

HOW TO speak “framer”

To ensure the best presentation and protection of your pastels, go to your framer equipped with a solid understanding of preservation framing.

BY CHRIS A. PASCHKE

UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT WAY TO frame an original pastel is an important element of preserving it over time. Numerous articles have been written about easy, inexpensive ways to frame a pastel in an attempt to keep costs down, but cutting corners can wind up becoming a liability rather than an asset. Custom framers spend a great deal of time reading, researching and attending framing classes to maintain their expertise on the best materials and techniques to handle all art media.

Thirty-five years ago it was considered state-of-the-art to use corrugated cardboard and masking tape to frame a painting, but current framing trends prefer preservation materials and reversible techniques for original art. Those acidic and invasive materials once commonly used have been replaced by neutral, pH-backing boards and starch paste hinges or corner pockets.

Although your framing professional may be very well skilled in preservation framing practices, he or she may not routinely frame pastels, so don't hesitate to explain how your pieces need to be handled and stored prior to framing completion. To make sure you're using all the

proper terminology, see “Define Your Terms” on the next page.

Mounting and Hinging

Custom framers should never agree to dry mount, wet mount or pressure-sensitive mount a finished pastel to any backing board, and should never offer spray adhesive. They may, however, suggest dry mounting your raw sheets of sanded pastel paper, such as Wallis, to a backing board *prior* to the application of pastel. The mount board for this should be at least a 4-ply rag board, though a more rigid 8-ply is even better. Foam center board isn't a good choice as a mounted backing, because it can easily dent or bend during pigment application.

The pastel paper should be mounted to the board with an additional 3- to 4-inch border to accommodate mats and a larger finished frame size. If the borders aren't wide enough for the desired frame, a sink mount may be constructed to enlarge the rigid pastel art (see photo 1). To do this, a set of 3/4-inch edge strips are attached to a new backing which will support and suspend the mounted pastel. Once the rigid pastel is positioned, it will

be flush with the edge strips and ready for matting, as seen in photo 2.

For a painting on unmounted paper, non-invasive corner pockets or starch hinges can be used for mounting. Linen tape may be used as a book hinge to connect the window mat to the backing board (see photo 3), but should never be used for hinging art. Hinges must be the weakest link, so they tear or break before damaging the art, and linen tape is too strong for this purpose.

Mat Colors and Emphasis

Vibrant mat colors may go well with the décor of a home, but framing should be done with the art, not the decor, in mind. In general, the best mat colors for pastels are understated and neutral—nothing too visually distracting. In general, avoid highly textured, glossy mats that fight for



If the pastel paper is mounted to a backing smaller than the desired frame size, you can sink-mount the painting by attaching a set of 3/4-inch strips to a new backing support that suspends the mounted pastel.



To install, drop the 4-ply pastel art into the border; since the strips are also 4-ply, the new backing is all the same thickness.

define your terms

Acid-free (AF): A chemistry term meaning the material is no less than 7.0 on the pH scale of 0-14 with 0-7 indicating acidity and 7-14 indicating alkalinity. A level of 7.0 is considered neutral, but most framing materials have an alkaline range of 7.5 to 9.5 pH, which includes most alpha cellulose and rag mats. Acid-free materials are non-staining and non-deteriorating when tested, but this can change over time.

Acid neutral: Any inert material with an unbuffered pH above 7.0 and no alkaline reserve.

Archival: A nontechnical term used to describe a material, technique or process that's permanent, durable and stable over time. More specifically, it refers to items properly stored in a climate controlled archive.

Buffering: The addition of calcium carbonate during paper-making as an alkaline reserve, which raises the pH level to counteract acidic contamination.

Foam center board: The correct generic name for boards with a foam center and assorted face papers of 100 percent cotton, neutral pH (AF) and clay coat varieties, available in white and black.

Fome-Cor: A specific name brand of foam center board manufactured by Alcan Industries.

Museum quality: Museum-, conservation- or preservation-quality are all marketing phrases used to suggest that the materials used reflect what would be chosen for use in a museum for high-value collectables—sometimes referred to as “museum treatment.”

Museum mounting: Use of reversible hinges, corner pockets or edge strips to mount the art to a 4-ply cotton rag backing board.

Preservation framing: Framing techniques that use only reversible methods and neutral, stable, inert materials from glass to dust cover, so as to avoid creating any new chemical reaction that would change the art over time. A dust cover, for example, should never be brown or black Kraft paper. If it is, that would be the first indication that preservation materials might not have been used throughout.

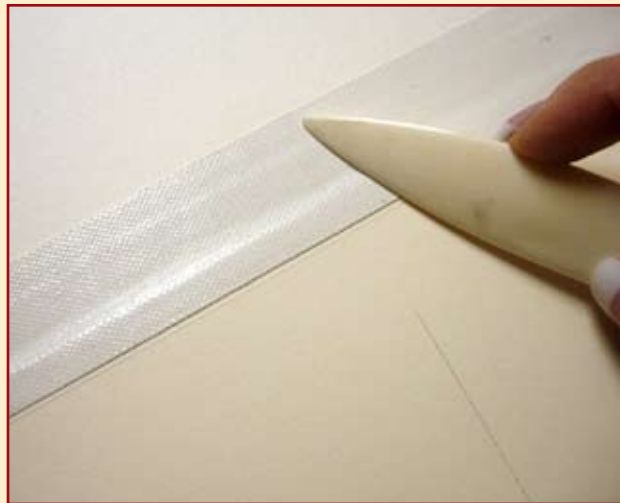
Rag board (also known as rag mats and museum board): Mat board made of cotton linters containing alkaline reserve.

Reversible: Materials and techniques that may be undone without altering the art in any way thus returning it to its original condition.

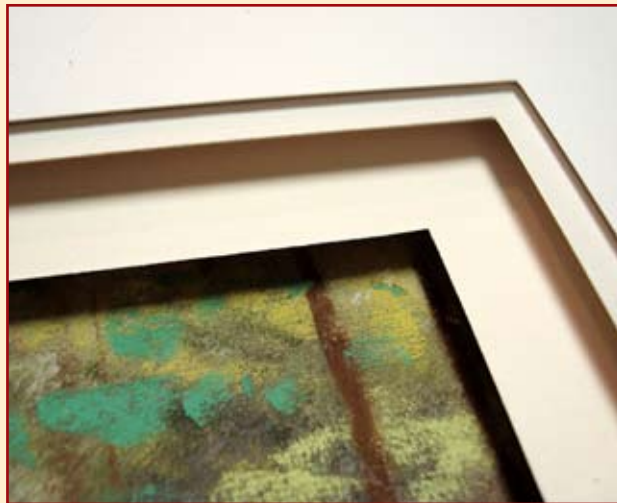
Reverse bevel: An invisible bevel cut to the inside of the mat window.

Spacer: A layer of foam center board, 4- or 8-ply rag board or commercial extruded polyester strip that separates layers and adds depth.

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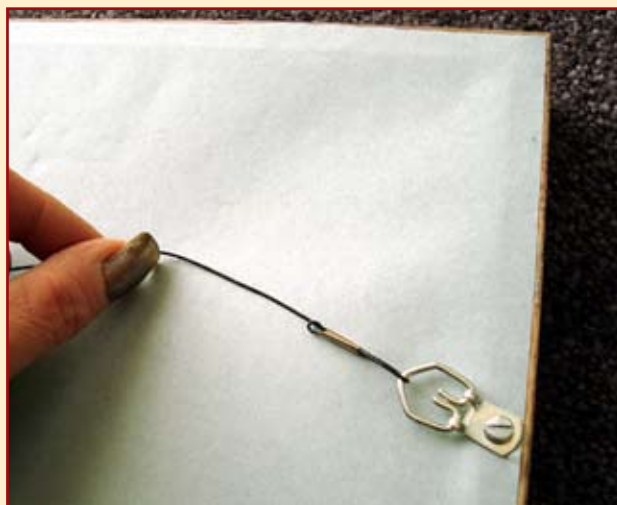
Linen tape should only be used for book-hinging the mat unit to the backing board with mounted pastel—not for hinging art.



Mat colors should be soft neutrals that gently draw the eye to the art. Here, the bottom ½-inch reveal (the part of the underlying mat that shows) is antique white and has been lifted with ⅛-inch AF foam center board. The middle natural white mat has a ⅜-inch reveal and is topped with a pearl white mat. The top two mats are also lifted with ⅛-inch AF foam spacers.



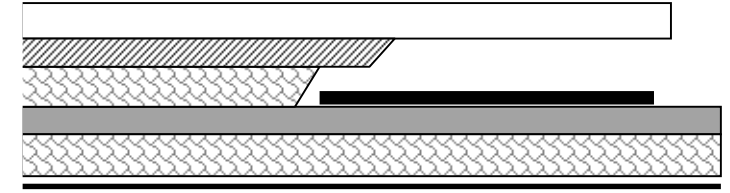
The three, neutral-colored, reverse-bevel mats with added spacers creates a unified frame design that not only protects but enhances the pastel.



D-rings and a 60-degree wire angle takes the stress off the side of the frame, which prevents it from cracking. Note the use of a light colored, neutral-pH dust cover.

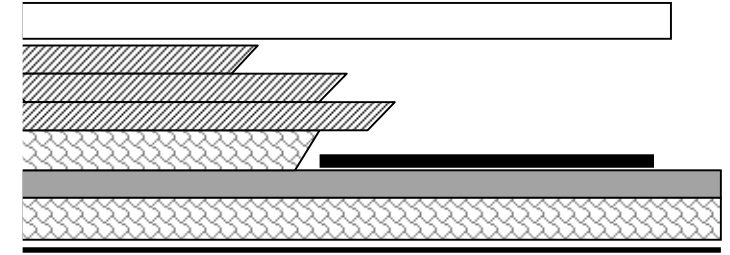
This diagram illustrates a basic pastel framing package with single mat.

UV-Glazing
Double 4-ply Reverse Bevel Mat
⅛-inch Foam Board Spacer
4-ply Rag Board with Mounted Pastel Paper
Backing/Filler Board
Paper Dust Cover



It's preferable to frame a pastel with multiple mats which creates more space between painting and glazing.

UV-Glazing
Triple Mat
⅛-inch Foam Board Spacer
4-ply Rag Board with Mounted Pastel Paper
Backing/Filler Board
Paper Dust Cover



attention with the painting. The most popular neutral mat color is some variation of white, but note that a pure bright white can be harsh and distracting. Softer pearl whites, natural whites, antique whites and creams work best. These can be combined with a darker neutral, used as the innermost liner, to help draw the eye into the art (see photo 4).

Spacing

Though a single mat with a deep spacer is adequate for a pastel (see diagram A above), it's far better to have a double or triple mat to keep the glazing (the glass or acrylic sheeting) farther away from the art, as in diagram B. The innermost mat should be lifted off the pastel by use of an 8-ply spacer mat, 1/8-inch foam center board or commercial spacers. Alcan Fome-Cor, Bienfang Foam Board and Bainbridge Artcare Foam Board are all types of neutral surface paper foam center boards.

The use of spacers in a frame package adds depth and intensity to the design and helps draw the viewer into the art (see photo 5). Keep in

mind that all window mats should be cut as reverse bevels to prevent any pastel dust from landing on the flat visible bevel edges. This too helps create the illusion of depth.

Glazing

A pastel painting is best protected under glass since UV-glazing—whether glass or acrylic—blocks 97 percent of the harmful UV rays that fade pigments and papers. UV-Care Clear and Museum glass are replacing regular glass as the top choices for custom framing.

Acrylic sheets (e.g. Plexiglas) are not recommended for pastels because of the potential for static electricity. Acrylic is available as UV- and abrasion-resistant but at a very much higher price. Anti-static cleaners and rags are designed to reduce static charges during the basic cleaning and assembly, but do not reduce static on a day-to-day basis; therefore, static cannot be avoided. Acrylic should be avoided unless the pastel is unusually large and weight is an issue.

Although some artists are using protective spray coatings in conjunction with commercial

how to speak framer

In the framing for this pastel painting, *A Path In France*, by Redding, Calif., artist Gwen Walker-Strahan, a mottled, slightly distressed, copper-finish wood frame picks up the rich colors of path and tree. The triple mat places the darkest mat as the innermost mat, which helps to draw the eye to the art. The colors of the middle and top mats pick up warm high-light areas from the painting.



panels in lieu of traditional glazed (glass) framing practices, most conservators will caution that these fixatives appear to be effective only in the short-term and shouldn't take the place of proper glazing of the art. After all, no amount of fixative will ever protect any original art from a splash of red wine.

Final Assembly


The basic pastel package includes: a frame; UV glass; acid-neutral, acid-free or buffered mat/mats; spacers to keep the mats from touching the pastel; backing and/or filler boards; dust cover; D-rings and wire at a 60-degree angle with slack for two hangers (see photo 6); and bumpers to lift and stabilize the frame, and allow for air circulation. Dust covers are there to help protect the painting from moisture, ozone and pollutants. Black dust covers are carbon-based, which ghost off onto light-colored walls, leaving scuff marks. For preservation-framing, light blue finishing paper or white Tyvek is favored.

As for the frame, be sure to select one that's deep enough for all layers, including spacers. A framer should not suggest a moulding that requires an extension to protrude out the back to accommodate all the layers. There are always mouldings deep enough for any design and it's

the framer's job to find one for you.

Qualified Framers

Most professional framers have a full working knowledge of how to protect and enhance your pastel. To be sure you're working with an accredited frame professional; look for the initials CPF (Certified Picture Framer) behind the name. This designation is awarded by the Professional Picture Framers Association (PPFA) after a framer has illustrated his or her working knowledge of all phases of custom-framing and care of art and collectibles.

When dealing with framers, you can anticipate that most reputable framers will leave the application of fixative to the artist and never agree to apply it. It's also very likely that your framer will suggest spacers and reverse bevels to accommodate pastel dust and glass even if you have used a final fixative. When discussing a job with your framer, ask questions throughout the design process. By knowing how to "speak framer," you'll undoubtedly learn about framing and your framer, in turn, will learn more about the art of pastel. 

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