

CREATIVE CMC DESIGNS

CMC OFFERS GREATER PRECISION, LESS LABOR TIME

GUNNAR CMC

The amazing creative potential of a computerized mat cutter is well established. A CMC user's ability to easily generate amazing matboard designs has become a recognized hallmark of the capability of these wonderful machines.

Yet, it is fair to say that opportunities for exceptionally creative mat design are limited in day-to-day retail framing—especially in the context of not overpowering the subject. Sometimes, it is the often-overlooked functional aspects of these machines that are the most beneficial in the daily running of a framing business.

Matisse Framing, located in Brisbane, Australia, is a landmark custom framing business with a strong reputation for quality custom frame design and manufacture. Owner Campbell Hughes is very familiar with CMC technology, having used Gunnar CMCs since they first arrived in Australia over 25 years ago.

Matisse Framing recently had an opportunity to frame a collection of art trading cards by world-renowned artist CJ Hendry. The hundreds of unique cards that came together in a “mystery box” have Australian slang and sayings on them. They could not all be framed without it becoming a massive project, so 66 cards were chosen by the client and laid out by Hughes into a grid design.

The decision was made to float the cards within the picture frame on a white background, accentuating the artist's choice of colors and words. As the words on the cards were in yellow, a matching yellow was selected for the side walls inside the frame.

This deceptively straightforward design presented a couple of significant challenges. First, alignment. If any aspect of the design was even a millimetre out of alignment, it would become the only thing you see. These cards had to be perfectly aligned.

Second, as they were to be floated, not only did the



● Sixty-six unique trading cards designed by Australian artist CJ Hendry were floated onto a white background, accentuating the artist's choice of color and words.



cards have to align, but the support mounts had to be identical in size and perfectly spaced. These support backings also had to be big enough to mount to, but could possibly be visible from wider viewing angles. Hughes was able to overcome these challenges using their Gunnar AIOX CMC in a few creative ways:

1. Cutting the card support backings. Each of these were cut out of 3/16" acid-free foamboard using a straight cut. The edges were cut perfectly clean, and the sizes of the individual mounts sized exactly as required.

2. Placement of both the backings and the cards. A basic piece of matboard was used to cut a disposable “alignment template,” with the 66 openings for both the backings and the cards. This took only minutes to create and cut, saving hours of labor time; most importantly, it guaranteed a precise and flawless alignment.

3. Cutting the side walls. Yellow matboard was cut perfectly into strips and adhered to 1/8" foamboard to use as an internal rabbit liner, providing the desired accent for the design.

The client was absolutely delighted with the finished result. Campbell Hughes from Matisse Framing said, “Our reputation is everything to us. Our Gunnar CMC plays a vital role in being able to offer a massive range of design possibilities available, and then being sure that we can make them quickly and easily is a major key to our continued growth.”

MODERN MITRE, VINTAGE FIGHTER

VALIANI CMC

Jason Nix, owner of Modern Mitre Custom Framing & Gallery in Auburn, AL, is a fan of a project with a good story behind it. “It’s always fun when something unusual with a unique story comes through the shop,” he said. But it’s rare that he sees a project with a story as remarkable as this one.

Owen D. Smith fought in The Vietnam War under the US Marine Corps. Because he was part of the MCAS (Marine Corps Air Squadron), he was stationed in Bangkok at the Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base. For his time there, he was issued an M1 rifle by the US Government. With it, he received a certification slip that stated he was holding the weapon for safekeeping and would return it with the slip when his service was over. Fortunately, he never gave the slip back when he returned the rifle. It’s framed at the top center of this piece, right between the USMC and MACS logos.

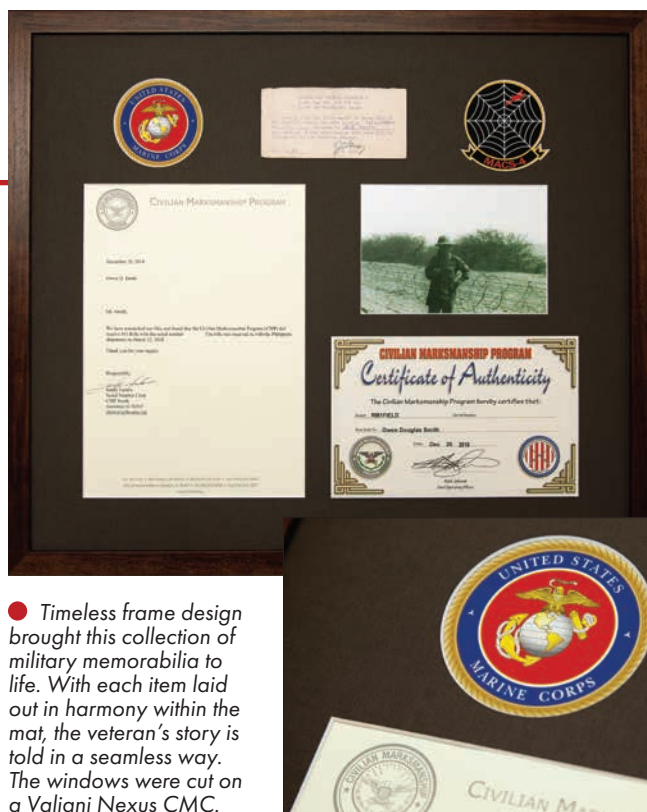
As it turns out, that little slip of paper was a golden ticket for an exceptional piece of memorabilia. With it, Owen and his son were able to track down the exact rifle he was issued so many years ago. In fact, the rifle was being stored in an armory in their home state of Alabama. They were able to purchase the rifle back from the government, and it now hangs just beneath this frame. But it hadn’t been sitting there all those years. It had arrived there in 2018 after years of travel the world, as we can see in the letter on the bottom left of the frame: “The rifle arrived with the Philippine shipments on March 12, 2018.”

That letter is from the Civilian Marksmanship Program, the organization that helped Owen and his son locate the rifle. To the right of that is a certificate of authenticity for the rifle from the same organization. Above that is a picture of Owen from his years in the USMC.

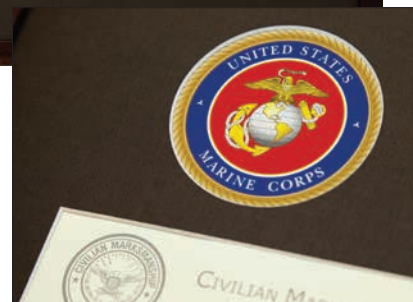
“There’s nothing better than getting a job like this,” Nix said. “It’s a great story with some history, and I’m glad I did it justice with the final product.”

The main mat used for the project is a Crescent Select Classic Linen matboard, colored Dark Olive to fit the military theme. All the windows were cut with Nix’s Valiani Nexus.

“I like being able to lay everything out in Valiani’s V Studio software. It helps me visualize what the final product will look like,” said Jason. “It really is one of the most



● Timeless frame design brought this collection of military memorabilia to life. With each item laid out in harmony within the mat, the veteran’s story is told in a seamless way. The windows were cut on a Valiani Nexus CMC.



user-friendly programs I’ve ever used. I’ve used software for other CMC machines, and it just wasn’t the same.”

Nix had a lot to say about the circular windows he cut for the logos at the top of the frame. “We used the green, 40-degree cutting head in order to get the really tight cuts,” he said. “Valiani machines are especially good at cutting circles. Beyond just the great selection of cutting heads, you have so much control over the speed of the blade, which is really important for circles.”

The window in the top right corner of the frame gave him a little more trouble, being a custom shape. It wasn’t as simple as selecting and sizing a circular window, but all he needed was a vector file in the shape of the logo. “I’m not too great with graphics software, so I just had a friend help me out,” Nix said. “I sent him a high-resolution image of the logo and he sent me back the file I needed. Then it was as simple as drag and drop.”

But beyond the perfectly rounded cuts, beyond the ease of importing custom shapes, beyond the ability to lay everything out before cutting in powerful and user-friendly software, Nix loves his Nexus for freeing him up to focus on what matters: the art of framing, the art of preserving memories like Owen’s in the form of decorations to be enjoyed by all who see them. “My Nexus paid for itself in no time,” he said. “It’s as good if not better than hiring an employee to cut all day. And I get to spend my time on the higher-level stuff.”

AN EXPERIMENT WITH SQUARES

WIZARD CMC

Petra Letson works with framers across Europe. “Everyone wants to know all about the drawing program, so it was startling when a framer friend told me that the design screen seemed to be far more impressive,” she said.

“The framer’s explanation was that, of course it is possible to draw anything, but the drawing program is all manual,” she added. “On the lowly design screen, so much is automatic—and there is such a nice picture of the finished mat on the screen.”

The time had come to invent a project to demonstrate this to herself. Petra wanted it to look highly complex, as if took hours to draw. She wanted to construct it from some unartistic elements that were already in the program, and then use the most automatic processes to assemble the parts. And it had to be elegant. Europeans, as it turns out, have an almost universal aversion to stuck-on decoration.

A border around the image is a traditional formula that is comfortable for most everyone. Lining up squares could create a border that would exercise several of the tools in the design program.

“I should not admit how many trial runs I needed to decide on the squares’ size and spacing,” Petra said. “First, I made a long row using the array tool. Then I grouped them and stretched the group to fit. Each square looked too large to me, so I added another square, changed the spacing, and stretched the group again. When I rotated the group to make the row of squares for the sides, I saw that the size and spacing could be better with a few more changes.

“None of this makes me sound like I had a mathematical plan, but what I saw on the screen needed to match what was in my mind’s eye. All this activity shows how many tools there are in the design program, how quickly experiments can be made, and how the visualization of the mat makes the evaluation easy.”

Through the progression of all these experiments, one constant impression was that the squares were so plain. One point of this project was to make something impressive, after all. What buttons on the design screen



● The photograph is about 18" wide. The small border squares measure 0.25" at their bottom layers. The reveals of each of the five inner layers are 0.1" wide. The outsides of the small squares are 1.25" across. All the squares around the opening are 0.5" apart, and the panel of squares is 0.3" away from the opening.



could bring small squares to life?

“A framer’s instinct is to keep the work flat, but that third dimension is not forbidden,” Petra said. “How about depth? The Wizard program allows mats with six layers, so each square is six layers deep. As I was working with these six-layer squares, I imagined them as deep pyramids dug into the mat. The shadows inside become a design element as powerful as color, and it changes from minute to minute with the lighting.”

No one is suggesting closing the drawing program forever, but a project like this turns the focus onto other aspects of adorning mats. Squares fitting in a row and forming a line around the image reminds us that after 30 years of Wizards in frame shops, the machines have always been quietly appreciated most for their multiple opening alignment capabilities. With 61 openings, this project could be accurately described as a multiple opening project. And now—what other tools and shapes are waiting for us on the design screen? **PFM**