

MASTERING MOUNTING

Leather-Look— Let's Call It A Wrap!

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

With the continued growth of laminating procedures in the 90's, laminating creativity has presented itself in a multitude of profit-making ways. Canvas transfers, faux glass etching and contempo panel designs (some showcased on this month's front cover) are just a few of the wondrous projects attainable using heat set vinyl films.

One innovative approach to the combination of fine art papers, laminating films, dry mount adhesives and heat presses as used to create uniquely decorative surface textures was first introduced in 1991. This clever, inventive process was christened "leather-look" (photo 1). Initially, the leather-look concept was promoted only as an alternative surface mat design, but the creative process has now come to incorporate wrapping foam boards, deep bevel liners and shadow boxes (photo 2).

The basic materials are easily attainable and may be already be in your inventory. The process is simple, cost- and time-effective, and a real potential money maker; plus, it's fun.

The Papers

Begin by dry mounting a matte finish vinyl laminate to a lightweight, lightfast (non-fading) charcoal, pastel, or drawing paper of 60# or less. The lighter the weight of the paper used, the easier it is to wrinkle and wrap as leather-look. The tighter the wrinkles, the more refined the emulated



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leather veining will be. The less the paper is wrinkled, the more bulky the veins will be. The idea is to make the simulated leather appear as a fine quality, tanned animal skin—not a heavy, coarse elephant hide. Unless, of course, that is specifically the desired look.

Papers generally run 18"x24" to 22"x32" in size; although sheets may be torn and pieced, it is more time effective if a full sheet is used.

Papers are available from many industry suppliers and local art stores. I often use either Strathmore Charcoal papers (as used in the sample) or Crescent Colored art papers (which are the surface papers from their mat boards). Canson Ingres, Fabriano Antique and numerous other papers work equally well.

Applying The Film

Though laminating films come in a variety of finishes and textures, only non-textured films produce a nicely controlled end product. Textured films, such as linen and canvas, will fight the veining for visual dominance and are really not effective.

Cut the paper and film about 2" larger than the desired mat size, remove the release paper from the film, and transfer the film to the face of the paper to be laminated (photo 3). Premount the laminate to the art paper (no substrate beneath) in a release paper envelope using the overlay foam as you would with any vinyl lamination process.

Films mount at a variable temperature range of 185°F to 225°F depending upon the manufacturer; an average press time will be three to five minutes. This step only mounts the film to the paper as part of the preliminary preparation.

Creating The Veining

Once laminated, the paper must be wrinkled, wadded or crumpled

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into a tight ball to achieve the veining (photo 4). The more you crumple the paper, the more refined the veins will appear once mounted.

When creating a simple 4 ply leather-look mat (such as the top mat in the Art Deco sample), flatten out the wrinkled and laminated art paper and mount it directly on to a slightly oversized mat blank. Use a pure adhesive film (ie: Fusion 4000, Flobond) to dry mount the flattened paper to the 4 ply board.

It is important to use overlay foam in the mounting package each time the film is placed into the press. The sequence, bottom to top, will be: release paper, 4 ply board, adhesive film, laminated/wrinkled art paper, overlay foam and release paper (photo 5).

It's a good idea to use a quality acid-free or buffered board rather than a standard paper mat so the bevel will remain constant over time. Color core and museum boards may be used to create interesting accents.

Complete the top mat by trimming or sizing the blank and cutting the opening as you would any mat (photo 6). Remember to adjust the blade depth in your mat cutter accordingly to accommodate for the thicker mat.

Preparing The Foam

To create a deep bevel wrap using a leather-look design, begin by prelaminating the film to a fine art paper as described above. The process is the same to that point.

Size a piece of $\frac{1}{8}$ " or $\frac{3}{16}$ " foam board to the actual size required for the framing of the art (photo 6/again). I prefer using black foam board for dark papers and white foam board for lighter ones. The surfaces of both black or acid-free white boards have slightly better tooth than clay coated boards for grabbing onto the back of the porous art

Photo 1

The leather-look sample featured used Matte PrintGuard-UV, Strathmore charcoal paper, TruVue/Miller UltiBlack Black 4 ply, Bienfang $\frac{3}{16}$ " Black on Black Foam Board, Bainbridge #9020 Gazelle and Larson-Juhl #105CB moulding.

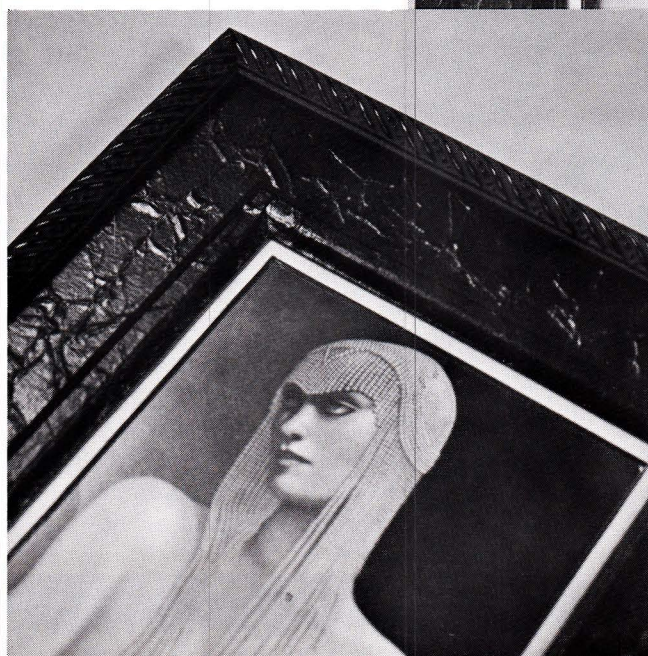


Photo 2

This detail shows the $\frac{3}{16}$ " wrapped middle mat explained in the article. The entire piece is laminated, eliminating the need for glazing.

paper when mounted with pure adhesive film, though clay coated boards will also work.

Extend the mat cutter blade to accommodate the thicker foam board and cut the mat to all proper proportions for your design. Always use a sharp, new, double edge blade for cutting foam to prevent pulling or tearing the inner foam. Not all foam boards cut well at a bevel; you may wish to test different brands and practice your technique.

Mounting To Wrap

Position the foam mat, pure adhesive film and prepared leather-look sheet on a firm surface. Reposition the foam fallout exactly into the mat center, depressing the laminated sheet to contour to the deep bevel (photo 7). Place the unit into a press remembering the overlay foam and both top and bottom pieces of release paper for press protection, just as with the previous 4 ply mat.

Mount the package at the manufacturer's suggested temperature for about two to five minutes (the featured sample is Seal Matte PrintGuard-UV at 225°F for two minutes). This step is needed merely to depress the fallout back into place while the film is being mounted to the foam (photo 8).

When the piece comes out of the press, the leather veins

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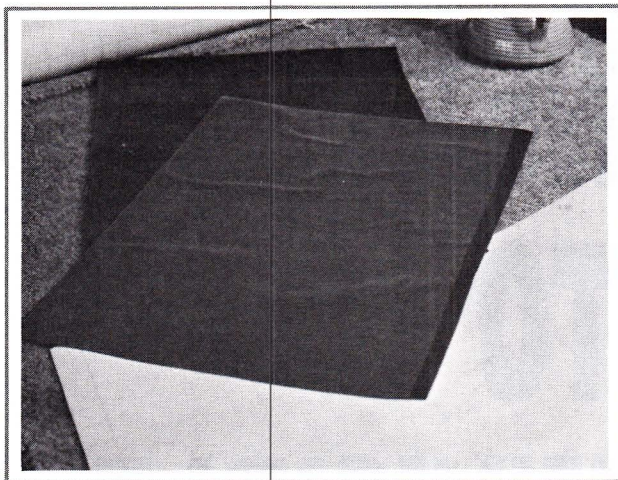


Photo 3

Apply the film to the surface of the chosen art paper and prepare to laminate. Remember to predry the paper and readjust for pressure if using a mechanical press.

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will be wonderfully depressed into the foam, even more than when using mat board. Remove the fallout to expose the deep bevel established during the initial mounting process (photo 9). Trim the exterior scrap of film from the outer edges of the mat and cut out the center of the depression, leaving about 1" around the bottom of the bevel. Miter into the corners. Note that all cutting is done from the front of the mat so as not to separate the paper from the bevel (photo 10).

A piece of release paper must be stapled around the tacking iron prior to completing the wrap. Since laminating film is a vinyl, it will melt if an iron is applied directly to its surface. Another warning: don't pull the iron, as the film can stretch or tear; only apply the iron as a constant pressure. Press, then move the iron; press, then move the iron.

Since the adhesive has been premounted to the entire back of the paper during the last step, tacking the wrapped edges is quick and easy. Turn the foam face down to complete the procedure. Press from the center and work towards the outer corners, pressing, not pulling (photo 11).

When totally tacked, check the bevel from the front, refit the fallout, and place the mat into the press one last time to ensure a permanent mounting of the turned flaps. Since foam board is not a conductor of heat, and the heat is in the surface of the press, place the mat face down to reinforce the tacking of the turned flaps.

Another Project Twist

The deep bevel wrapped $\frac{3}{16}$ " foam mat is the middle liner mat in this featured project. Since laminating film is a glass substitute, no glazing will be needed to complete this job if the print is also laminated. There is however, a third mat which should be protected too.

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Photo 4A. Once the paper is laminated, wrinkle it into a ball to create the veins.

Photo 4B. The tighter the wrinkles, the more refined the simulated leather-look will appear.

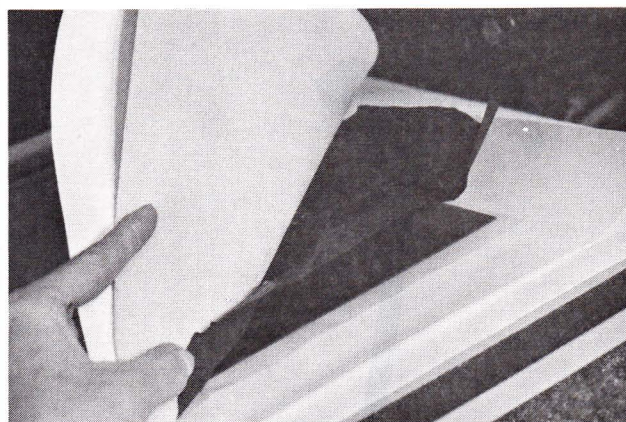
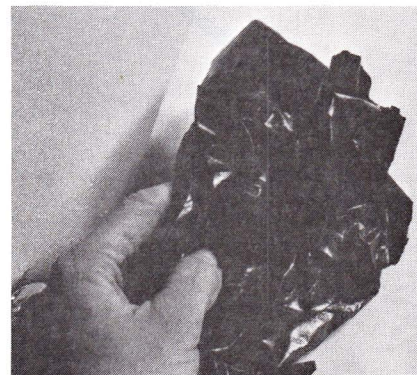


Photo 5

The mounting package shown from bottom to top: sponge pad wrapped with release paper, then two-sided release paper, 4 ply mat blank, Fusion 4000 adhesive, laminated wrinkled art paper, overlay foam, and top release paper.

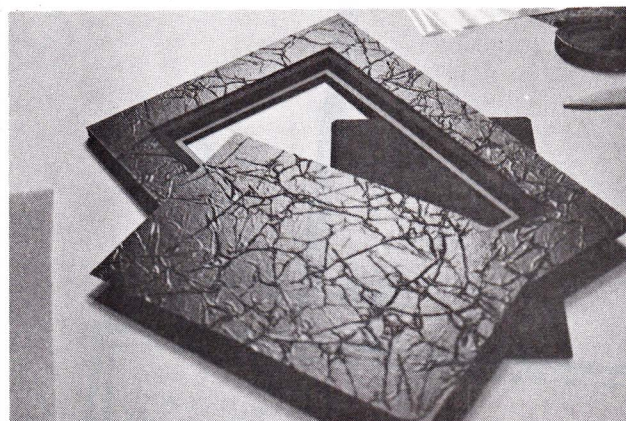


Photo 6

The top mat is leather-look applied to a black core 4 ply mat blank, mounted, then cut into a mat. Note that the black foam middle mat ($\frac{3}{16}$ " deep) and bottom liner mats are already cut.

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Photo 7

On a firm surface, reposition the foam fallout into the exact place. Even a slight offset of the fallout can reestablish the bevel or crush it. Place the overlay foam into release envelope and mount accordingly.

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The 8"x10" Art Deco print was mounted to a foam board substrate. The cut mat was properly aligned and affixed to the oversized substrate carrying the mounted print using ATG tape. Then the entire print and mat unit was laminated with matte film. All mats were then ATGed together and fitted into the selected moulding.

Pricing

Calculating the price for this project involves the addition of press usage and design time. Leather-look pricing equals a laminating charge plus mounting charge plus design time. Design time includes the wrinkling and wrapping added to regular mat prices, moulding, and fitting charges.

A wrapped leather-look mat may be priced as any wrapped mat would, but rather than adding fabric yardage, add the mounting/laminating charges. If you charge \$10.00 to dry mount, charge \$10.00 to laminate. Although films cost more per square foot than adhesive, the substrate is already priced out as part of the mounting.

A regular leather-look mat would include only the base mat price plus mounting and laminating. No extra design time is required—unless you're worth it!

Remember, we should all be charging what the market will bear, keeping in mind that specialty designs and creative skills are definitely worth more. Never undersell yourself.

Leather-look is a versatile process developed to allow maximum creativity with minimal investment and time. This project can appear contemporary, masculine, or natural depending upon the colors, papers, application and substrate selected. Leather-look creates interesting textural mats, dramatic shadow boxes, and more. As for this month—let's also call it a wrap!

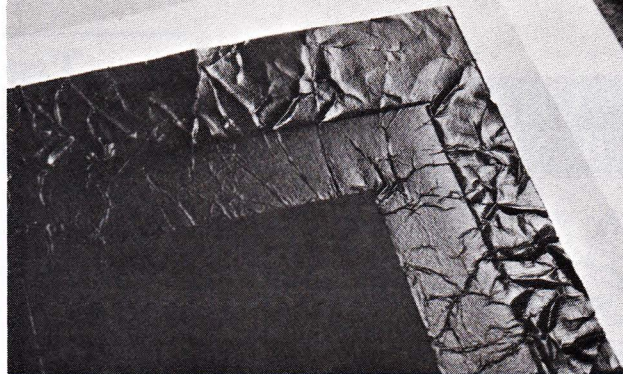


Photo 8

This first two-minute mounting merely sets the adhesive and establishes the bevel for wrapping.

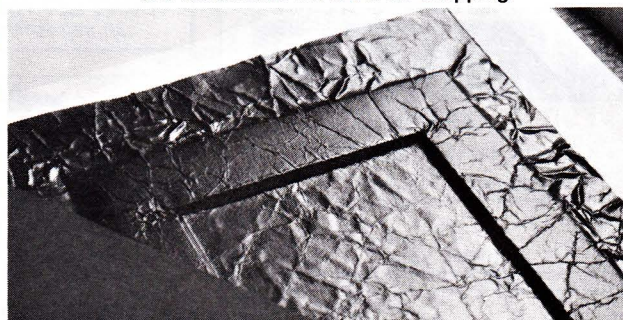


Photo 9

Removing the fallout exposes a well set $\frac{3}{16}$ " deep bevel ready to be trimmed, mitered and turned back.

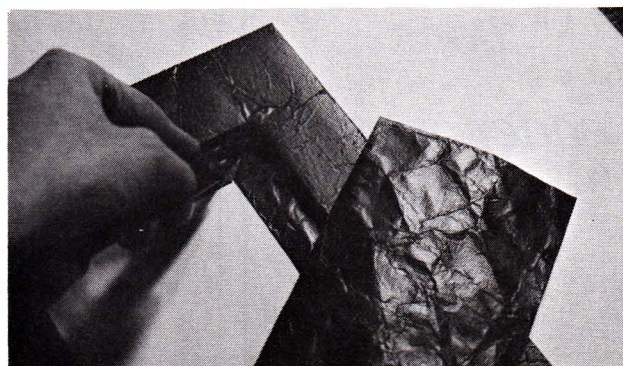


Photo 10

Cut the center out leaving 1", and miter into the corners from the front so as not pull the mount from the bevel.

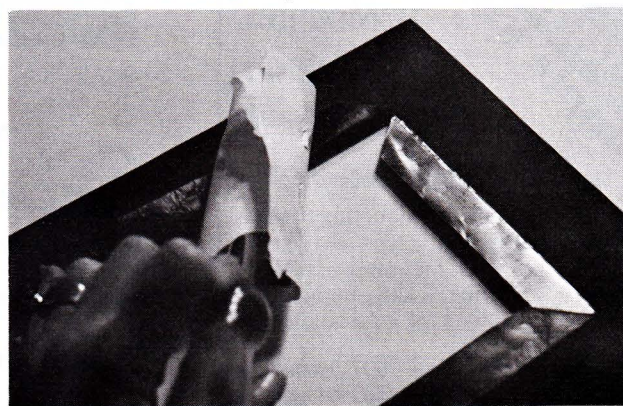


Photo 11

Staple release paper around the tacking iron to prevent the laminate from melting when heat is applied. Since the adhesive was mounted to the entire sheet, the tabs are ready to be tacked back by heat activation. This can also be done on large pieces using a household iron set just below the wool setting, with no steam.