

PRINCIPALS OF PRESERVATION FRAMING



By David Lantrip, MCPF, GCF

Methods, materials, and generally accepted framing practices have certainly changed in a relatively short amount of time. When I first learned framing, we used powder-packed float glass on almost everything, cotton or alpha cellulose mats were the rare exception, and nearly every piece of paper art was dry mounted to a pulp board. We went through rolls of what we called “framer’s tape,” which was just glorified masking tape.

Today, an everyday frame has UV-filtering glazing, cotton or alpha cellulose mats, and the artwork is mounted to acid-free foamboard with corner or edge mounts. If the art is permanently mounted, it is often done using a low-temperature adhesive—maybe even a reversible product. These materials are pretty much standard now, and an average frame like this goes a long way to meeting recommended preservation standards. The rest is a matter of small details.

Most framers recognize the benefits of preserving artwork in as close to its original condition using easily-reversible methods and products while avoiding the introduction of harmful materials. The applies not only to items of value (real value, historic, sentimental, or potential) but also to everyday items. After all, a customer pays good money for framing and should be able to enjoy it for a long time. As Jack Dempsey, creative director for Crescent, points out; “There is long-term cost savings from not having to replace matting that has faded.” There are also financial benefits to the framer, as upgraded framing materials contribute to a healthier bottom line. Let’s look at a couple other ways preservation framing can benefit a framer.

A guiding principle of preservation framing is the idea of reversibility; that anything we do to the artwork should be easily undone with a minimum of effort or risk. That is certainly good for the artwork, but let’s extend that to include the framing itself. Consider the times you have been asked to replace the glass in a shadowbox. First it is necessary to remove the side walls lining the inside of the frame and holding the glass in place. Usually the framer destroys

● Mylar is a versatile material that can be used to mount a variety of artwork. Its versatility and low cost make it a preservation workhorse.

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both the foamboard and matboard strips while removing them because they were held in with multiple strips of ATG and maybe glue along with it. Did you charge for new linings? Is the matboard even still available?

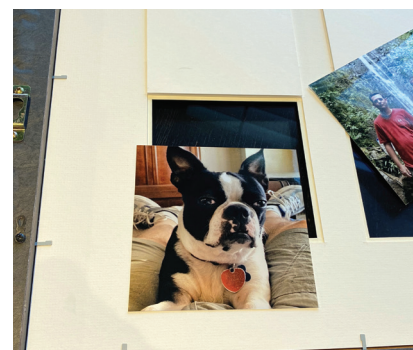
Had the previous framer instead attached the shadowbox liner with just a few small strips of ATG and dots of glue, the story would be different. Removing them would be a quick matter of popping them off with a putty knife, intact and ready to be placed back in with the new glass. This is a significant savings in time, materials, and frustration.

As another example, think about mounting objects with adhesives. No matter how benign the chemical composition, the fact remains that reversing it will involve some manipulation, cutting, pulling, or prying. It might even involve a solvent, introducing unknown and complex chemistry into the mix. Contrast that with the ease of, for example, simply cutting a Mylar strip or cotton thread from the back.

This idea of reversibility in all aspects of framing can be summed up simply as thinking of the next guy. At some point, anything you do may have to be undone by a framer in the future. Ask yourself how that will be done with a minimum of fuss, materials, and risk. This is not just an abstract, ivory-tower concept; that next framer could easily be you!

Here are some other practical cases where easy reversibility makes life easier for a framer:

- Pinning or lacing needlework. Consider how easy it is to pull out pins or snip a few threads, compared with trying to undo aggressive tapes or adhesives.



● Reversibility benefits the framer, but it can also have practical benefits to the customer. Turnbuttons and a platform mount in this multiple-opening frame make it easy for the customer to switch out new family and travel photos.

- Unscrewing offsets to remove a canvas is much less risky than trying to remove a canvas that has been toenailed into the frame.
- This applies to stacked frames as well; consider the need to replace an old and soiled linen liner.
- Booking mats keeps them and the mounting board aligned and makes it a breeze to remove the artwork. The alternative of adhering them to the mounting board with ATG or glue makes future removal a much riskier task.

As mentioned previously, preservation framing is good for business. We usually look at the sales end of it; upgraded materials are simply better for profits, and consumers expect them routinely. This expectation is consistently proven in consumer surveys and research. As Jane Boyce, president of Tru Vue, puts it, "All the custom framing research that Tru Vue has conducted shows the number-one reason consumers frame treasures, art, and keepsakes is for preservation and protection. We believe that when most consumers custom frame, there is an expectation that we are working to assist in protecting their art and memories." Embracing preservation

is also good on the back end, since a simple approach can help reduce the cost of goods and simplify purchasing.

Let's look at mounting works of art on paper. There are plenty of products available to make reversible mounting easier, including corner pockets of various sizes, premade edge strips, and many varieties of tape, some of which are "acid-free." They are convenient, but also limited. A specific size corner pocket is only good for a limited range of paper sizes, and some may cover too much of the paper. A specialized tape may be used only rarely. These limitations force the framer to research and stock a wide variety of products, some of which may get little use.

To make an analogy, think about baking. The grocery store carries plenty of cake mixes that can be thrown together in a couple of minutes and are pretty convenient. For what they are, though, they are expensive. And they only make one thing. The alternative is to stock the pantry with flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and other staples. These are all relatively inexpensive and can be combined in myriad ways to create hundreds of different desserts.

A simplified approach means fewer decisions, fewer products to stock, better use of the products, and a lower cost of goods. For mounting paper items, a limited but flexible toolbox will handle the vast majority of preservation mounting, including:

- Hinging paper
- Rice starch
- Gummed linen tape
- Polyester film (commonly known as Mylar)
- Double- and single-sided acrylic-based tape

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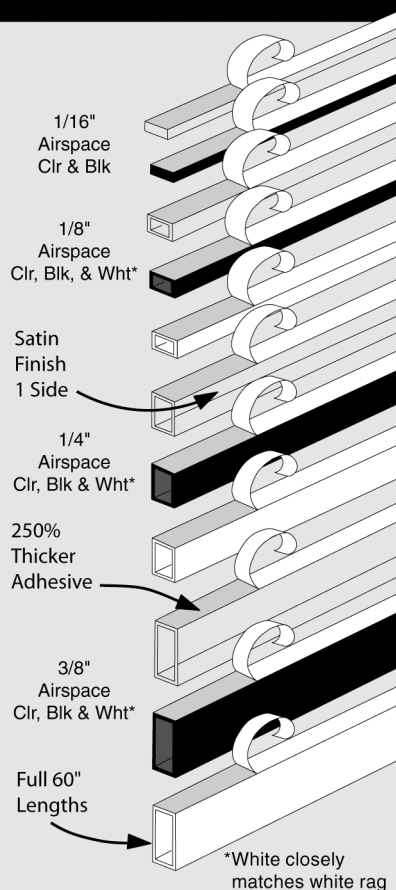
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● *Embroidery floss should have a place in every framer's object mounting toolbox. Available in over 600 colors to blend into nearly any object, it is chemically stable and durable over time. It can be stranded to use more or fewer strands to suit the weight of the object being mounted. It is usually available for about 50 cents per skein.*

Naturally there will be some ancillary items, but these are the basics. Rice starch paste and hinging papers are used to create a wide variety of hinges in different configurations to mount everything from oversized watercolors with their edges exposed to small, delicate sketches. The paper, secured with linen tape, can be used to create edge mounts that are easily reversible, completely non-invasive, and are arguably even safer than hinging. Mylar can also be used with the proper double-sided tape to create edge mounts. They can be made in long strips in advance, ready to be cut to length and used quickly and easily for routine mounting.

Object mounting can be handled with the same approach. Rather than a wide variety of specialized mounts that might only be useful for one type of object (a coin of a specific size, for instance), a variety of basic, inexpensive supplies can handle almost all the objects a framer is likely to see on a regular basis. Some of those supplies include:

- Mylar
- Double- and single-sided acrylic-based tape

- Cotton embroidery floss in assorted colors
- Tulle or other fine mesh fabric
- Steel or brass rods in various diameters
- Heat shrink tubing
- Hot glue gun

Mylar can be used in narrow strips or other configurations to mount objects ranging from medals, coins, and golf clubs to books, magazines, and tools. Embroidery floss is useful for sewing down jewelry and many small objects, while tulle is great for mounting balls and hockey pucks. Steel or brass rods are used to create formed rod mounts to hold many oddly shaped objects. There is really no need for chemically suspect, specialized adhesives, which are often expensive with short shelf lives.

Preservation framing is required when working with fine art and other valuable materials, but there is no reason to reserve it only for the work that "needs" or "deserves" it. After all, who are we to make that judgment? Aside from the protection it provides artwork, its principles of simplicity and reversibility are qualities that benefit a framer's bottom line, not to mention his sanity. In short, always think of the next guy, and take to heart the words of Thoreau: "Simplify, simplify, simplify!" **PFM**



David Lantrip

David is the director of education for Franchise Concepts, and the franchisor for Deck The Walls, The Great Frame Up, and Framing and Art Centre stores. He has served in a number of roles in the PPFA including as a member of

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