project will not reflect unsightly, unfinished edges from the mirror if the light colored, raw wood is painted black. The entire image will appear more three dimensional and dramatic.



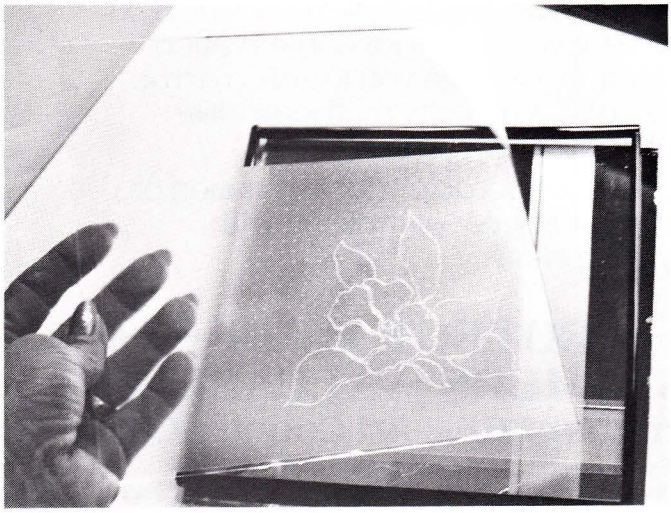
4. The laminated "faux etched glass" panel is edged with the black plastic spacer and is ready to be fitted. Note the reflection in the mirror and that all the perforation holes have disappeared. The film is turned to face the inside of the frame package.



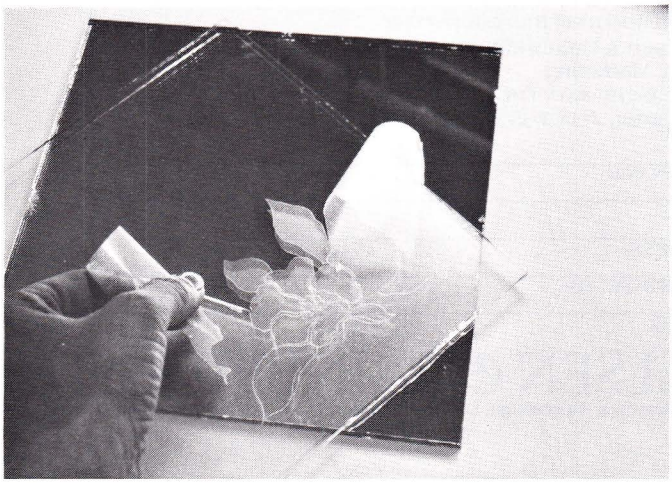
5. The completed, fitted, mini faux glass etched mirror with single glass panel may be left looking geometric and somewhat Art Deco, or an additional design may be added. Consider designs that integrate a border down one side, or maybe a more traditional French mat look.



6. Draw the design on tracing paper (working in reverse) with the paper placed beneath the glass (with the perforated film applied) and on top of the geometric panel design. Cut the pattern much as a stencil, and be prepared to remove all excess film.



7. The cut pattern illustrates the perforated film and image ready to peel. Laminating film has the wonderful characteristic of allowing the designer/artist to score accent lines into the film, which will remain visible after mounting.



8. Carefully peel off or remove all unwanted background portions of your pattern. Be sure to burnish the remaining pattern pieces with your finger, and mount using the 180° to 225° process.

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and a top sheet of release paper or a release board.

Design Tips

Use your mat cutter to cut and then accurately align strips of pre-perforated laminating film (photo 1) on the glass. Once the film has been mounted, line the sides of the glass with black spacers (i.e. Framespace, Spacemaker Econospace, Innerspace) to allow air circulation, as well as to create the 3-D imagery (photo 2).

Prior to assembling the frame (this step may also be completed *after* frame assembly) paint the inner raw wood rabbet black to prevent wood reflection in the mirror after completion (photo 3). The completed etched unit is now ready for fitting (photo 4). Once fitted together, the single piece of "faux etched glass" and the mirror design remain simple, contemporary and interesting (photo 5).

Accent Patterns/Borders

If a more intricate design, floral pattern or border is desired, the pattern is easily executed directly onto the glass. Since the completed lamination is turned toward the mirror for assembly, all patterns must be drawn and executed in reverse of the desired direction.

Draw the design on a piece of tracing paper and layer it within the proper alignment between the previously completed geometric design and the blank sized glass (ready to be designed); then proceed in cutting the pattern (photo 6). Remember the patterns must all be the reverse of the desired end product. Since tracing paper is easily seen through (as is the glass etching) completing the next layer is easy.

Glass will not be damaged by a razor blade so you may cut the design directly onto the glass. Fingerprints and dirty glass will, however, be immortalized beneath the mounted film for all eternity, so be certain to use clean materials. The unmounted, repositionable, perforated matte laminating film, having been positioned on a clean piece of framing glass (the pattern masterfully cut with a sharp, new blade) is now ready to be peeled (photo 7).

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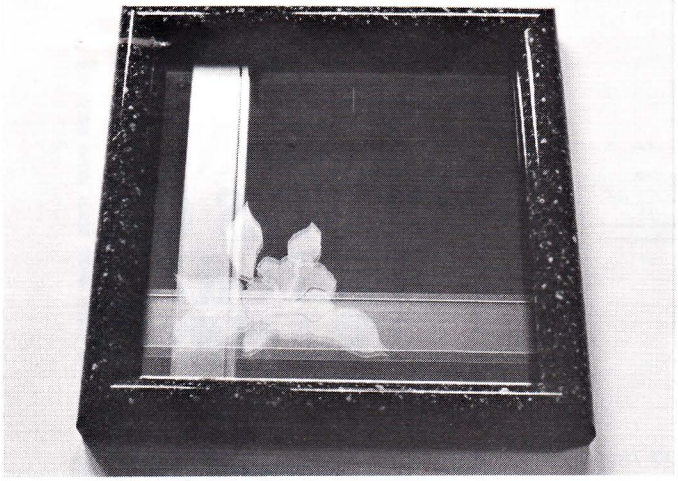
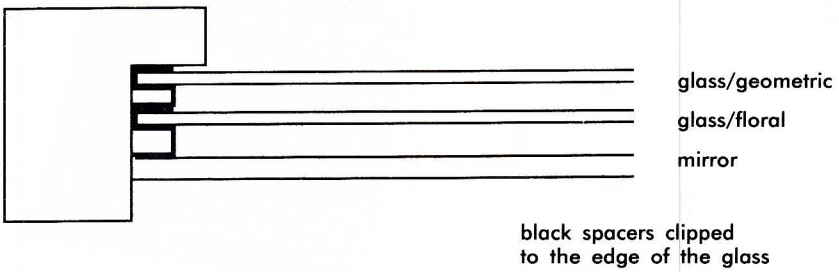


9. The completed designer mirror has two sheets of glass layered with spacers over the base mirror.

Diagram 1
Mounting: Mirrors



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Peeling or removing all of the negative spaces of the pattern will be the final step prior to heat mounting the film (photo 8). Carefully lift all of the unwanted pattern portions and discard them. Burnish the remaining pattern pieces using the fleshy part of your finger rather than a bone burnisher.

Assembly

Upon completion of mounting the laminating film (don't forget the 180° to 225° process) you get to experiment with the layering of the faux glass etched pieces (possibly including etching on the mirror itself) in relation to which layer or pattern you'd like to place on top.

I decided to layer this particular project with the geometric panel design as my top layer, placing the floral behind (I liked the dominant floral reflection in the mirror best—diagram 1). The floral on the inside created a more three-dimensional image, pleasing to my own aesthetic tastes (photo 9).

Creating The Niche

Designer mirrors may be created either as a result of developing that custom niche (a result of good marketing and eye catching completed store samples) or they may be simply recycling otherwise wasted materials (sales targeted towards impulse and gift buying). In either case, the addition of faux glass etching into the mirrored package creates additional profits by allowing further usage of your laminating end cuts and heat mounting system.

Your pricing structure should, as always, reflect shop time, design talent and materials used. If all the materials you use are recycled end cuts, perhaps you should work according to the shop time formula. Never give your design ideas away, and never price yourself out of the impulse market, if that's what you're after. Enjoy what you do and make money doing it! *PFM*

Chris A. Paschke, CPF is the owner of Designs Ink in Oxford, Connecticut, specializing in commercial framing, design, consultation and education. Ms. Paschke teaches, lectures and demonstrates at various workshops and seminars on mounting, matting and design at industry events around the country.