

Mastering Mounting



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3-D Mounting for Wedding Dioramas

A traditional shadow-, memory, or object box generally consists of a deep frame surrounding assorted collectibles. Everything from Grandma's hand crocheted doilies, glasses, and yarns to a graduation tassel, diploma, and photo may serve as the inspiration to create a custom made keepsake frame. Memory boxes were very popular during the 1970s in the hobby and craft world for preserving memorabilia. Many of these were sold in the form of small rustic crates or semi-finished, 2" deep frames with dividers. The boxes were sold empty, complete

sets of golf clubs.

Traditional shadowboxes consist of a selected backing or support substrate strong enough to firmly hold the items to be mounted. It is then wrapped, covered, painted, or left with its own texture to best enhance and protect the objects and memorabilia. Items are attached to the backing by commercial or fabricated mounts designed specifically for the object; sewn; or sometimes glued.

The box sides are made of either commercially extruded materials designed for use as spacers, or by using

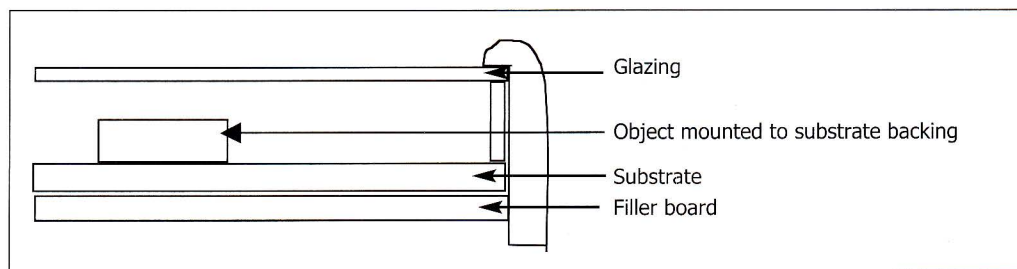


Diagram 1

with glass, dividers, and backing boards ready for insertion of thimbles, tiny antique toys, or anything that fit into the 2"x3" spaces. Over the past 10 or 15 years, shadowboxes have become a staple in the custom framing market and have been perfected and deepened to accommodate balls, bouquets, and even whole

the same boards and materials that are used as a backing. These pieces are sized to fit, then attached to the sides as separate strips. Both the strips and commercial spacers act to support the glazing in the final fitting of the pieces into the frame (see Diagram 1).

The development of the acrylic box

increased the options of shadowbox design. It helped to launch the three-dimensional revolution of freestanding tabletop units. The acrylic box serves as glazing with the actual frame becoming the stand beneath. This type of housing is what was used in the recent mounting and framing project described here.

Wedding Dioramas

Last year I attended the wedding of my best friend's son. The bride-to-be comes from a very artistic and creative family, but none are framers. There were handmade soaps as table cards, decorated sugar cubes, bows, candles, and a signature mat ready for signing at the guest table. As table decorations, it was decided to create small dioramas using do-it-yourself slide together basketball boxes that the bride had purchased. They were 10" clear acrylic cubes with U-shaped slide together components that measured a little smaller inside at 9.44"x 9.44"x 9.44". They were perfect for the task at hand.

A diorama differs from the above traditional concept of a shadowbox as it is a three-dimensional scene produced against a decorated background, which may bring dinosaur scenes of our elementary school years to mind. The wedding dioramas discussed here are not unlike the dinosaur dioramas of our youth, as they are a walk through history, a 3-D time lapse presentation of both bride and groom's families through the generations.

The idea of this project was to create individual boxes for assorted surnames from both sides of the wedding party using photos, text, and memorabilia that represented a mini history of that family. This is the story behind that wedding diorama concept.

The original theory behind the dioramas was to make each one a conversation centerpiece for a table, and to serve as a way to include passed members of the family in the wedding festivities. Each

Photo 1: Table Assignments—The dioramas were used instead of table numbers with each person's table assignment found at the front guest table.



Photo 2: Shoe and Photos—The open cube allowed for the box to sit flat on the table while placing the pieces into it. This made the hot glue assembly easy.

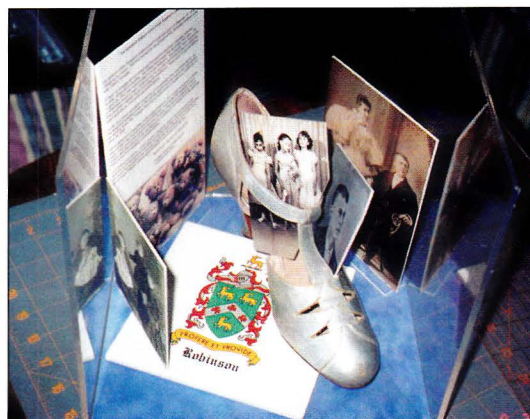


Photo 3: Robinson Diorama—The completed Robinson diorama is seen here, ready to be fitted with its corresponding cover unit. The two U-shaped acrylic pieces fit together to form a completed cube. Note the suede mat piece in the bottom of the cube.

Photo 4: Gallery Exhibition—The dioramas were designed to feel like a walk through a history museum or gallery exhibition. Imagine yourself 5" tall strolling past the display. Most people viewed them at table level.



box was topped with a card stating the name of the family it represented. So, the tables were named by family rather than table numbers (see Photo 1). Though expected to be a hit, it was never anticipated the dioramas would become the hit that they turned out to be.

There were 10 tables planned at the wedding reception. This meant eight families were selected and contacted about the project, with two dioramas reserved for the bride and groom as individuals. Each family was assigned the task of gathering old photos and items that best represented their family history. They were instructed to select only duplicates; replaceable objects; high quality photocopies of originals; or any new items we were allowed to cut, mutilate, and destroy. The dioramas were only

meant to survive the day of the wedding so the selected adhesives were pressure-sensitive films and hot glue. Admittedly, this was not preservational, but this was a temporary framing project, not fine custom framing after all.

On-Site Assembly

Prior to the day of assembly the blue suede backing boards were all cut to size to fit inside the cube, and the larger 10"x10" green suede under boards were sized for diagonal placement beneath the dioramas when positioned on the table. This would help add color to the table settings and incorporated the bridal colors.

We began the design process by separating the goodies into their appropriate dioramas, lay-

ing them out for overview. Additional scraps of suede matboards were used as stands and backing boards that were hot glued together and then onto the blue suede base. We used Crescent PerfectMount film to mount the photocopies to the colored mat boards and then sized them down for placement in the gallery (see Photo 2).

The Robinson Family

The dioramas were loaded with goodies including a flapper shoe, mah jong tiles, a tiny stuffed teddy bear, certificates, articles, tiles, scarves, hankies, and, of course, lots of photos. The Robinson family diorama turned out to be the group favorite, though Star Wars (representing the bride herself) was a huge hit with the kids. The white Robinson family crest tile was bought specifically for use in this diorama and it added color, history and variety to the box (see Photo 3).

Since many of the dioramas had only flat photos, the layouts were designed from a tabletop perspective. (Imagine yourself five inches tall strolling through a fine art gallery or history museum; that was the objective.) Since the diorama was to be placed in the center of a table it would be viewed equally from all sides. Therefore, the placement of images needed to be two-sided and the mounting boards needed to act as the hanging panels of a gallery (see Photo 4).

The photos were not all standard sizes and the trick was to not only to match sizes on opposite sides, but to try to keep the eras and/or themes at 90° angles to

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each other for continuity and association. At times, there were blank areas of matboard remaining exposed. We used small bows and flowers in the bridal colors to accent, cover hot glue seams, and blank exhibition space (see Photo 5).

To integrate a flapper shoe that someone had provided, I placed small vintage portraiture, of a married couple, on verso sides, tucked into the shoe. It would have been great if the photo of the flapper had gone in the shoe, but alas there was no flapper photo and these turn of the century portraits were the correct size for the shoe.

The project was a huge success. Assorted dioramas featuring memories and photographs of the Gibson, Ormsby, and Fine families graced the tables as guests reveled in celebration for the couple's future, while paying homage to their families' past (see Photos 5 and 6).

Afterthoughts

I was directed to complete this project as disposable dioramas, like a temporary school project, as they were not custom framing memorabilia. But old habits die hard and using a hot glue gun on these photos really made me cringe. I had been assured the originals were safe and we should proceed as directed. This is where ethics comes into play. My inner voice kept saying, "Although I know these are not meant to be permanent dioramas, what if someone decides to keep one? And, where were they going when the event was over?"

Well sure enough, just as I had predicted, they all found homes. Each patriarch of the given family snatched its family diorama for posterity. And now I have to live with the truth that although hot glue may not damage the bottom of the flapper shoe, it could damage the fugitive photocopied photographs housed in the non UV-filtering acrylic cube.

Custom vs. Do-It-Yourself

But my point is to think about this. The featured boxes may have been bought as do-it-yourself mini exhibitions meant only to last for the four hours of the reception, but the concept can easily be redesigned into a diorama for all time. As a market savvy custom framer who designs top end samples for in-store display, consider the possibilities. Think outside the box and into the cube of a custom diorama.



Photo 5: Ormsby Table—Full of photos and spanning generations, this diorama was also a hit. Note the added ribbons to help hide seams and blank colored matboard.



Photo 6: Touches of History—All the dioramas found their way into their own family homes.

Whether a walk in time through Dad's high school years as a football quarterback, a silver anniversary stroll through 25 years of love and sharing, or a mini gallery of a bride's family history, anything can become a diorama. The beauty of creating a custom framed diorama is the use of preservation materials and knowing this exhibition will never be a limited engagement.

It will truly last the test of time. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, Mounting Editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring commercial custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and industry consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, design creativity, and fine art, she works with industry leaders and has taught for the National Conference. She has written two books on mounting: *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook* (now in its second edition) and *Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating*. She can be contacted at www.designsinkart.com.