

MASTERING MOUNTING

Resurfacing And Retexturing Laminating Films

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF



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In last month's discussion of creative and interpretive uses of laminating films for surface mat decoration, I began to illustrate expanding the potential for using films intricately in design. As with "leather-look" and embossed mats, the resurfacing and retexturing of vinyl laminating films can increase your profits through expanded design. At this point a disclaimer for, or apology to, all of the laminating film manufacturers should be offered: I will be pushing the suggested mounting procedures of many films to achieve a new end product appearance.

Film Finishes And Textures

Laminating films are marketed in a variety of finishes and textures directly from your distributors, available in both perforated and non-perforated rolls and sheets. Finishes include luster, semi-gloss, semi-matte, matte, ultra matte and gloss, while textures are generally limited to linen and canvas. With this variety of films available, why would we ever consider retexturing or resurfacing them at all?

Some of the above-mentioned finishes are currently only available as special order items, in rather large quantities outside of the United States. Also, from a cost effective point of view, if a framer can alter the surface of the film he already has on hand he may increase sales of the films in general, use current inventory more efficiently, and maintain a rapid turn around time for framing

completion without the need to order unstocked finishes. Besides, they are fun to play with. Often, when a new concept is tested, additional ideas have a tendency to develop.

Procedures

I need to recap the correct procedure for basic laminating in a heat press before going on to retexturing. You must always recognize the rules prior to bending them, for you need to know the absolute limitations.

From the bottom to the top, the laminating package contains release paper, substrate, previously mounted artwork (if applicable), laminating film, overlay foam, and release paper when surface laminating with a vinyl film. The press should be set to 180°F-225°F depending upon the manufacturer; the time will vary depending upon the size and thickness of the base.

Always remember the importance of predrying everything to be mounted in a mechanical dry mount press; remember the moisture issue. Overlay foam is always required for correctly and efficiently mounting a vinyl film because it equalizes the pressure and heat against the film being mounted and ensures the desired manufacturer's finish.

When overlay foam is not used, there is a chance that the lack of even pressure may not adequately mount the film and slight cloudy areas could result over a dark image (photo 1).

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If the foam is accidentally omitted during mounting, the project may be remounted with the foam, which will often correct the error.

There are specific manufacturer's foams available which have been tested for use with vinyl laminating films. These are the ones that should be used. Other commercially available foams, such as those available from craft or fabric shops, may contain a higher percentage of petroleum and actually adhere to the film during mounting.

Taking all of this into consideration, there may still be times when the use of foam may be an optional part of the framing designer's discretion, as in high glossing or resurfacing a luster film. This is where we begin to bend the rules.

Resurfacing For High Gloss

The resurfacing or refinishing of an existing laminating film may also create new matting design opportunities. By eliminating the ov-

erlay foam, interesting effects can be achieved with no additional framer investment. The available gloss and luster vinyl laminating films, although shiny, are not truly a high gloss finish. I personally prefer matte finish snapshots when I have photo-

graphs developed, but the general public (in recent years) seems to prefer the high gloss finish on photos. It is true the colors are brighter in a glossy finish, but the glare problem is ever-present when framing, even under glare resistant glazing.

So, if John Q. Public wants high gloss, we can do it—even with a laminate. Yes, the overlay foam is required to achieve the manufacturer's designated finish, but if you begin with a luster or gloss finish film and use the slick surfaced graph backing paper (removed from the back of the film) on top of the film, with the foam on top of the paper, the result will be an extremely high gloss finish (photo 2/center right). The new order of laminating layering will be release paper bottom, substrate, mounted artwork, graphed backing paper (slick inner side against the film), foam, and release paper top sheet. The foam is still in the package but is not in direct contact with the film.

Actually, the pebbled luster finish in the upper left corner of the photo echoes the texture of the foam itself, being somewhat transferred to the film during mounting. Hence, the slick high gloss refinishing is merely

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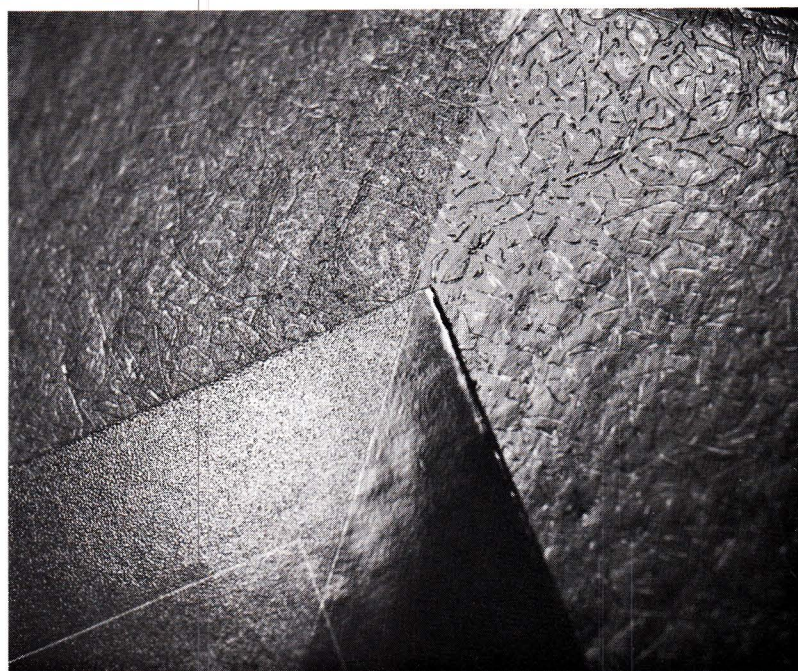


Photo 1. The upper right corner shows three stages or degrees of pressure creating three different looks. The cloudy (whites) areas remain least mounted due to lack of pressure against the board.



Photo 2. The upper left corner illustrates a luster finish laminating film mounted onto a poster using the manufacturer's suggested methods. The upper right wedge shows the 'high gloss' achieved by layering the removable backing paper between the film and the overlay foam.

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the transfer of the smooth, slick finish of the backing paper to the film (rather than the pattern of the foam). The foam is still necessary, for it will assist in creating a more even pressure against the film.

Consider the possibilities of introducing previously unavailable laminate surfaces to your customers. Even if high gloss over posters is not your cup of tea, it showcases an additional selection available for your customer, and that may prove to be a positive sales aid in itself. Strive for being everything your customer could every hope for, leaving him no reason to look anywhere else.

Retexturing With Foils

To taking the concept of resurfacing one step further, the final rule to bend involves the extremely simple process of taking crinkled aluminum foil and layering it on top of the film prior to laminating. The mounting package in this case becomes release

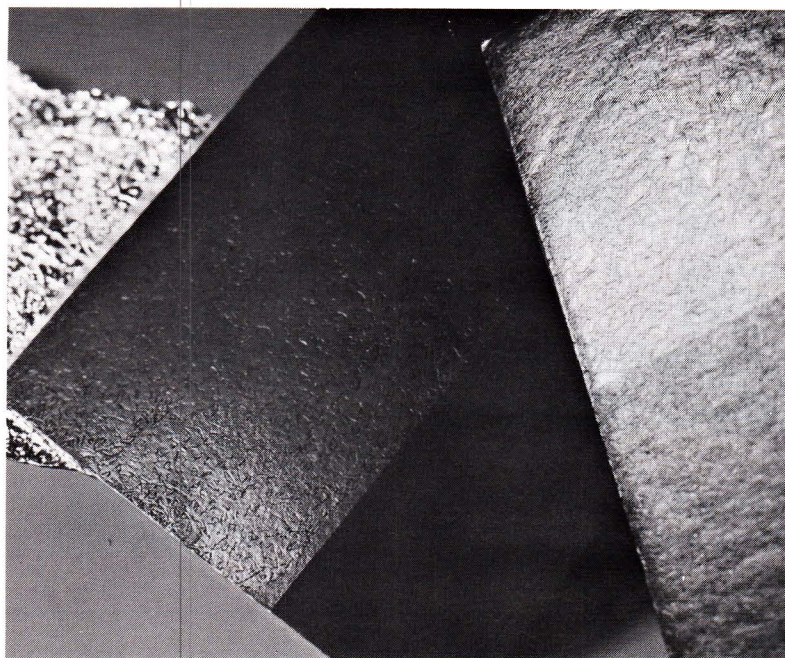


Photo 3. The crinkled foil is far left, a retextured piece of black $\frac{3}{16}$ " foam board was used as a substrate far right, while black 4 ply matboard is center. The division down the middle of the foam was created by repressing $\frac{1}{2}$ the board with overlay foam and no foil a second time. Notice the extreme orange peel texture of the foam, great for a shadow box.

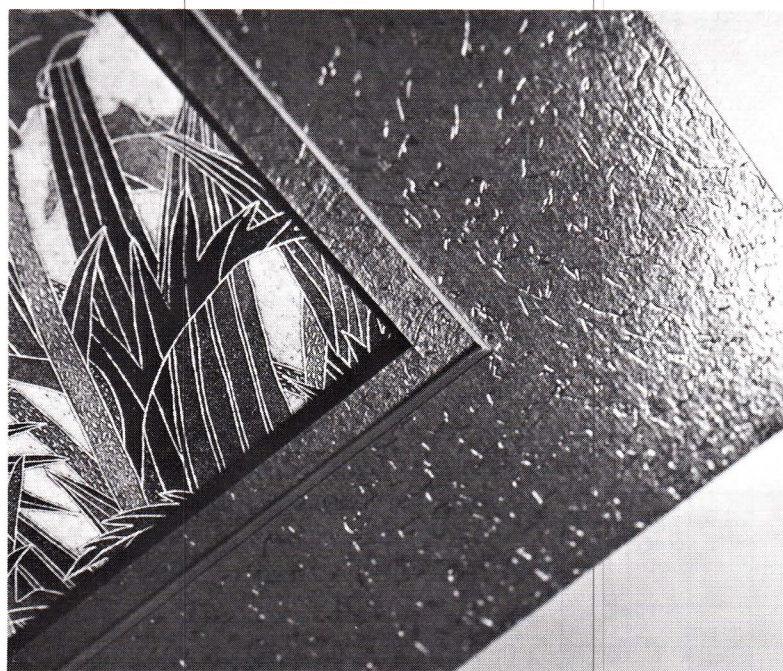


Photo 4. Specialty mat boards are easily created using luster or glossy films for the best visual result. Matte finish films don't showcase the resurfacing enough and textural films compete.

paper bottom, substrate or mat, film, crinkled foil, foam, release paper top sheet. I prefer release paper on top, rather than a release board, because of the uneven nature of the mounting package itself.

The end product is a unique texture, well-suited to both foam boards for shadow box backgrounds (photo 3), matboards for a new specialty mat (photo 4), or when laminating a print as a new textural option.

Rules always are applied for a reason; anytime rules are bent there could be circumstances to consider. As mentioned in the discussion of overlay foams, dark colors may show three stages of bonding since foam is not in direct contact to the film. The close up (photo 1) upper right shows the crisp sharp lines made by the foil, the well mounted film, and the slight white clouded areas where the mounting has not bonded to its maximum potential.

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After the initial mounting of the film with the foil overlay, the foam may be used to re-press the film for a second mounting. This will often improve the bonding of the film to the board, and also minimize some of the clouded areas, but it will also reduce the newly created foil texture by about one half (photo 5).

The layering process is: laminate the mat, film, foil, foam and release paper at manufacturer's suggested film temperature (180°F-225°F) for about five minutes. You may then optionally remove the foil from the package and relaminate for another five minutes.

Design Possibilities

The retexturing of laminated mat boards, to be used over a laminated

Photo 5. The mat (at a high glare photo angle) in photo 5 shows the extreme difference in double pressing first with foil/foam, second foam only. Notice the reduction of texture and increase in luster.



Photo 6. This laminated print has a 'foil retextured' laminated mat enhancing it. It can be offered framed or hung as a mounted poster, perfect for students not ready to invest in framing. Just another optional suggestion to fight customer objections. Sell up from a "mounted to foam only" poster . . . not down from glassed framing!



print or photo, eliminates the need for additional glazing. This makes it suitable for application where glass is not allowed. It also allows you to create designer matboards with your entire inventory of existing colored matboards. Pricing is simple; you are only using your press and film, so one regular mounting charge will be added to the base price of the selected mat.

So might retexturing be a design process in your future? The high gloss technique described has been a routine money making process for a number of framers I know, and retexturing mats is simply yet another design alternative (photo 6). As always, samples are a must, for if a picture is worth a thousand words, a sample is often worth even more—like the value of a sale! 