

Mastering Mounting

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Shadowboxing Made Easy

Part 1

To “shadowbox” is the act of making motions of attack and defense, as in boxing, but in the absence of an opponent. Shadowboxing is an activity that hones one’s boxing talents. As aggressive and spontaneous a sport as boxing appears, it actually includes the execution of trained precision blows (and the selling of the whole show behind the fight itself). So how exactly does this relate to, or differ from, the shadowboxing we may do as framers? Isn’t it obviously dancing around and dodging the customer’s blows of “it’s going to cost how much?”.

The one-two punch of designing and selling shadowboxes is probably the biggest similarity between traditional sport boxing and framing memorabilia. It takes precision in the design to be able to best present the articles to be framed, and the selling of the more elaborate box concept in the first place. There is still much customer education needed to teach the cost of quality preservation framing costing more than the antique family keepsakes...which are generally priceless in the first place.

Designing

The whole memory/scrap book explosion of recent years has, in many ways, set the stage for framed shadowboxes to flourish. PPFA has even had consumer promotional campaigns to help the framer promote this concept. Framing memories better allows customers to enjoy their collectibles and family

heirlooms on a daily basis, rather than keeping them packed away—safe yet hidden—to be handed down to the next generation.

When a customer brings into the shop a cluster of common items to be framed, a shadow box might be suggested. A deeper or stacked moulding will often be needed to accommodate the items, and many times long term preservation practices must also be presented. These items may also be light fugitive and would require the protection of UV glazing. Yes, true conservation/preservation handling of all item concerned.

Traditional Shadowbox Construction

Traditionally-constructed shadow boxes consist of a selected backing or support substrate strong enough to firmly hold the items to be mounted. This is then wrapped, covered, painted, or left with its own texture to best enhance and protect the objects and memorabilia. Items are affixed to the backing by commercial, or fabricated, mounts designed specifically for the object (ie: plate, gun, fishing rod); sewn; or sometimes glued.

Box sides are made of either commercially extruded materials designed for use as spacers (ie: Framespace, Econospace, Spacemaker, Innerspace), or by using the same boards/materials that are used as a backing. These pieces are sized to fit and then attached to the sides as separate strips. Both the strips and commercial spacers act to support the glazing in the

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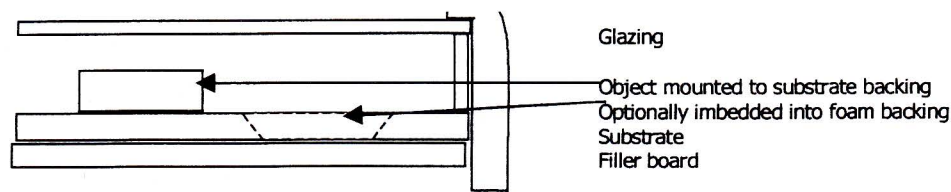


Diagram 2

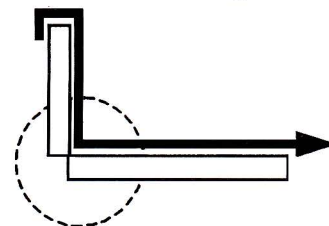


Diagram 1

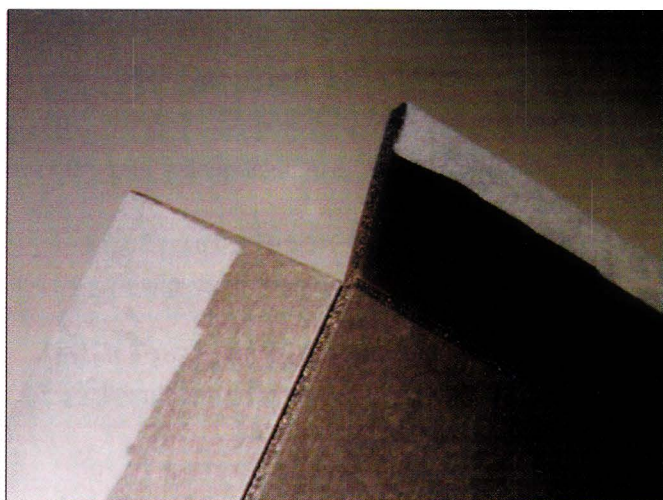


PHOTO 1a

The corner trimmed one-piece box has been edge wrapped and is now ready to assemble at the corners. This box illustrates the "cut out" corners since the fabric does not fray.



PHOTO 1b

When folded into a 90° corner the flush edges complete the box design. Wrap with linen tape to hold firmly and burnish in place to fully engage adhesive.

final fitting of the units into the frame. (see Diagram 1).

There is a science behind shadowbox framing, including deep box mouldings, stacked mouldings, glazing, constructed spacers, alternative commercial spacers, substrates and mounting mechanisms (both commercially available and invented in the shop as a solution to the problem). There are also alternative methods for creating the basic box itself.

In this two part series I will be concentrating on the construction of four different one-piece boxes. The basic one-piece and window showcase versions will be covered this month in Part One, continuing next month in Part Two with cove designs and platform dimensionals.

One-Piece Boxes

Unlike traditionally constructed boxes, one-piece boxes

are those constructed from a single piece of foam or mat board with the sides remaining intact during construction and subsequent assembly. The sides are still capable of supporting the glazing, but the big difference is that the sides remain attached to the backing itself at all times. The mounted fabric or decorative paper functions as an additional reinforcement, giving more stability to the box edges when folded.

Basic construction is simple and efficient (see Diagram 2). Note that the fabric extends both across the box backing and wraps around the top raw edge of the foam that fits beneath the rabbet into the frame (Photos 1a and 1b).

Begin by first cutting the foam to size for the box based on the following formulas:

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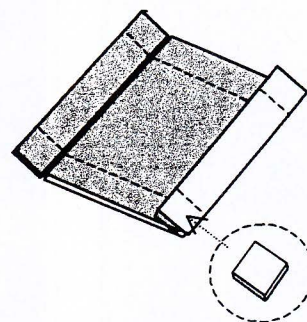
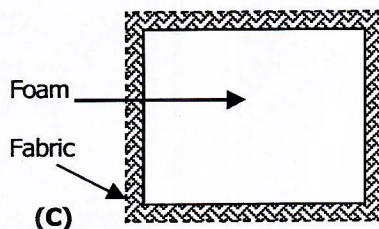
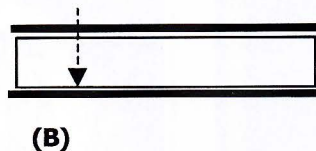
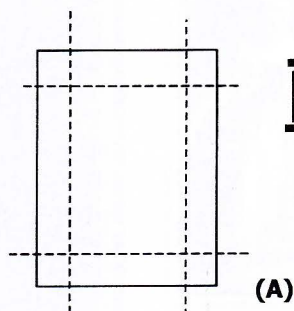


Diagram 3

Diagram 4



PHOTO 2

The completed box is ready for attachments. Sample shown has been inserted into the frame to illustrate the more finished look, but items will be sewn through foam and then backed with a second sheet prior to fitting.



PHOTO 3

Original 22" x 29" Marathon Box (shown courtesy of Mark MacKinney, Oxford, Connecticut) was to be composed of racing jersey, number, and completion medallion. The photo and calligraphy were added by framer request for additional items to tell a more complete story and better commemorate the event.

Desired Inner Width + Side + Side - Board thickness -
Board thickness = Box Width

Desired Inner Length + Side + Side - Board thickness -
Board thickness = Box Length

You may be best advised to build the frame after the box is formally constructed—at least until you are very familiar with the formula. Note in Diagram 2 that the sides create an additional width to the box backing measurement. This thickness of the substrate needs to be subtracted from the base measurement of the box.

An 8" x 10" box, with 1" high sides would actually measure:

$$8" + 1" + 1" - \frac{3}{16}" - \frac{3}{16}" = 9\frac{5}{8}" \text{ wide, and}$$

$$10" + 1" + 1" - \frac{3}{16}" - \frac{3}{16}" = 11\frac{5}{8}" \text{ long.}$$

Next the foam blank must be scored to accommodate what will become the folded sides of the completed box (Diagram 3a). Score down through the backing, end to end, but not through the face of the blank (Diagram 3b). The fabric or decorative materials for the box should be an inch larger around the backing to allow for later wrapping over the exposed board edges (Diagram 3c).

Any process of mounting may be selected to attach the material to the backing, depending upon the desired result and expected longevity of the project. Wet, spray, pressure-sensitive, or dry mounting techniques will all apply to this step-by-step method. Select the mounting method and affix material to substrate. Once mounted to the box front, the project box must be completed in

preparation for attaching the objects and memorabilia.

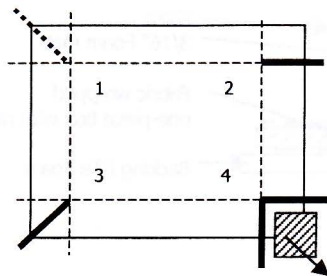
Fold the four sides of the box forward to crease the front panels, then remove the four corner squares, leaving only the fabric and surface paper at the corners (Diagram 4). The decorative material may then be trimmed at the corners for easier handling and in preparation for final finishing.

The corners may be trimmed and finished in four different ways: folded miter, tab cut, miter cut and wrapped, or cut out. Diagram 5 illustrates the four separate versions available, but the correct choice will totally be determined by the materials mounted. If too heavy a fabric is tab cut or miter folded, it will usually over-fold the corner in at less than a clean perpendicular 90 degree corner. Pay attention to your materials and their limitations.

After mitering the corners of the box, they need to be wrapped and reinforced with linen tape to hold the square inner corners. The extra fabric extending beyond the substrate edges needs to be wrapped around the top cut edge to cover exposed foam (Diagram 2). Now the box is ready for the objects to be affixed in place (Photo 2).

"First Marathon" Box

The sample shown is a completed version of a shadow box for Mark MacKinney, Oxford, Connecticut. After completion of his first marathon (Tucson, Arizona December 1997) he brought the items in to be placed in a simple shadowbox design to commemorate his accomplishment (Photo 3).



1. Folded miter – for light materials only
2. Tab cut one side – for paper or fabric
3. Miter cut and wrapped – for ravelly fabrics
4. Cut out corner – for non-raveling materials

Diagram 5

It is a basic one-piece box with dry mounted velour fabric in a soft grey-green to pull together the colors of blue and green of the jersey; red and white

of the racing number, and completion medallion. The photo was an addition as a request from the framer (me) to add pieces to the project for interest and color unity, the moulding selection in a mahogany with washed grey does the same. Mark wished no heroics with preservation, but all due care was taken in the completion of this project anyway.

"Window Showcase" Box

The first variation on the above one-piece box design is a window showcase. It begins with the basic one-piece box as explained and constructed above, then places a wrapped window mat to cap the box prior to placing glazing on top and into the frame (Diagram 6).

There are two simple steps required to achieve great wrapped mats in a heat mounting system. The first is remembering to fit the fallout back in

place before mounting; the second is to iron the bevel to reactivate the adhesive and adhere it to the bevel edge. Most wet and pressure sensitive adhesives will reactivate with the application of heat after drying. Both household irons and industry tacking irons will work to iron bevels and tack back tabs when completing the wrapping.

Cutting and completing the mat is simple regardless of the mounting method used. This description is based



PHOTO 4
Mikado Box (shown courtesy of Hunt Corporation) is a one-piece "window showcase" box. The wrapped top free form cut window mat matches the lining of the box itself, and the window opening echoes shapes of items in the box.

Mastering Mounting

on heat mounting but modifications for alternative cold methods don't really change the technique, just the mounting method. Cut the window opening and mount material to the mat using the fallout to depress the material into the window opening (Diagram 7), then weight and cool. Cut the inner window opening, leaving 1" raw fabric edge, and miter the corners of the fabric after mounting. Hand iron the bevel edge to mount the loose fabric to the bevel.

Place the mat face down and iron the flaps onto the back of the mat window. *Do not rush*; iron slowly for a good bond (Diagram 8).

Finishing the box begins by following traditional framing steps of glass cleaning. Then slip the completed box into position in the frame; cut and fit the foam backing to support box and reach sides for stapling; add needed filler boards; then paper and wire for hanging (Diagram 6).

Mikado Sample

Both the box and the top window mat of the Mikado (Photo 4) window showcase sample were dry mounted in a mechanical press at 190°F for one to three minutes in a mechanical (or two to four minutes in a vacuum) press, removed, then cooled under a weight. The window

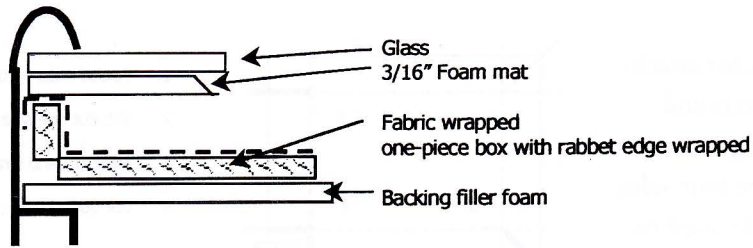


Diagram 6

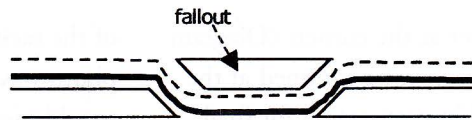
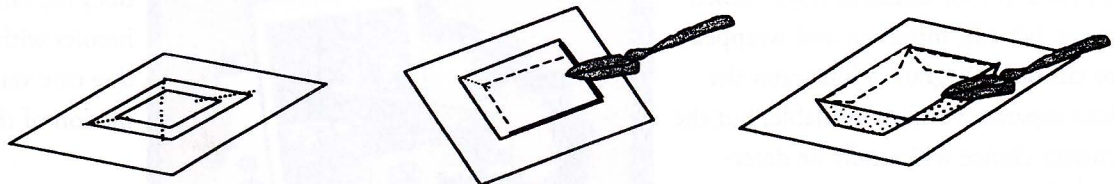


Diagram 7

Diagram 8



Cut opening in fabric with mat face up. Miter corners. Do not cut too close into the corner, it could expose raw foam or mat board.

Hold the mat with the plane of the bevel parallel to the table and iron the bevel to reinforce and melt adhesive. Foam board is an insulator and will not allow the heat to melt the adhesive when the fallout is in place during initial mounting.

Turn the mat face down and iron the adhesive backed tabs to the back of the mat window. Begin from the center and work into the corners, always pulling towards the outer edge to avoid bevel buckling.

mat was a free form design following and echoing the shapes of the memories within it. Paper-backed silk was used for both the box lining and the wrapped window mat. For additional information on wrapped mats and freeform design mats see [PFM](#) "Wrapped and Embossed Mats" March and April 1998.

More to Boxing Than Shadows

In light of the practicing one may need to do in front of a wall to be prepared to face one's opponent, framers should have multiple boxes and variations on them all over their

walls as samples of what they can do for the customer.

Selling is half the battle, but with terrific samples and dynamite ideas, there are lots of potential dollars out there ready to be won. Next month I'll battle cove designed boxes and platform dimensionals. Stay tuned for them in terms of how depth may effect glazing selection in June's Light and Glazing issue. ■

* Mikado Window Showcase Sampler is owned by Hunt Corporation and has been offered with their permission in this article. It is also available for review in their booth during most major framing shows. For additional information on this project contact them for SHADOW BOX #3848-98-c