

MASTERING MOUNTING

ILLUSIONARY BOXES: A Step Beyond Laminating

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

In last month's column, I discussed the finer points of laminating large or oversized posters and promised you a follow-up look at "illusionary boxes". Since we've all experienced customers who would like their inexpensive posters mounted and framed "inexpensively", we constantly strive for variations and possibilities to satisfy them.

Laminating is not the cheapest way to complete a project, as laminating film pricing is nearly equivalent to that of glass. The advantage is that the project need not be actually framed once it has been laminated.

Substrates

Poster art and photographs may be mounted and laminated onto foam board which is available with white or black core and in thicknesses up to 1/2". A completed look can be achieved by bevel cutting or reverse bevel cutting the laminated poster edges after mounting to create the illusion of either floating the poster or outlining it.

Wood is also a substrate option, bringing to mind the entire "plaquing" concept found readily throughout Canada, including boxes and float mounts. The wood is shaped and colored prior to mounting and laminating so the exterior edging becomes the pseudo frame.

Gatorfoam, available in thicknesses up to 1 1/2", is also used as a substrate for its thickness, rigidity and toughness. Its limitations include difficulty in cutting because of the tough, epoxy-coated surface. Regular straight line mat cutters are maximized at a thickness of about 1/2"; also, Gatorfoam's cost is higher than foam board. Although it would be difficult to bevel cut Gatorfoam for a trim finish, its design advantage is the possibility of taping the raw edges of the foam after laminating. This creates the illusion of box-like depth to the entire image with-

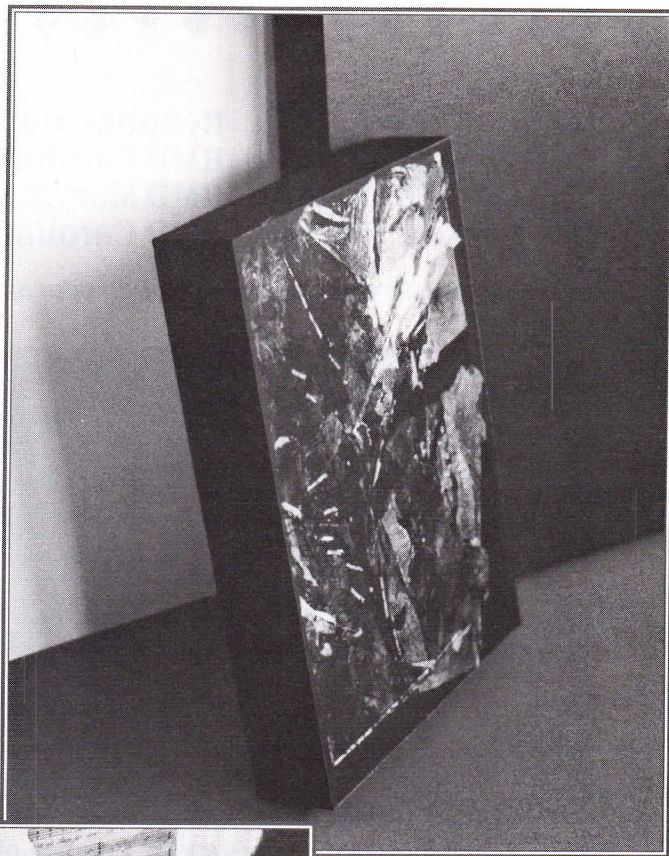


Photo 1
Completed 5"x7"
illusionary box. Matte
laminating film was used
in all samples.

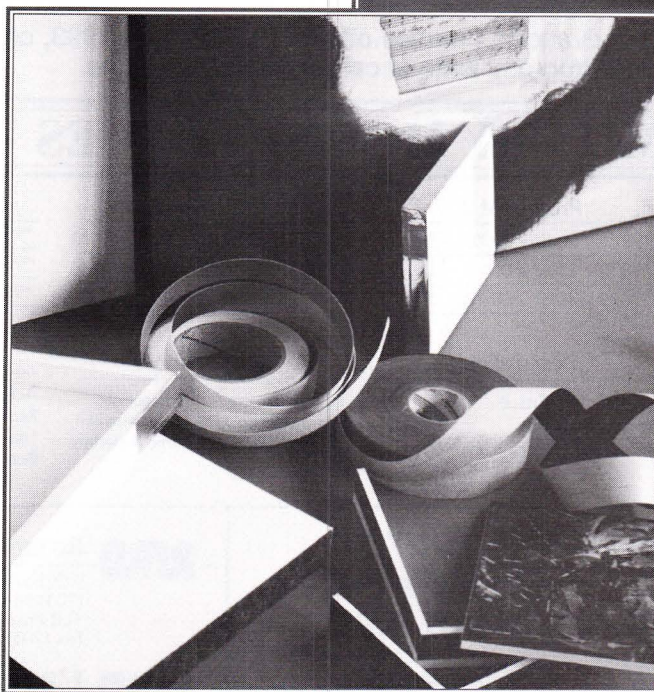


Photo 2
Supplies include decorative
tapes (all self-adhesive),
a completed illusionary
box in back, and a box in
progress previously mounted
and laminated ready for
side strips.

out the need to construct artificial walls. This brings me to the "illusionary box" itself.

Materials

The box is created with 3/16" foam board as the laminate substrate with 1/2" thick foam board strips cut to the desired width in order to create the illusion of a deeper box (photo 3). Requirements include the board of choice, decorative strips for edging, and adhesive to affix the added strips (photo 2).

The decorative tapes available and their adaptability to this process of box design will vary with their thickness and width,

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as well as pattern and color. The wider the sides, the more substantial the box will appear; therefore, I prefer at least a 3/4" to 1" tape (photo 4). Also, the lighter the color and thinner (in mil.) the tape, the more likely the seams of the foam will show through (photo 5). Tapes range from linen to paper to metallic and are manufactured by many different companies (i.e.: Filmoplast, Miller Pasta, Ultramount, MasterMount, 3M, etc.).

If wood is used to create the surface and/or sides (rather than foam) then Formica trims, as found in home improvement centers, can also be used. Plain unfinished wood beneath tapes may show grain and unevenness.

Construction

Once the poster has been mounted and laminated, and the tape or trim for the sides has been chosen, determine the width of the side pieces to be cut. Add the thickness of the substrate (3/16") to the added thickness of the materials mounted to the surface (approximately 1/16" for adhesive, poster and laminate), then subtract this from the width of the tape being used to determine the width of strips to cut. Using

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Photo 3 The poster has been mounted and laminated as in "Laminating" PFM, April '93, then fitted with 1/2" foam board with sides approximately 1" wide. The black Filmoplast linen tape is nearly 1 1/4" wide to accommodate the total width of the sides.

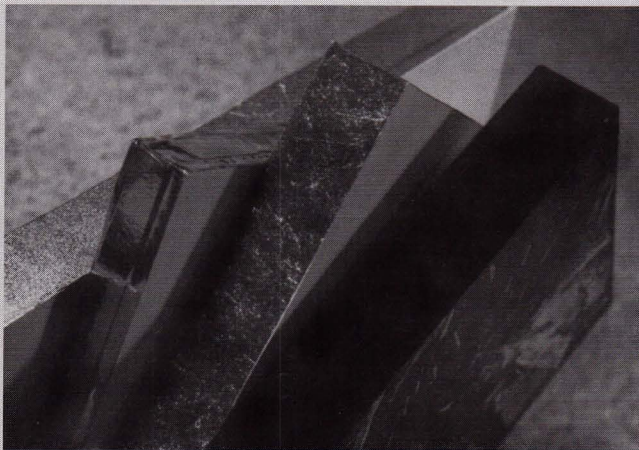


Photo 4 From left to right, Miller Florentine 1" wide Pasta; 3M Gold Metallic; Miller Tenebra 1" Pasta; Filmoplast black linen tapes. Note the problem with definition of the thinner, lighter color tapes and the seams beneath. Wrapping the edges with another (i.e.: linen hinging tape) will cut down the attention to seams but not remove it. Darker, non-glossy finishes will always camouflage seams best.

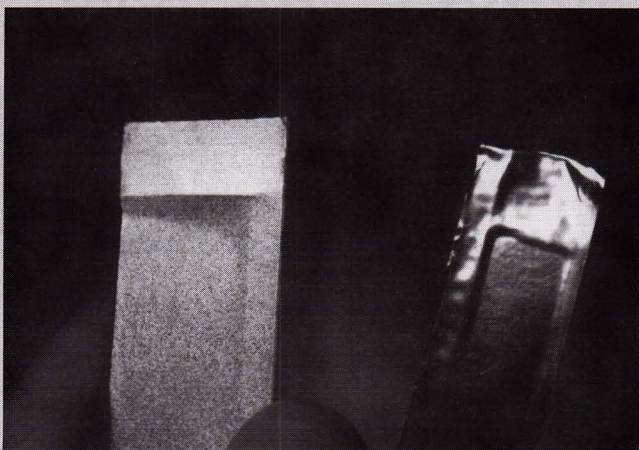


Photo 5 Detail photo of light metallic tapes which readily show the seams of the foam board. As with a tiny dust particle trapped beneath a black poster, even the slightest seam shows with light tapes as with the tape on the left. Obviously the seam beneath the right sample is not as smooth as it could have been either (see photo 6).

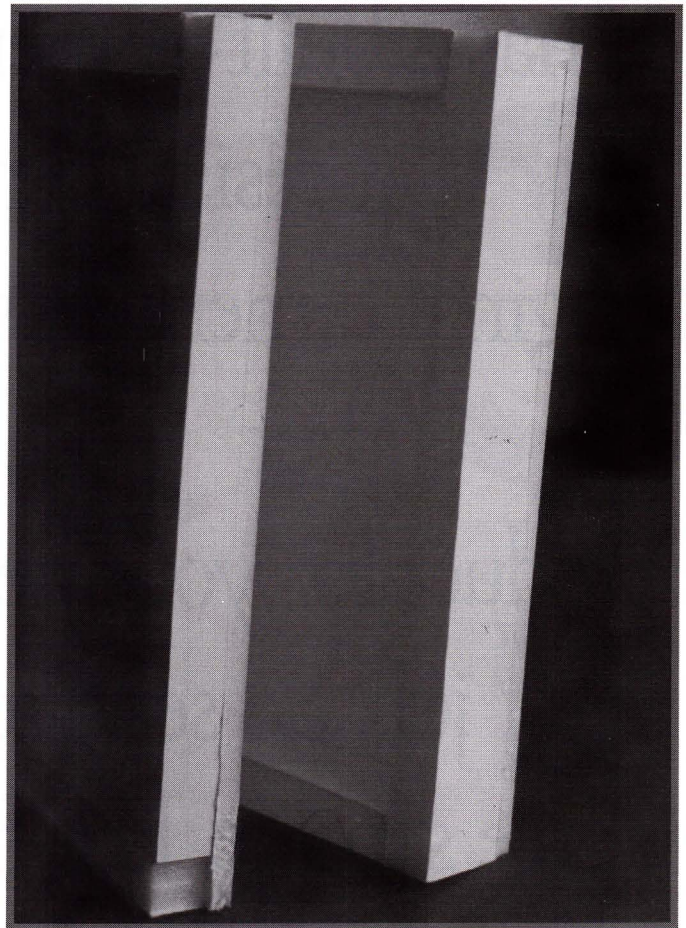


Photo 6 The actual sides of the box should extend the full length top to bottom of the box (right sample) to create a smooth visual image. All joints must be as smooth and accurate as possible, not like the joints in the left sample.

Diagram 1

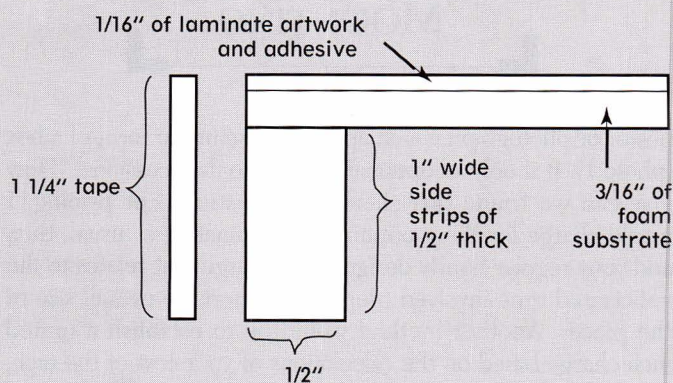
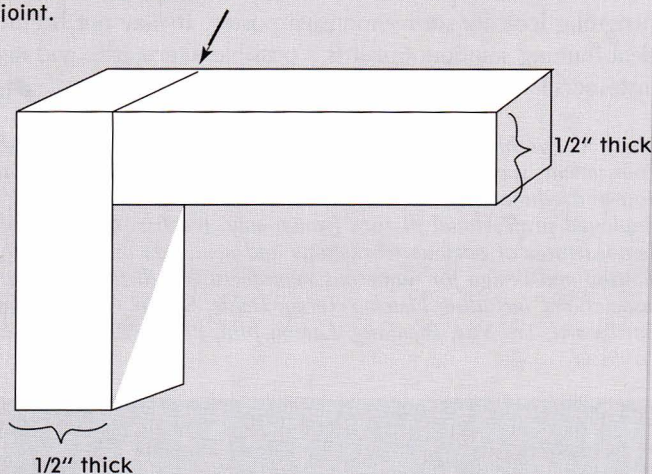
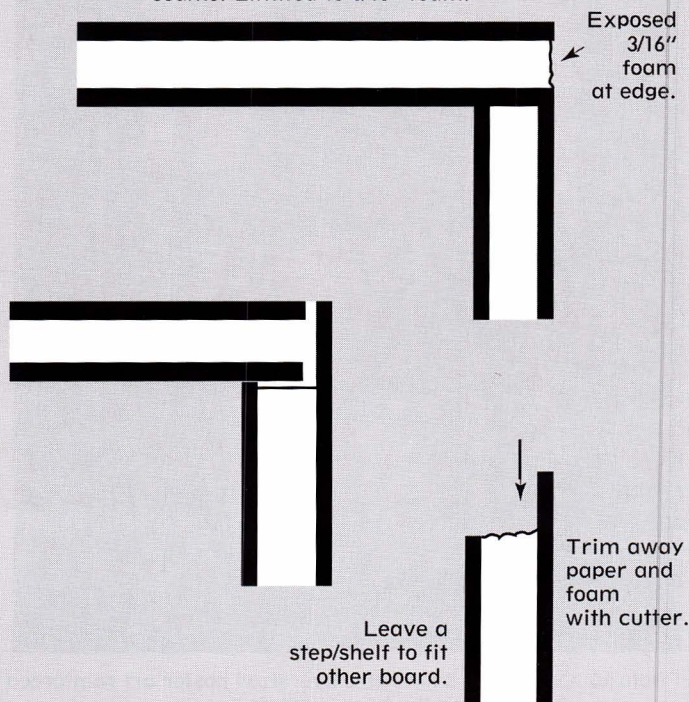


Diagram 2

Potential seam problem area of traditional butt joint.



Rabbit Cutter potential of smooth seams. Limited to 3/16" foam.



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this method, the sides would turn out about 1" wide for the 1 1/4" black linen tape. You can also hold pieces together to determine the proper strip width (diagram 1). The longest sides of the box should be the actual sides, with the top and bottom strips nestled between. This creates the smoothest look since no joint appears on the side (right sample/photo 6). It is always important for the butt joint to be as flush and smooth a union as possible to avoid any unnecessary lumps or gaps (left sample/photo 6).

I recently received information on a wonderful new tool called a "Rabbit Cutter", marketed by Charrette, which solves the entire butt joint problem, though it is designed to work with 3/16", not 1/2", foam. The tool trims one side of the surface paper and foam from the edge of 3/16" board, leaving only the outer surface layer. This creates a shelf for one side to fit into the other, eliminating any exposed foam altogether (diagram 2).

Assembly

Cut all four sides, trim them to the proper length, then permanently affix them to the back edge of the completed lamination. It's a good idea to glue the sides in place to avoid them letting go, though on small pieces heavy duty or double stick ATG tape may be used. If ATG is used, reinforcement of the sides with hot glue or heavy linen tape is advised (photo 7). Hot glue has a tendency to break down the foam slightly, so do not hold the tip of the gun in direct contact to the foam.

On large pieces, it is suggested to cross brace in order to cut down on warping (photo 8). Counter mounting is an option too, but then additional costs are introduced. Wood strips can be used as the sides of the box, which would then allow use of the aforementioned Formica strips, and keep the foam from warping.

Once the sides are cleanly constructed, the tape may be applied. Don't begin exactly at the corner; you don't want to run the risk of leaving a white gap. By beginning slightly around the top corner, you can end up with a double layer of tape over one of the rougher butted foam corners. Wrap the tape in one long piece around the perimeter of the box, ending exactly at the point of the actual corner of the box with about an inch of overlap (photo 9).

Finishing

When selecting the proper method for hanging, consider the size and weight of the overall project. It is not advisable to simply hang the box on the upper edge using the side for support, because the sides of the box can release from the weight. We've all seen thin mouldings warp from the weight of the framed package, exposing the raw edges of the inner glass. Wiring may be done by affixing poster mounts to the inner *back* of the box (not the side pieces as with a frame), which may need to be reinforced with glue.

The end product should be a mounted and laminated

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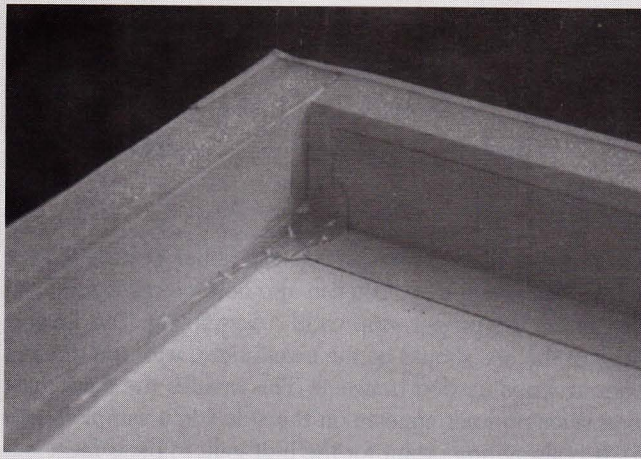


Photo 7 Reinforcement of the inner edges of the side pieces with either hot glue (on left side) or linen tape (right side) is suggested if ATG tape is used to hold the sides in place. Hot glue is fairly unsightly, so use the clear version or keep it cleaner with the tape. Remember the back will remain visible to the customer.

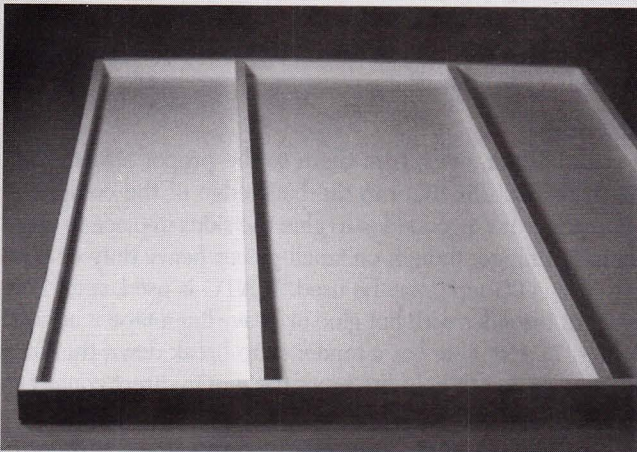


Photo 8 Cross bracing is suggested on large pieces to help cut down on warping and additionally stabilize the side pieces. Never hang from any of the side pieces or braces. This is the reverse side of the oversized Kline poster seen in photo 10.

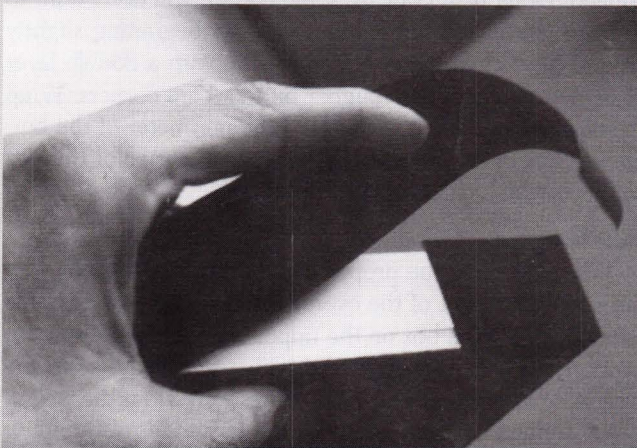


Photo 9 Wrap the tape around the perimeter of the box in one strip overlapping about 1" at the end. Burnish the entire piece down with a bone burnisher to create a good bond to the foam board.

poster or photograph which appears to be in the form of a box (photo 1). It is only an optional solution to the occasional "How else can we frame this cheaper?" question. For pricing, I would charge for the mounting and laminating as usual, then add your regular hourly design/labor charge that relates to the anticipated time involved (depending upon the overall size of the piece). Another method would be to establish a united inch charge based on the calculations of your cost of the tape, material for the sides (1/2" foam, wood, etc.) and labor time.

Using your dry mounting and laminating equipment in this creative way can help you hang onto that poster project and bring in the additional capital you might otherwise have lost. It's an effective, quick and relatively easy way to create an intriguing look for an inexpensive poster. It may not be the ideal framing solution, but it is a possible alternative, and my customers love it



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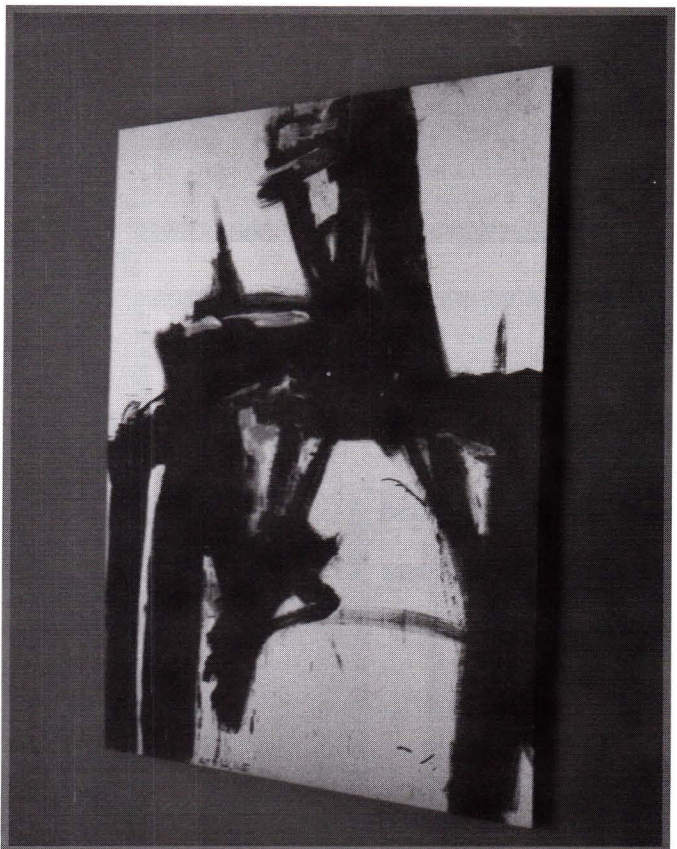


Photo 10 Completed 3'x4' Kline oversized poster art reinforced on the back in photo 8.