

Mastering Mounting



Plaquing: A Creative Option

by
Chris A. Paschke,
CPE, GCF

Shop any discount store (Marshall's, TJMaxx); decorator chain (Linens 'n Things, Bed Bath & Beyond); or department store (Kohl's, JC Penney's, Macy's) and you'll find a vast selection of open edition images that have been transformed into plaqued, canvas-wrapped, and three-dimensional metal images. Framed art is not the only option these days. Framing

turned into resin wall plaques, which have given way to metal versions of the same as well as tiles (Photo 1). But it all began with open editions for framed art and their variation on a theme called plaques.



Photo 1: The center 14"x14" open edition collaged character for "Spring" from Wild Apple Graphics originally printed in 1998 has been licensed as a resin plaque (left), ceramic tile (framed, top), and 3-D metal sculpture (right).



Photo 2: The open edition image "My Sweet Rose" was plaque mounted and laminated with a satin matte vinyl to a piece of 9"x12" MDF with routed edges painted black to contrast against the white paper edges of the art.

Plaquing Yesterday and Today

The practice of plaquing as we know it in the framing industry has been around since the early 1970s and was introduced into the U.S. from Canada by Drytac Corporation. Richard Kelley relocated from England to Canada in 1963 and started the dry mounting manufacturing company Drytac to meet the creative needs of mounting and laminating customers.

In 1971 he began importing and distributing giftware from the U.K., which included mounted/laminated placemats backed with cork. This was a new product for Canada and soon became a huge success. When he decided to manufacture them himself with a machine that he had found in England, it became an immediate success when he received an order for 24,000 coast-

ers. Soon after, he began to promote the idea of laminated pictures and photographs to framers and photographers—and plaquing was born.

Plaquing is the process of mounting a print with a permanent tissue adhesive to a decorative, routed, painted board of pine, Masonite, or MDF, which is then surface-laminated with a protective vinyl heat set sheet rather than with traditional frame and glass (Diagram 1). Though it has been a huge industry in Canada and Europe ever since its intro-

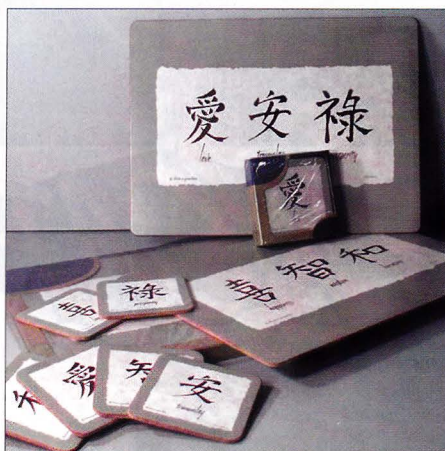


Photo 3: These sets of mounted and laminated placemats and coasters are art of mine licensed by Wild Apple Licensing to Pimpernel. They are open edition images mounted to thin boards then backed with a layer of cork for insulation and protection for furniture and glass top tables.

duction, plaquing never really took off in the U.S. In September 2000, Hunt Corporation (now Elmer's/Bienfang) began demonstrating plaquing using their tissues and laminates. Though it is commercially done with hydraulic heat presses in Canada, this technique has always been possible in manual mounting presses in the U.S., but it was never embraced until the new millennium.

Types of Mounting

Plain mounts (a.k.a. flat mounts) are the most basic forms of plaque print presentation. When a print or photograph is premounted with a permanent adhesive, trimmed to smaller size than the substrate, tacked and mounted to the center of a backing board of Masonite, MDF, or foam or mount board, it is called a plain mount. Photographs are commonly plain mounted onto display boards as 11"x14" photos on a 16"x20" background. Borders are generally 2" to 3" around. And although this is not the preferred method for glazing and framing, it is frequently used for photo storage (Diagram 2).

When a mounted image extends to the edge of a substrate and not matted, it is known as flush mounting. This doesn't apply to plaquing because of the visible colored edges of the board. A flush mount print/board unit may be bevel, reverse bevel, or square cut at the exact photo edge to create increased dimension (Diagram 3). If

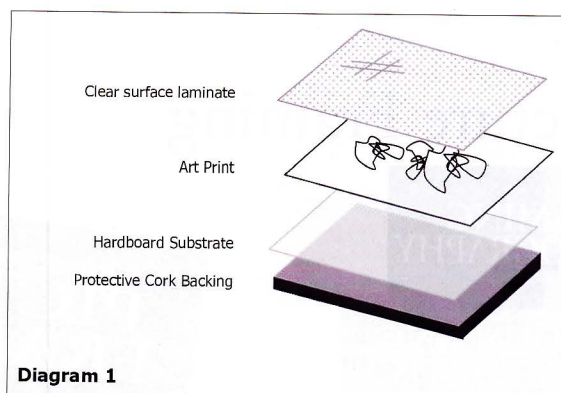


Diagram 1

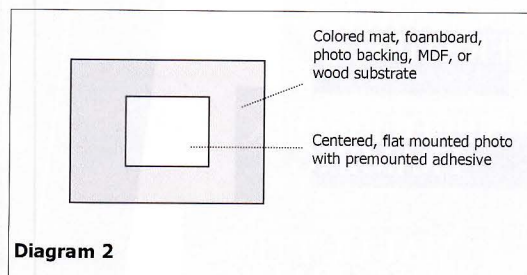


Diagram 2

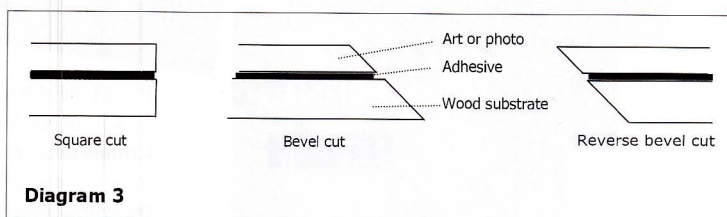


Diagram 3

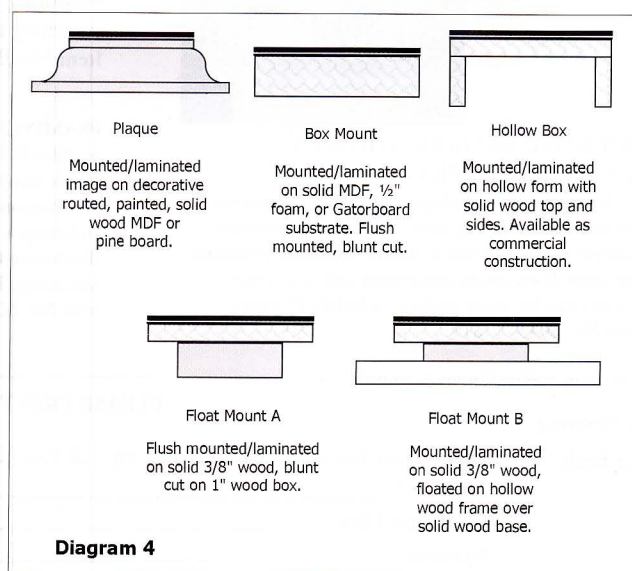


Diagram 4

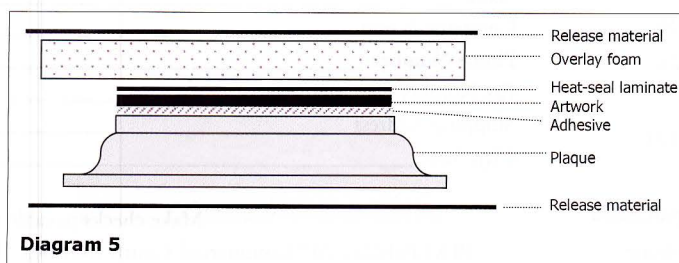


Diagram 5

mounting photos for storage, flush mounting would defeat the purpose of protecting photo edges from damage. Trimming the board to the image edge makes it vulnerable to dents and bending.

Basic plaquing is the practice of mounting and laminating an image to a painted, decoratively edged board (Photo 2). When the plaque is then backed to a $\frac{3}{8}$ ", $\frac{3}{4}$ ", or 1" solid wood piece, it is a box mount. When only side pieces are applied to a plaque, it becomes a hollow box. And when a plaque appears to be suspended over a smaller wood frame or is backed

and then mounted to another piece of wood, it is a float mount (Diagram 4). The basic plaque, box, and hollow box all have the structure and appearance of a solid unit, with the image mounted to its surface.

The process of mounting a smaller box to the back of a plaque or a plaque with a spacer mounted to the surface of a box is often referred to as float mounting because the plaque appears to float off the wall.

Materials and Process

Rigid board surfaces most often selected for this technique include $\frac{1}{8}$ " tempered Masonite; $\frac{1}{2}$ ", $\frac{3}{4}$ ", or 1" pine boards; $\frac{3}{8}$ " to 1" MDF; and sanded plywood. When producing your own in-house plaque, any surface vinyl laminate finish or texture of gloss, satin matte, matte, linen, canvas, or heavy canvas may be used. Bevel edges may be either painted

or stained, with plaque appearances being varied with assorted routed-edge profiles. Acrylic paints and stains make good sealers, dry quickly, and clean up with water.

Plaquing is simply a matter of mounting and laminating an image. Premount a sheet of permanent tissue adhesive to the back of the print in a 200°F press. Cool and trim away excess adhesive to the exact

desired size of the face of the prepared plaque. Tack the image in place, cover it with a sheet of vinyl heat-set laminate also trimmed to exact dimensions, and align it over the print. Cover it with an overlay sponge, place it in a release paper envelope and into a pre-heated press at the manufacturer's temperature specification for the selected laminate for enough time to thoroughly

mount the vinyl film (Diagram 5).

In-house or Commercial

The process of plaquing has assorted names depending on the company promoting the concept. Drytac calls it plaquing. Bienfang calls it plaque art. The Print Mount Company calls it Plak Art. I have also seen it advertised commercially in art stores and trophy shops as plaque lamination. No matter what name it's known by, the concept, process, technique, and equipment are all basically the same—and so is the end product. The biggest decision is whether to offer it as an in-house service, get into mass production, or send it out to a commercial company. Commercial companies that offer plaquing include Print Mount Plak Art, Unique Mounting Services, Off the Wall Lamination, ColorPak, PlastiPlak, and MES Lamination.

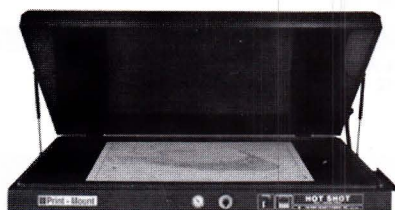
Drytac sells a high tech wood edger for plaquing called the DES-1, which is designed for large scale production. It routs, finishes, and applies color to the edges of plaques in preparation for surface mounting and lamination. It is capable of bonding high temperature foils at 300°F to 365°F for the ultimate in decorative application. It also has a continuous feed conveyor to move plaques from a shaping station to a cleaning station.

Artist and Publisher Copyright

Mounted and laminated placemats and coasters of my Asian calligraphy and art have been sold since 1999 (Photo 3) through Wild Apple Licensing. Any time an open edition image or photo is transformed from its original form to another by an outside company, there are copy-

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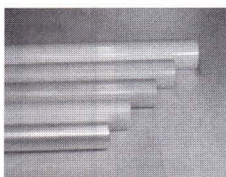
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right issues. Framers must always consider this when creating a new item like a canvas transfer or a plaque from published open edition images when the initial intent of an art print is to have it placed in a frame.

When images are purchased with the intent to vary their form and be sold commercially, from laminated placemats to key chains, you must have the approval of the artist and licensing company. You will need to pay royalties. When an image is mounted and laminated onto a placemat or turned into a serving tray without the artist's permission, it is copyright infringement, which is illegal.

The same is true with canvas transfers or plaquing. Plaque mounting an open edition image as a service for a customer is generally legal, but images slated for production with the sole intention of marketing them as a new form of wall decor requires permission and/or a licensing contract to alter the art.

The artist and publisher have the right to decide if they want their

printed images placed on a painted wood plaque, box, placemat, coaster, or tray. As an artist I have been called numerous times by my publisher to obtain permission to place my small Asian images on ceramics, canvas, or wood as transfers or plaques—but always as a licensed product with royalties. So be sensitive to the alteration of artworks, and consider what you're doing.

Plaquing and Frame Shops

The technique of plaquing has been in the framing industry for nearly half a century. It is currently thriving in home decor markets, particularly in the OEM market that supplies art to furniture and discount stores. For professional custom framers, the usual idea is to frame fine art for presentation—not mounting and laminating it to a piece of wood.

Although you may question the place of this technique in custom framing, consider that as framers venture into the gift market with ceramics, textiles, and even jewelry, there's much more to a gallery and

custom frame shop today than just picture framing. The real question is, will offering plaquing as an option to framing bring in additional revenue by targeting a currently untapped market or will it water down customer desire for wider mats, fillets, and better glazing on images?

Any framer who dry mounts should also consider offering plaquing as a contemporary, durable alternative to glazing. Since it is nonbreakable and warp, humidity, and moisture-resistant, plaquing is a perfect alternative to traditional framing for bathrooms, kitchens, and kids rooms. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, Mounting Editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring commercial custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and industry consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, design creativity, and fine art, she works with industry leaders and has taught for the National Conference. She has written two books on mounting: "The Mounting and Laminating Handbook" (now in its second edition) and "Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating." She can be contacted at www.designsinkart.com.

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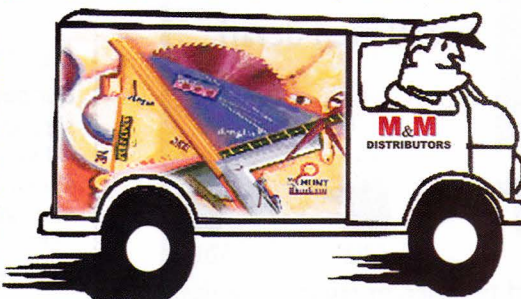
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