

# Design Concepts: Float Mounting

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF

**C**arousel horse, iris, or rabbit... whatever the cast paper image, it can be floated. In order to create a good design, attention must be paid to the elements, factors, and basic principles of design, regardless of whether conscious or subconscious in nature. Any time custom framing is created, both design and mounting technique must be considered. Whether preservation hinging or dry mounting, the finished design always employs some type of mounting method to suspend the artwork. We embark on float mounting for this article.

## Design Definition

In the opening article of my "Essence of Design" series (*PFM*, February 2000), I explained that the first stages of the design process include defining, creating and analyzing any given framing job. This month I am concerned with three dimensional, cast paper editions with wonderful uneven deckled edges that practically



*Photo 1: Featured Cast Paper Artwork—The featured artwork is heavy cast paper open edition images of a 12"x16" Carousel Horse and a 16"x20" Iris. (Images used in this article were purchased by the author from I.C.F. Inc., [www.ICF-art-images.com](http://www.ICF-art-images.com). The Iris image is shown courtesy of Hunt Corporation.)*



*Photo 2: Types of Deckles—(left to right) Long feathered heavy kozo, rounded and contoured bark paper, squared and geometric papyrus, and the featured carousel horse.*

scream to be float mounted. (See example of this in the artwork of the carousel horse in Photo 1.) This process would be defining the image.

Deckled edges come in a variety of looks. They may be slightly uneven and contoured as with

the featured carousel horse; squared and geometric as in the edges of papyrus paper art; rounded and contoured as with bark paintings; or marvelously long and feathered as with a piece of heavy kozo and Sumi inks (see Photo 2). The deckled edges help designate the art as a good candidate to be float mounted; floating both maintains the dignity of the art and, in many cases, is the best way to enhance its natural appearance without compromising it. This is the analyzing or verifying stage of design.

## Emphasis or Eye Control

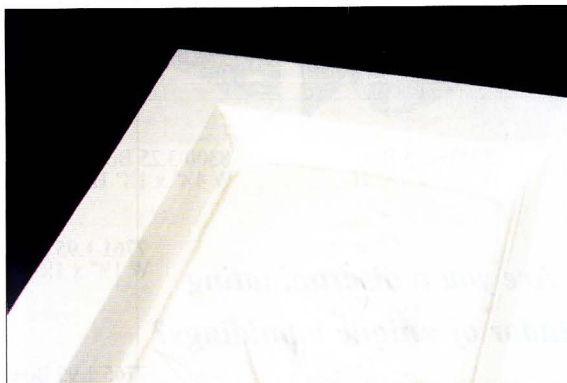
Visual emphasis involves the control of the viewer's eye as it looks at the framed image. If the moulding or the colors behind floated white on white art are too bold (without proper attention having been paid to the movement of the eye around the frame), it can be distracting. Though the eye must be allowed and encouraged to move freely around the frame, it must not be drawn away from the image without being encouraged back to view the piece. Regardless of the design, the art must remain dominant.

Control of the eye with the framing of a white image occurs in a number of ways; with line, texture, color, shape, and intensity. The key is in creating an interest or appeal, something that makes the viewer want to look at *the art*, not the decoration, frame, or beautiful colors used. When the art has no color it appears that you have *carte blanche* to apply any color in the framing, and to some extent that is true. But being true to the image through a natural acceptance of the selected color should remain key.

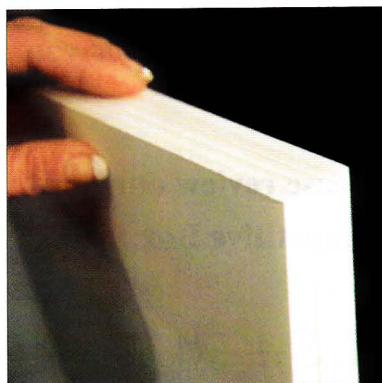
## Intensity of Floating

Like any good design, float mounting or floating an image creates a unique custom presentation that encompasses other elements in the principles of design. When an image is floated it allows for its raw edges to remain visible. The floated image may then be slightly or dramatically

raised above the backing board, creating the intensity of natural highlights and shadows around the art. This mounting method showcases the edges as an important



*Photo 3: Deep Bevel Mat—This deep bevel mat is a layer of five sheets of  $\frac{3}{16}$ " foamboard bevel cut in preparation for hand wrapping with wrinkled mulberry paper for texture or dry pigments for color.*



*Photo 4: Sizing Foam Mat Blanks—In order to bevel cut the stacked mats on a straightline cutter by hand, they need to all begin at exactly the same size, and shape. If one is slightly out of square, they must all be out of square exactly the same.*

part of the art. It also develops a three-dimensional appearance through the use of shadows and deep frames.

A cast paper image has a depth that needs to be nurtured and encouraged to breathe. Add to the natural three dimensionality of the cast paper the additional breathing room necessary within the frame and it is easy to see that spacers are often a solution to the spacing of a cast paper design.

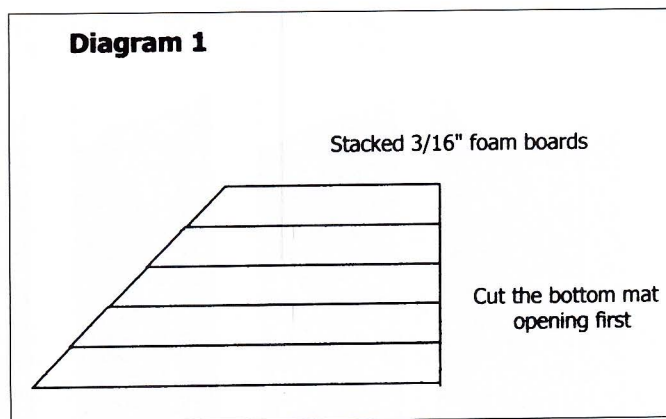
Commercial spacers such as deep Framespace with its  $\frac{3}{4}$ " airspace; special shadowbox mouldings such as those from Nielsen Series 100 or Framera Boxers; or stacked deep bevel mats cut in your own shop may be used to adjust the depth of the glazing from the backing to accommodate any cast paper art.

## Stacked Deep Bevel Mats

The deep bevel mat seen in Photo 3 is a stack of five sheets of  $\frac{3}{16}$ " foamboard that were bevel cut in preparation for hand wrapping with wrinkled mulberry paper, which can be left plain for texture or tinted with dry pigments for color. In order to bevel cut the stacked mats on a straightline

cutter by hand they need to begin as exactly the same size and shape. If one is slightly out of square, they must all be out of square exactly the same (see Photo 4).

Calculate the width of the



*Diagram 1: When cutting to create a stacked bevel mat, calculate the width of the window at the widest point, which is the bottom of the bevel.*



window at the widest point, which is the bottom of the bevel (see Diagram 1). Cut the window mats individually, working from bottom mat to top, reducing the mat guide width approximately  $\frac{3}{32}$ " each time until the desired depth is achieved. (The  $\frac{5}{32}$ " is a basic guide for a  $\frac{3}{16}$ " foamboard thickness, which varies slightly with the brand of foam used and the angle slant of the blade penetration of a professional mat cutter.) After cutting the window openings, the mats are glued or taped with ATG together in alignment and a bone burnisher may be used to smooth and flatten out the wide bevel prior to wrapping.

### Line and Texture Emphasis

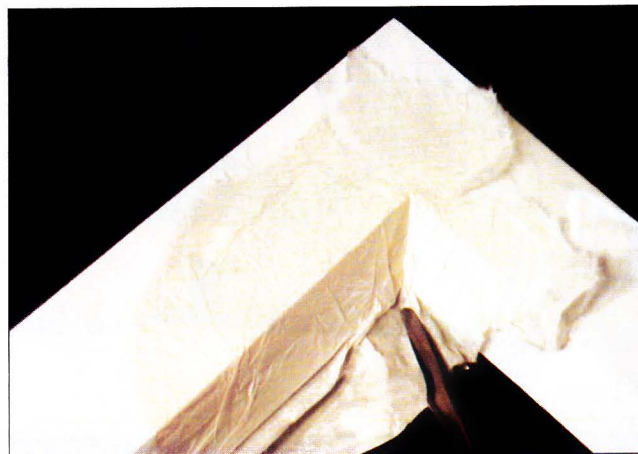
Use of line in any design occurs with the introduction of a window mat, surface mat decoration, the addition of linear color panels as painted bevels, or even the subtle use of various textures integrated as narrow and wide strips to surround a floated image or on a deep bevel. Using various textures will also help create viewer appeal, though much more subtlety than with the use of color. By wrapping the deep bevel in a neutral untinted rice paper using a wrinkled technique, a new texture has been added to the design, as well as a new line element. The fact that it is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " wide and surrounds the window does not disallow it from still being a line (see Photo 5).

### Color Emphasis

With any monochrome or white on white art the introduction of color will attract initial attention. Though any color will appear bold

with a very neutral or colorless image, a bold color may be used if offset or balanced with the use of a similar color or color value elsewhere in the project to maintain eye movement.

Since iris flowers are commonly seen in shades of



*Photo 5: Textural Emphasis—By wrapping the deep bevel in a neutral untinted rice paper using a wrinkled a new texture has been added to the design.*



*Photo 6: Color Emphasis—The wrapped bevel may be tinted with wet or dry pigments for color accent or a major color statement in the design.*



*Photo 7: Eye Movement—A 2" deep white metal moulding allows the eye to come into the frame easily, resting first on the color tinted deep wrap of purple, then drawn to the deckle and into the art.*

purple, that was the color selected for this cast paper image commissioned by Hunt Corporation (see Photo 6). In order for the purple not to overwhelm the white art it was used as a painted bevel in the top 4-ply mat, as well as the five layer, deep bevel wrapped mat

surrounding it. The wrapped bevel has been tinted for color accent in this design using Conte and Alphacolor pastels as dry pigment burnished into the hand heat mounted, wrinkled rice paper.

The design utilized a 2" deep Designer white metal moulding which allows the

eye to move into the frame easily, resting first on the color tinted deep wrap of purple, then drawn to the shadows and deckle, landing finally on the deeply three dimensional cast floral image. In turn the white art reconnects the eye to the same white, outer frame making the eye movement cyclical.

### Space and Proportion

One of the most important things to remember when floating art is to never crowd the edges. The spaces, or distance, between the art deckle and the mat, acrylic box edge, or outer spacers must allow for the art to breathe; yet there is no set distance. The more delicate and feathered the

edges, the more room that may be needed to show them off. Fragile edging will not have the visual strength of a harder more solid deckle edge as with the Iris.

Just as a mat width and a moulding width should not be the same, the space between the deckle edge and the inner mat or spacer must also not be duplicated. On the Iris design there is  $\frac{1}{2}$ " between the art edge and the bottom of the deep bevel with the bevel appearing optically 1" wide when viewed straight on. When viewed from an angle, that bevel makes a much wider optical statement (see Photo 7). There is  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the exposed bottom mat before the painted bevel of the top mat, with the top mat as a 2" wide border.

### Floating with Conservation vs. Commercial Hinges

Conservation hinges made of Japanese papers and cooked starch paste are recommended for float mounting. There are various weights of Japanese papers to accommodate the weight of the image being hinged. The hinges should be lighter than the art so they might break away during and prevent the art from tearing.

There are also commercially produced hinges available as both pre-pasted or pressure-sensitive types. If commercial hinges are selected make sure to follow all manufacturers' suggestions to ensure maximum strength. The traditional cooked starch pastes have stood the test of time and endurance as proven by ancient Chinese scrolls.

Placement of the hinges follows the same standards as any

**Diagram 2**

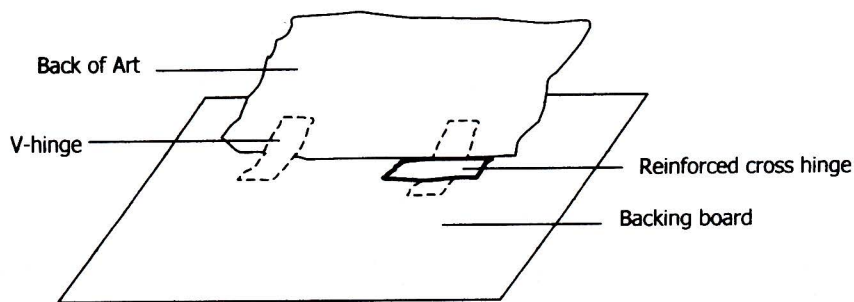


Diagram 2: Float Mounting with a V-Hinge

**Diagram 3**

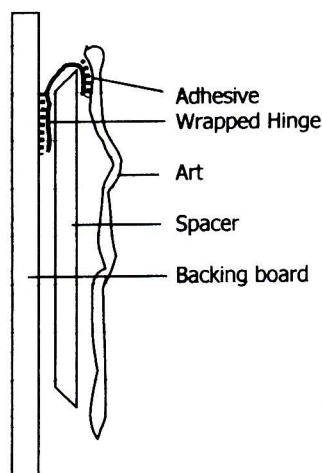


Diagram 3: Float Mounting with a Wrapped Hinge

**Diagram 4**

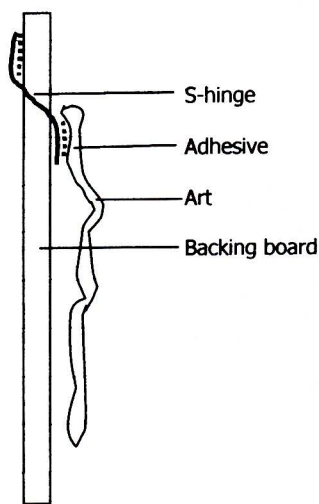


Diagram 4: Float Mounting with a Pass Through, or S-Hinge

hinged conservation mounting—using two hinges across the top as indicated by the art width. One or two additional hinges may be loosely attached to the bottom or low sides to help prevent the floated art from flopping around when moved. If these are added they must be loose enough to allow for paper expansion and movement inside the frame.

### Float Mounting Variations

There are a number of techniques for float mounting. Still, they all require the hinging to remain visually undetectable as to allow the art to appear as though it is floating in the center of the frame, unsupported... like magic.

#### V-hinge

The most basic version of floating would be to apply a reinforced V-hinge. This is a rectangular folded hinge that is adhered to the back of the art, and then to the backing. A rectangular cross piece is placed across the half that is attached to the backing board for support (see Diagram 2).

#### Wrapped Hinge

The wrapped hinge is first attached to the back of the artwork and



allowed to dry. The other end of the hinge is then wrapped around the end and attached to the back of a straight or reverse bevel cut spacer, cut smaller than the art. This unit is then attached to the backing board (see Diagram 3).

This is a very secure method of float mounting. If a reverse bevel spacer is selected, the sharp

edges should be removed by blunting with a burnisher or sandpaper to prevent them from cutting through the mulberry hinges.

#### *Pass Through or S-Hinge*

The pass through hinge is first attached to the back of the art and let dry. Then it is passed through a

slit cut in the backing board and affixed to the back side of the backing board in a somewhat flattened "s" shape (see Diagram 4). For heavy pieces and oversized images this is a strong method of floating. Once the mulberry hinge is passed through to the back of the mounting board it should be reinforced with a cross hinge or tape.

#### **Grabbing the Gold Ring**

As described here, float mounting is a conservation alternative to traditional hinges. Float mounting may also be done using wet glues and affixing the art directly to a reverse bevel spacer and then mounting it to the backing board. When it is trimmed blunt to the edges it is called flush mounting. When it appears float mounted but is permanently bonded to the center of a board with no mat, as is often done with photographs, it is called flat mounting.

The beauty of float mounting a lovely deckle edged piece of artwork is the showcasing of the art and its handmade paper, as an artistic unit. So, go ahead and take the ride on a carousel...and don't be afraid to reach for the gold ring. While the ring in hand on the carousel just means another free ride, grasping the ring of float mounting could mean more gold in your pocket or more customers standing in line to ride your carousel of designs. ■

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