

Mastering Mounting



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Tackling Tack Strips—A Common Item Transformed to Art

Generally a serious column, this one is full of humor and absurdity, just in time for the holiday season. We're in the months of oddity framing for the various holiday happenings. Just keep in mind that not every shadowbox is a valued collectible requiring hand sewing or Mylar mounting, and not is every project is meant to last for generations. Sometimes art is mounted and framed for one year in a dorm room, or, in the case I'm going to describe, to travel around in an installation van.

The story behind this month's column concerns both mounting issues and design strategies. Many of us have seen everything from car parts; wisdom teeth; and full buffalo hides brought in to be framed, but what about the mounting of mounting strips?

How To Mount These Mounting (Tack) Strips?

Recently, I framed a project from Bear

Valley Springs, CA. This was an odd project to design and mount—the very strips that mount carpeting into place.

First, let me explain how it all began. A client of mine had purchased a large fixer-upper house that needed serious TLC, and they wanted to transform this sow's ear into a silk purse. Some back-

ground information: the house had mint green exterior; baby blue wall-to-wall carpeting throughout; solid primary blue Formica in the kitchen with a full 18" backsplash around; and mauve chair guards on all the walls with wallpaper below featuring tiny pink floral clusters. Get the picture? Nightmare on Design Street.

A local faux painting artist had been

brought in to create wonderfully unique and artistic one-of-a-kind walls in many rooms including: the kitchen (now in various shades of gold and green); living room; and master bedroom.

The original carpeting had been removed prior to faux painting, thus

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exposing the original tack strips along the edges. When the old carpet was removed during construction the tack strips remained in place only to be adorned with all the same decorative paint and drips from the creatively painted wall above.

And Tack Strips Are... ?

Tack strips are the one-inch-wide wooden strips nailed to the floor to hold newly stretched carpeting in place (see Photo 1). You know, the ones with the nails that stick you in the toe through the carpet when you stand too close to the wall while attempting to measure and hang a newly framed piece of artwork while barefoot. Most likely, this only occurs in the privacy of your own home, since working and hanging framed art barefoot is only something done only after a few glasses of wine, and never commercially.

Seems anytime new carpeting is installed, new tack strips are also installed. The construction team thought nothing of these old strips, but the new carpet installer thought very differently. Seems he had never seen "faux painted" tack strips before and decided as a professional carpet installer this was something he not only needed in his possession, but also that it might find a home in the store where the new carpet had been purchased. I mean, how often do you find faux painted tack strips?

Identification Stage... You Framed What?

Quite seriously this carpet professional decided he wanted the tack

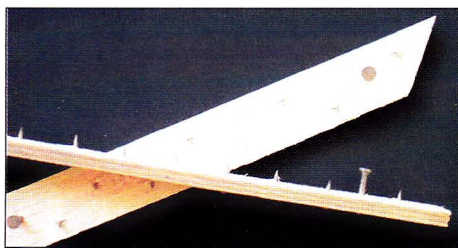


Photo 1: Unpainted, Unused Tack Strips—These are the sharp one-inch-wide strips used along the wall baseboard to hold a newly stretched carpet in place.



Photo 2: Elements for the Box—(clockwise from lower left) New unpainted strips, faux painted strip, foam padding, and carpet samples

strips framed. These were actually quite pretty with three or four layers of assorted gray, lavender, and purple paint as basecoat, sponged and assorted drips. We opted to take a new unpainted strip, a piece of the purple faux painted strip, a small section of pink composite foam padding, and some of the eggplant colored textural carpeting for inclusion in this shadowbox (see Photo 2).

Creativity Stage: Glazing and Mounting

Once the items for framing had been selected, then the creative process needed to kick in. Since the pieces to be included in this display were all designed for the wear and tear of daily abuse we chose not to use glazing on the

completed shadowbox. It was also possible that the materials going into this box could have dyes or components that might outgas causing hazy glass or other chemical reactions. So the unsealed wood, raw metal tacks, composite recycled pink and multicolored foam, and the carpet samples would all be left to the open air.

Since all of the inclusive materials were manufactured to tolerate and withstand the abuses of humidity, temperature variations, and dirt, they would probably hold up fine for the duration of their framed life also. When discerning if this piece falls into the category of disposable art versus fine art, this most definitely is an example of the former.

We do know that carpet will be damaged by UV light. It is susceptible to fiber drying, rotting, and fading like most fabrics. But this project was to be created far more for fun and novelty than as a long-term collectible. That gave me carte blanche when determining how to affix the pieces into the box. It became more important to make them decorative than to preserve them for all of history, or the local museum.

Design: Emphasis

One major challenge during this design layout was establishing the focal point, or visual emphasis, of the assorted pieces. Since tack strips are not the focus of wall-to-wall carpeting (they are not seen after the carpet has been cut, laid, stretched, and tacked into place), so the concept of including the



Photo 3: Simple Carpet Box—One option was to simply cover the backing with the eggplant carpet and align the faux strips to showcase them.

foam and carpet into the shadow-box to create more interest and to give more pieces to work with became a focal challenge. It would have been easy enough to place two or three faux painted strips into a fabric or carpet lined shadow box, and there you have it (see Photo 3). However, the idea was to pull more pieces into the box for interest and to tell a story.

While the layout of the pieces in the box was a challenge, selecting the right moulding played heavily into this too. The focus had to remain on the strips, not the carpet. Two layouts were considered (see Photos 4 and 5). Notice how, in Photo 4, the eye seems drawn from the unfinished raw wood strip upper right, down the painted central strip, to the crossed strips below. The eye bounces around the frame some to the three pieces of eggplant carpet scraps and the peek-a-boo foam padding beneath, but the strips seem to be the focus.

The right-angled sample in Photo 5 better represents actual butted corners and alignment to carpet edging. The eye is pulled to the edges of the frame at both the upper left and lower center where

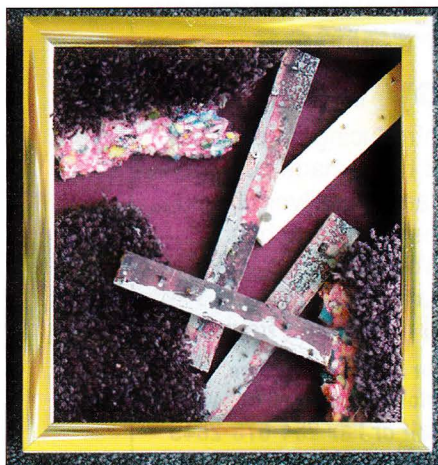


Photo 4: Layout Option #1—This design directs the viewer's eye movement sliding down the strips, to the crossbar of the H, then to the right and left, up around, and back into the frame. Though a pleasing layout, it does not replicate the function of the actual strips as in option #2.

the strips touch, but still moves back to the central corner.

Moulding Selection

In selecting a moulding for this project, a deep, black, anodized profile looked great; however, it felt too formal for the subject matter. Another black profile, as well as a mahogany selection, also felt too polished and formal. Since one of the pieces in the box was the unpainted raw tack strip for contrast, it had the power to attract attention. So the idea was the outer frame might need to be of the same look—maybe a natural deep box moulding. Unfortunately the natural I considered distracted from the inner purple carpet even more.

So as moulding samples were taken from the wall and tested it became more and more apparent that the solution would be to play into the extremes for what it was, meaning that subtlety was not working for the emphasis on the

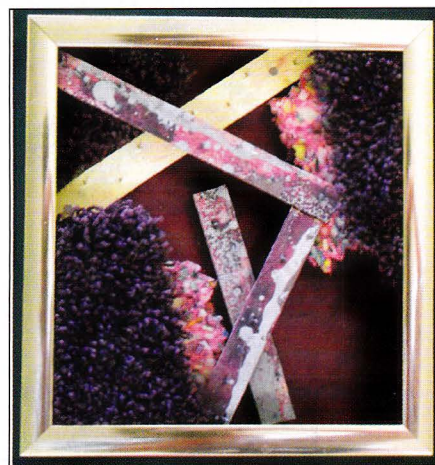


Photo 5: Layout Option #2—This version better represents the actual strip use of butted corners and alignment with the carpet edging. The eye can either be thrown out of the frame where the strips touch the outer edges of the frame, but then pulled back into it by the center corner butt.



Photo 6: Three-Quarter View—Note the depth of the box.

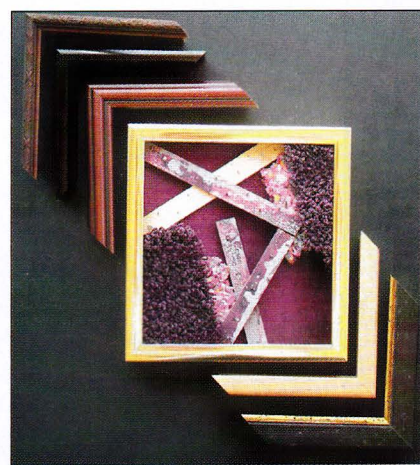


Photo 7: Moulding Selections—A selection of the various corner samples pulled for designing. (Upper left to lower right) LJ Queen Victoria X2380; Nielsen 35 Anodized black; LJ 448CM; Reflections #510 Natural and Provence #360770 Coal. The gold metal frame is Clark #800 series, measures 9x9 1/2" and is 2" deep.

painted strips (see Photo 7). Ultimately the gold metal moulding was chosen for its surface width, strength of visual impact, and color. The surface width of the moulding was strong enough to hold its own against the one-inch-wide daggers of wood inside the frame and the bright gold metal picked up the flecks of assorted yellow, blue, and black in the foam padding, as well as yellow being the color complement to purple. Note also the depth of the moulding required (Photo 6).

Production Stage: Hot Glue

Since this project was part joke, part keeper, the mounting methods were very lax. In fact, since there was no glazing there was also no way to keep it clean besides future vacuuming. (Most appropriate for carpeting anyway.) The purple fabric backing was dry mounted with a pure film adhesive into a piece of $\frac{3}{16}$ " foamboard.

Technically, all of the foam and carpet pieces should have been sewn through the backing board as well as the strips. It was decided, however, to use acid-free, inert 3M #3797 TC Jet-Melt Hot Glue and Polygun-TC (see Photo 8). The cost needed to be kept at a minimum for this project as it was to be a novelty gift. Some of the pieces were reinforced with stitching just to ensure durability.

Whether sewn or hot glued, the pieces needed to be prepared prior to placing in the box. They did not weigh much, but had sharp edges and splinters that



Photo 8: Hot Glue—The 3M Polygun-TC is a non-drip, professional level glue gun that uses acid-free, inert non-flexible 3M #3797 TC Jet-Melt Hot Glue.

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needed to be contained and configured like a puzzle between the tacks. The strips couldn't be sanded to remove splinters as that would have altered their rough-hewn natural look.

The carpet continued to fray and unravel each time it was handled, which may have been even more reason not to glaze the proj-

ect. Even with the hot glue the pieces needed to be held in place well, evenly supported, and mounted tightly so as not to fall loose when handled. This was a bit more of a performance piece than a framed collectible.

Clarification... Critique Stage

The completed project was a smash success! The installer now travels with this "artwork" in his van and shows it to everyone. He occasionally allows the carpet store to borrow it to show off to sales reps and just for its novelty. This was, most definitely, one of the most unusual gifts/tips ever given to a laborer for a job well done.

Conservation Mounting

From the designer's nightmare of determining a focal point of this project to the Feng Shui problem of daggers flying everywhere within the frame, this was an interesting set of challenges more than I ever realized at the beginning. Seems framers are indeed problem solvers.

Years ago, when I was first involved with teaching and demonstrating for Seal Products out of Naugatuck, CT, the standard joke my boss loved to tell about mounting was, if thumbtacks were mounting, then stainless steel thumbtacks were conservation mounting. Now where exactly do faux painted tack strips fit into that equation? Sorry, I couldn't resist. Happy Turkey Day! ■

*Project shown courtesy of Al Huebner,
Al's Flooring, Tehachapi, CA*