

# Mounting in 2025

*New and improved materials, discontinued products, and more updates.*

A year ago, I wrote about rolled adhesive updates and current mounting trends, thinking that might hold us for a while, but I was wrong. With this new year, additional discontinuations have been noticeable, and it's looking like these changes are here to stay. Since the recovery of the recession (2007-2009), the emergence of the digital printing has greatly impacted the framing industry. It began with lithographic prints no longer being sold in frame shops and branched out into many shops purchasing wide format roller laminators to accommodate the larger mounting needs of their clients.

During this conversion, framers were—and some still are—subcontracting larger mounting(s) to graphic display businesses that offer wide-format, high-tack, pressure-sensitive services and substrates not generally carried by framing distributors, including Sintra, Gator, and Dibond (all manufactured by 3A Composites).

## Foamboard vs. Gatorboard

Framers have been using foam center boards as a substrate for decades, especially after its acceptance by International Standards Organization (ISO), when it was first approved for use in framing enclosures in their document



ISO18902-2007. It is a lightweight, rigid foam sandwiched between white, black, or colored facing papers that has been the choice for framing, presentations, school projects, signage, and as the substrate for heat-activated (HA) and self-adhesive (S-A) boards. Available in 1/8", 3/16", and 1/2" thicknesses, the 3/16" is the workhorse, with 1/2" becoming rare in 32" x 40" at regional framing distributors.

Gatorboard is a durable display board that is constructed of a dense polystyrene foam core with facing papers on either side mounted to a thin veneer, making it rigid and lightweight. Gatorboard mounting is considered a more permanent signage solution than foamboard because of its strength but is not generally used as a framing substrate because of the veneer. But there may be situations with large, oversized shadowboxes for heavy rugs, large flags, and some collectables, which might require the strength and rigidity of a 1/2" substrate and Gatorboard is of-

(L-R from bottom)  
Gilman (LT and HT), Alcan (KLT and HT), HarTac, Elmer's, United Industries (black and white), Coda (Foam and 1/4" Plastic coated Coda-Foam)  
circa 2014.



**Chris A. Paschke**, owner of Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, is a professional picture framer with over four decades of experience. She is an artist, a National Conference educator, has authored numerous magazine series, including *The Essence of Design*, *Design Concepts*, and *Digital Directions for PFM*, and has four self-published books on mounting. She currently writes the *Mastering Mounting* column for PFM and is a contributing writer to *The Artist's Magazine*, *The Pastel Journal*, and *Watercolor Artist Magazine*. She was honored with the PPFA Award of Distinction for Leadership 2008, the Vivian Kistler Recognition for Innovation Award 2010, and the PMA Distinguished Service Award 2012.



*The mounted polyester encapsulated map tears the top layer of adhesive and paper from the board after mounting, illustrating perfect tear strength*

The 11 boards first reviewed in 2014 were readily available in 32" x 40" case lots, but 10 years later, most have disappeared from distributor warehouses, though some remain available from sign companies or art stores like Blick Art Materials online. Kool Tack InstaMount offers Competition Plate, Gatorboard, Mighty Tough, and Foamboard, which bond synthetics well.

## Dry Mounting

The beauty of thermoplastic dry-mount adhesives is they reactivate when placed back in a press, allowing the bonded item to be removed from the substrate, or for premounting of tissues. Numerous thermoplastic adhesives—ones that bond by cooling—are used as rolled products for photo and art framing. Thermosetting

adhesives bond as all layers reach bonding temperature and are considered permanent. Due to possible supply chain issues and/or perhaps low sales volumes over the decades, most of the rolled adhesives have been discontinued or replaced by P-S and HA foamboards. To date Release Paper, Release Boards, Overlay Foam, and Vinyl Laminates are still in production and available from our suppliers.

## Heat-Activated (HA) Boards

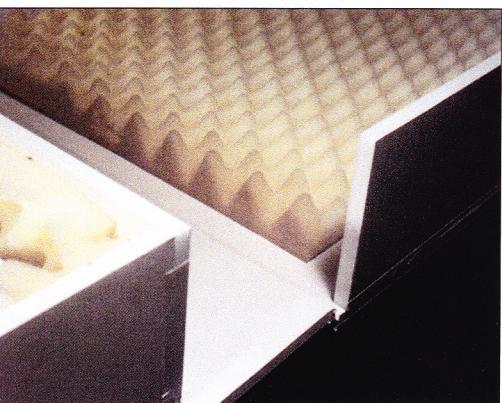
Rolled adhesives used to be identified by composition—tissue-core carrier and film; type of bond—permanent vs. removable; porosity—breathable vs. non-breathable; and acidity level—buffered vs. unbuffered, to make identification and comparison of manufacturer to generic brands easier. Since the discontinuation of well-known name brands FotoFlat, MT5, ColorMount, Fusion 4000, Flobond, Techmount, Drychival, and RagMount, the only known tissues that remain available are Drytac Trimount, D&K BufferMount, and Decor Permanent Dry Mount Tissue. The equipment is still available, supporting the transition from rolled adhesives to HA boards.

Original dry mount tissues and films from pre-1945 were shellac based and often bonded at temperatures over 200°F. Reformulations and use of synthetic adhesives since the 1970s have brought average tissue temperatures down to 185°F-190°F and lower. In 1992, Hunt Manufacturing launched SingleStep using Seal Products adhesive and their Bienfang foamboard as the first heat activated substrate. Adhesive coated boards remain commonplace in today's framing industry and are available as permanent, removable, and reversible

with temperatures running from low of 130°F to high of 190°F.

Permanent HA boards bond in the press as all layers reach required bonding temperature and the bond may only be broken with a chemical solvent. These boards have adhesives which bond between 180°F-190°F with an average vacuum press dwell time of four minutes. SpeedMount is lower at 150°F-160°F as a medium temperature, short dwell time of 15-30 seconds. Gilman MountCor and MountCor Canvas are the lowest temperature, permanent HA board which bonds at 130°F, 30 seconds in mechanical press. It bonds at such a low temperature it is unique in the market and readily mounts all heat sensitive items including thermographics, laser prints—dry toner color copies; dye sublimation, dye transfer, thermal transfer; thermal, piezo, solvent, and UV-curing inkjet with no damage, and loves synthetics.

Reversible HA boards have the same activation temperature of 150°F as removable boards but with a shorter dwell time for 15 seconds to one minute in a mechanical press. Reversible boards have a much lighter bond, and art may be easily removed from the substrate and returned to its original state with no adhesive absorption or residue left behind. Even with reversible bonding, KoolTack still does not consider their board a true archival or conservation product. For any HA board to bond properly it should have tear strength once fused. That means the top layer of adhesive and paper should rip from the board if dry peeled after mounting. The production of HA boards has changed little in the past decade with MountCor, SpeedMount, 3A Fome-Cor SingleStep, KT Drymount Foamboard, and KT Preserve Untra sold at many distributors.



*A drop spine shipping box built out of 1/2" foamboard, lined with 2 1/2" eggcrate foam.*

ten the solution. Larger 1/2" sheets of both foamboard and Gatorboard are often available in 40" x 60" and 48" x 96" from some distributors.

## Pressure-Sensitive Adhesives

PSAs are dry, synthetic adhesives that are clean, easy to use, odorless, use no solvents, are generally pH-neutral, and chemically inert. There are three levels of tack available with PSA: high, medium, and low tack. High tack is aggressive and most difficult to manually apply since it has no repositioning potential and immediately grabs to smooth nonporous or coated stock with no forgiveness. Medium tack is the one most frequently used in picture framing, being somewhat repositionable during mounting with porous papers, though even

repositionable p-s boards will grab more aggressively to a smooth or coated material. Low tack is most often found as a temporary positioning tack used in preparation for other bonding as laminates with liners or Post-It notes and are not suitable for the longevity of framing.

## P-S (Self-Adhesive) Boards

Self-adhesive—also known as self-stick, peel and stick, and sticky—boards are cold-mount pressure-activated mounting substrates with thermoplastic adhesives known as P-S and PSA. Application and end use temperature may affect p-s bond permanence, and moisture is a physical barrier to adhesion and long-term bonding. A permanent, high-tack pressure-sensitive applied at room



KT InstaMount products Competition Plate, Gator Board, Mighty Tough and Foamboard bond synthetic materials.

temperature may fail at freezing temperatures if placed outside, or in an excessively humid bathroom. Coldness to the touch is an indicator of moisture content in boards making dry storage imperative for p-s materials, if boards are damp, permanence is threatened. Remember, just as removable pressure-sensitives may not always remove, permanent pressure-sensitives may not always be permanent.



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## Shipping Box Update

Building custom reusable shipping boxes is another option all framers should offer as a service. This is an example of where 1/2" sheets of foamboard or Gatorboard are the best choice. I have always used 1/2" foamboard sheets to build in-house boxes, but when frame suppliers stopped carrying 32" x 40" cases of 1/2", I began using two 3/16" permanent, high-tack, pressure-sensitive foamboards placed face-to-face as a very good substitute. For years framing distributors sold Elmers HT PSA and Bainbridge Permanent Self Adhesive and they were both excellent for these boxes. Their permanent high tack immediate grab

nature of these boards made them a good substitute.

I was recently tasked with creating two boxes—32" x 40" x8" and 37" x 29" x10"—to ship five original framed pieces to a museum in Illinois for a client, and there were no suppliers selling cases of either 1/2" foamboard or Elmer's or Bainbridge PSA boards. An alternative high-tack product was purchased—one of the very few remaining available in our industry—and although it appeared to be a good alternative, it was not. After fully, evenly weighting the face-to-face bonded sheets overnight, the outer 1/2" never properly bonded and ended up needing to be fused using 3M 3797 Jet-Melt glue sticks and the Polygun-TC.

The glue sticks are short 2" x 1/2", neutral pH and noncorrosive, adhering to Volara and Ethafoam. As with everything else, both the gun and the sticks have evolved and been replaced by the newer version 3M Pro 200 Hot Melt Applicator-TC and 3M 3792-TC Hot Melt Glue (Ethylene-Vinyl Acetate Polymer) sticks.

The evolution of our state-of-the-art industry has been good overall, taking us from corrugated cardboard and masking tape to better, safer materials to house art. And even though that includes us dealing with discontinued adhesives, PSA boards, and glue guns, we should embrace the new and improved. Or so I'm told. **PFM**



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