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Laminate Surface Enhancements

Contempo Panels/Faux Glass Etching

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

There seems almost no end to the uses and applications of heat set laminating films for mat design. In addition to using them as viable glass substitutes, these versatile products have already been creatively expanded into "leather-look" mats (as demonstrated in PFM, June 1991). This article will demonstrate the further design capabilities on both mats and glass.

As previously discussed, laminating films come in various finishes and textures. Although all may be used for these design suggestions, it is generally agreed that the matte finish is most *visually* successful. A good quality, professional level mat cutter and matte finish laminating film can help you create "Contempo Panels" including "Shadow Stripe",

"Geometrics", "Borders" and "Faux Glass Etching" designs which are quite simple, as well as visually appealing and cost effective.

The laminate darkens the mat board under the areas to which it has been applied and gives it a wet or shadowed look—a very contemporary, monochromatic, 21st century French mat panel image. "Contempo Panels" (as they have been named) may be created on any breathable surface of mat board using standard laminate mounting procedures.

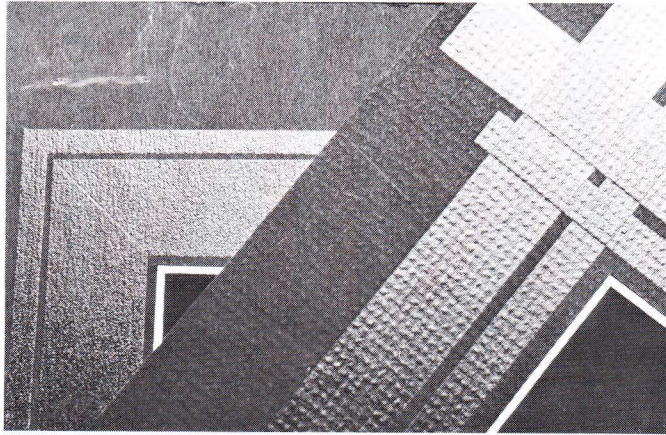
Although contempo panel designs may be adapted for use with almost any subject matter (including florals and landscapes), they seem to be most effective when used in conjunction with paper memorabilia, certificates, letters of accommodation,

documentation, newspaper articles, and photographs (particularly black and white). The look is extremely versatile and will only be as limiting as your basic design capabilities. It touches upon all the extremes—from conservative corporate "shadow stripe" to asymmetrical contemporary "geometrics" to flamboyant floral "border" designs (photo 1). Your personal design flair and creativity can expand these basic concepts into a repertoire of exciting new ideas that are quick and easy to execute. It will also help you expand the use of your current heat mounting equipment and materials, thus creating the opportunity for increased sales and greater profits!

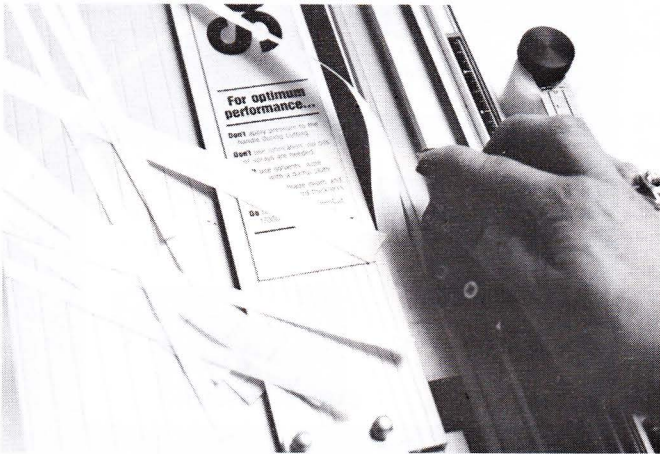
The step-by-step basics of contempo
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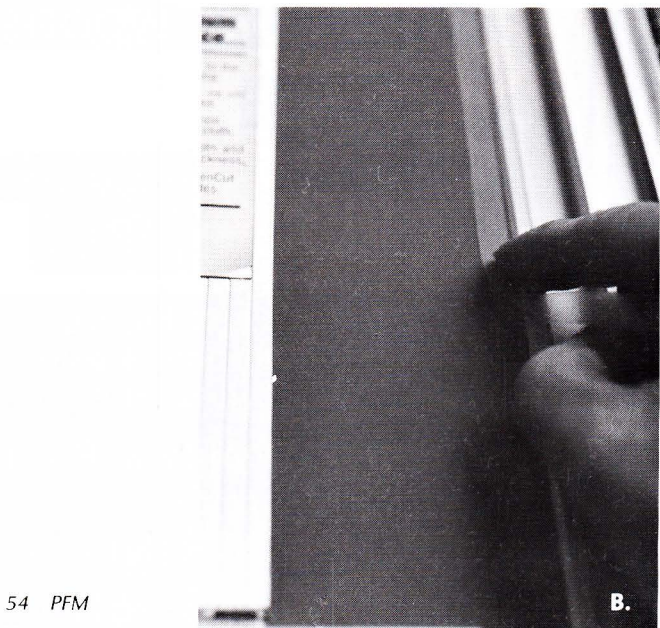
2. Close up of panels on smooth and textured mat board surfaces.



3. Mat guide set to cut laminate strips. An accurate squared professional mat cutter may cut $\frac{1}{8}$ " and larger efficiently and very quickly.



4A., B. Peel backing paper from the laminate and lightly tack the strips into place on the face of the mat along the cutter bar. Let the strips extend to just short of the full length of the mat so adequate laminate is available for mitering.



po panel designs, using accent strips of heat set matte laminate, will be covered completely in this article. All the same principles of the step-by-step procedure apply to each of the additional suggested surface designs, including "faux glass etching".

Materials are always very important, directly affecting the outcome of the project's surface texture and dramatic use of color. It seems that although any color mat may be used as a base, the darker the color, the more dramatic and effective the end product. Use either acid-free white core or black core mat boards rather than the paper core boards which yellow over long periods of time. Also note that some mat board surfaces are much more textured than others and that often a black surfaced mat board is available in both a smooth or textured finish. Experiment with scraps of board to get a feel for the very different end products (photo 2).

Sometimes the most obvious time-conserving methods of cutting and lining up dry material strips for surface enhancement are readily overlooked. Strips of matte laminate should be cut in exact proportion and placed on the surface of the mat beside the pre-cut opening(s) with exacting precision. Your mat cutter will be the most time-efficient piece of equipment used during this design procedure.

Contempo Panel: Shadow Stripe

Using the bevel cutter head on your mat cutter (complete with full-length mat guide and squaring arm), set the mat guide at $\frac{3}{4}$ " and cut strips of matte laminate from a piece slightly longer than the longest side of the mat being decorated. It is generally much easier to cut the laminate clear side up/backing paper side down since the curvature of the rolled laminate assists in flattening the plastic. Scraps and end cuts of laminate may be saved from other laminating projects and used for this application.

Reset the mat guide to $\frac{1}{8}$ " (or your desired width) and cut additional strips of laminate (photo 3). Remove the remaining uncut laminate from beneath the cutter bar and set it



aside for future designs. Cutting the laminate with the bevel cutter as opposed to the vertical cutter will not cause any problems since the laminate edges will flatten out within the mounting/laminating process and will be invisible.

Always cut the mat with four even border widths (which may be trimmed back $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " as needed to weight one end after design completion). Be certain to take this trimming measurement into account when initially sizing your board. Pre-cut the mat prior to setting any of the laminate strips, just as you would any decorative paper surface application. For pattern placement of the laminate strips in a "shadow stripe", it is wise to loosely follow the traditional concept of $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ (as found in formal French matting), although the monochromatic color allows a greater amount of design flexibility in surface width variations.

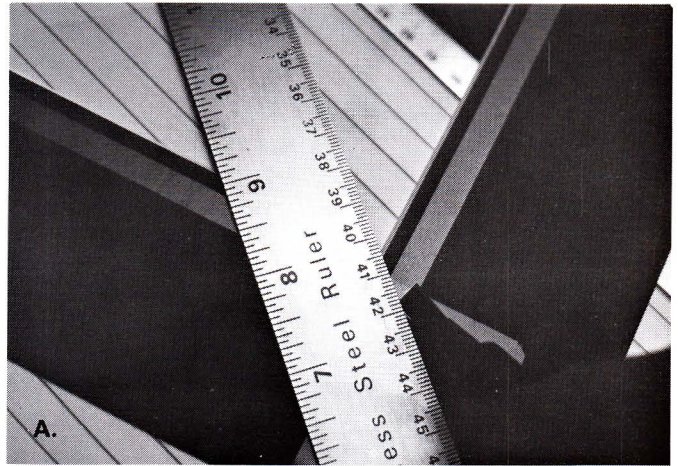
Set the mat guide to the width required to attain the desired pattern or laminate placement. Slip the blank pre-cut mat face up under the bar, flush against the bottom squaring arm.

Peel the backing paper from the pre-cut laminate strip and line it up exactly along the bar of the cutter, lightly tacking it into place on the surface of the mat (photo 4). Once again, the pre-cut strips should be longer than the actual length of the required strips, yet slightly shorter than the outer dimensions of the mat board. This will ensure adequate room to mitre the laminate corners (photo 5). Cut the overlapped laminate strips by lining up the inner corner of the mat opening with the two overlapping corners of the surface laminate by using a cork backed metal straightedge and a sharp blade (photo 5A).

Remove the excess pieces of the laminate (photo 5B) and burnish the strips into the place with your fingers. Re-adjust the mat guide to accommodate the placement of the next laminate strip and repeat the previous steps.

The mechanical or hot vacuum press being used to set the laminate should be set between 200°-225°F. Place the prepared mat into an

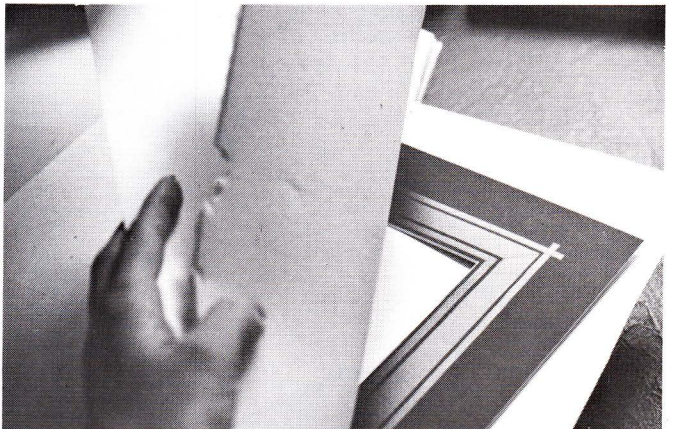
5A. Miter the laminate corners by lining up the inner corner of the mat opening with the two overlapped corners of the laminate strips. Cut through both laminate layers at the same time using a cork backed straightedge and sharp blade.



5B. Remove excess laminate to square corners.



6. Envelope of release paper and mat foam overlay are put into a preheated press of 200°-225°F for 3-5 minutes.



envelope of folded release paper with a foam overlay on top of the laminate stripped mat (photo 6). Close the lid and press the unit for 3 to 5 minutes. The completed "Contempo Panel: Shadow Stripe" mat is now ready for framing.

**Contempo Panel:
Geometric**

Artistic interpretation is definitely

encouraged (within the realm of good taste) when designing with the asymmetry of a "geometric" contempo panel. Although there is nothing wrong with artistic license, remember not to integrate too many design elements, line planes or patterns at one time. Very often "less is more!"

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The "geometric" design step-by-step mounting format remains exactly the same as the "shadow stripe", however the strips of laminate are now placed on only *two* sides, in an asymmetrical layout. When using this design to frame a certificate, consider the asymmetry of the surface laminate pattern in relation to the placement of any metallic seals, blind embossing or ribbons. Keep in mind that asymmetry is still "in balance" but not in the typical mirror image of symmetry (photo 7 and diagrams).

Once again the steps are: cut the laminate into strips, position the strips on the mat surface using the mat cutter guide and bar, cover the mat with a foam overlay in an envelope of release paper, and mount for 3 to 5 minutes at 200°-225°F.

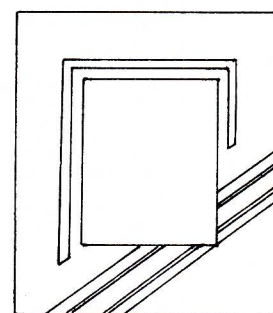
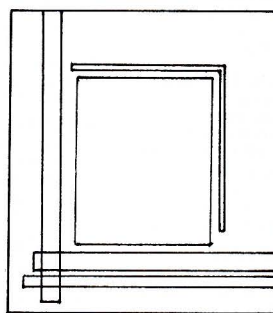
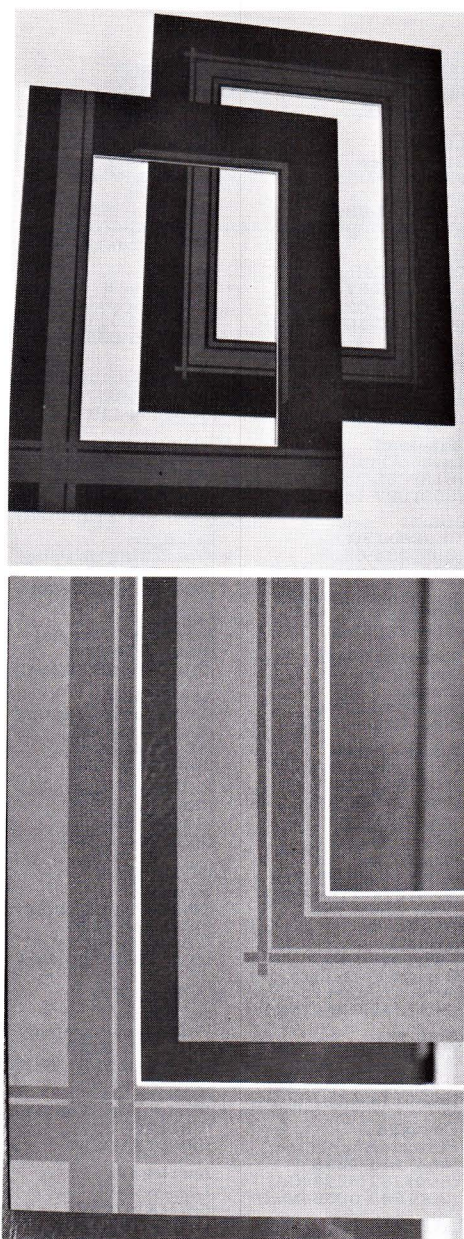
Faux Glass Etching

When applying the identical "contempo panel" principle of dry mounting the matte laminate film strips to a piece of glass, a wonderful visual effect similar to glass etching or engraving is achieved (photo 8). Glass is not actually cut or removed from the glazing surface as in sandblasting, etching cremes or diamond engraving (photo 9).

Some of the heat laminating principles used in "faux glass etching" bend or push the manufacturer's suggested product use guidelines, so take note: we are pushing laminate slightly beyond suggested application procedures (which should include perforation). As illustrated in "Transferring Photos to Canvas" (PFM, May 1991), plastic films must be perforated prior to mounting on any non-porous materials. This eliminates the potential for trapping air bubbles between the two non-porous layers.

In the case of "faux glass etching" each individual application must be considered independently. The surface strips to be heat mounted are quite narrow (i.e. 1/8" to 1" in width). Adequately burnishing them down with your fingers (photo 10) prior to heat setting generally achieves a smooth, bubble-free result. If the panels of film to be laminated are quite wide and you wish to eliminate *all* possibilities of air bubbles or blotches, manufacturer's suggested

7A. & B.
Completed
"Contempo Panel
Geometric"
layouts.



Sample layouts: vary widths and experiment with patterns.

procedures usually recommend prior perforation of the film and adjusting the beginning temperature of the press 180°F.

After applying heat and pressure, increase the press temperature to 225°F. This allows adequate time during the temperature increase (approximately 10 minutes) for the air to be compressed out from between the

plastic and glass and for the perforations to melt back together. Once the press actually reaches 225°F again, the actual lamination process takes only about 3 minutes.

The preparatory steps of lining up the strips of laminate and mitering the corners is exactly the same on glass as on mat board. However, since the blade cannot cut the glass,



you needn't worry about overcuts on the mitered corners. Use the mat cutter, mat guide and bar to position the pre-cut laminate strips onto the glass, just as on mat board.

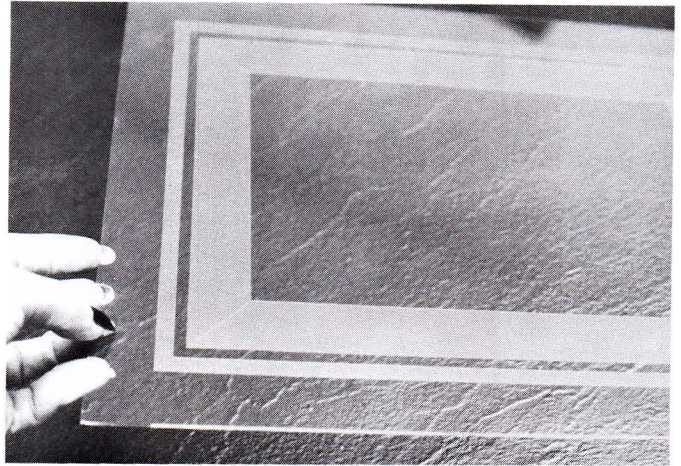
Always remember to place the foam overlay on top of the laminate on the glass prior to mounting and place it all in a release paper envelope. You should also place a piece of board (larger than the glass) beneath it to protect the vacuum press diaphragm from possible damage. For a number of reasons it's a good idea to complete the faux etching as a final step, just prior to fitting the completed framing job. The glass needs to be clean for laminating as well as fitting to cut down the number of times it must be cleaned and handled. Also, once the laminate is lined up and burnished into place prior to mounting, positioning can be verified or confirmed in relation to the inner mats. Remember that if for some reason you miscalculate the placement of the laminate strips, they can still be moved prior to mounting, but your miters still may not match up properly. The strips can be totally removed with a razor blade, even after mounting.

Be sure to frame the completed faux etched glass with the laminate turned *into* the mat, not facing out into the room. Not only does this look much more like an authentic glass etching, but it will also protect the mounted laminate.

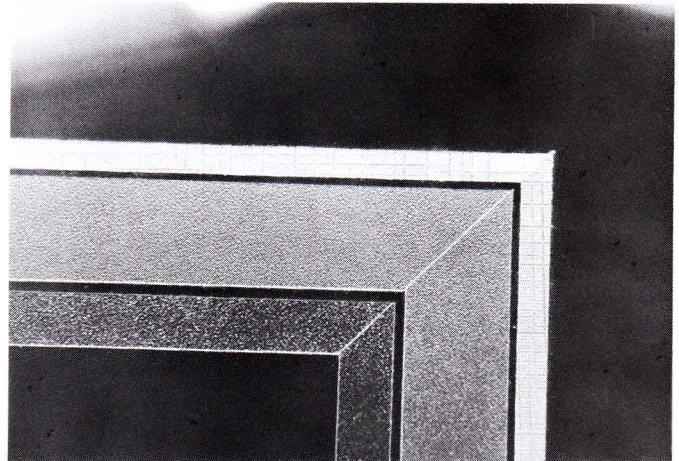
Consider the likelihood of using a spacer between the front framing glass (complete with laminate strips) and the inner mats. Any laminated surface mat enhancement which places a plastic directly in contact with the glazing surface is subject to a temperature reaction and humidity changes. Adding a simple spacer within the frame unit will not only allow proper circulation, but will also increase the design project price.

Pricing "Contempo Panels" and "Faux Glass Etching" is based upon the united inch theory previously discussed in "Leather-Look" (PFM, June 1991). Since strips of laminate in all lengths and widths are usable, scraps and end cuts may be easily recycled.

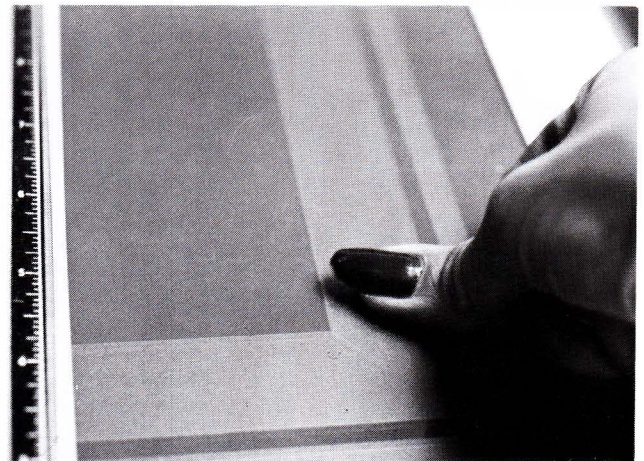
8. "Faux Glass Etching" completed glass with matte heat set laminate will be framed over a dark mat for highest contrast.



9. "Faux Glass Etching" 8x10 sample with three types of applied laminate. Detailed close up of three textures, from inner most strip: Luster, Matte and Linen.



10. Aggressively burnish down laminate strips with fingers after mitering and prior to heat setting. This will remove optimum trapped air if not using perforation procedure.



You may wish to price each width strip differently, or perhaps set a standard price for all strips regardless of width, considering the recycling theory and same labor time involved. Do charge for each additional design element you introduce into *any* project (this includes spacers). Cor-

ner samples as well completed framed art work or memorabilia are a must! These designs are exciting and innovative but it's up to you to sell the client on them. Make all those scraps, end cuts and inventive design hours really pay off! PFM