

MASTERING MOUNTING

Mounted Paper Embossings

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF



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As I explained in "Embossed Fabric Mats" (June PFM), embossing is the process of creating a surface design by decorating, embellishing, or otherwise enhancing an existing surface with raised ornamentation. In the art world, embossing is mechanically achieved by using soft fine art papers and an etching or printing press to create a high degree of pattern definition in a raised three dimensional design (photo 1).

Inkless or colorless three dimensional patterns are called blind embossed designs, which utilize only the drama of highlight and shadow to reinforce the image. Color may be applied to paper embossings later to reinforce a design by using inks, dry brush watercolor techniques, pastels or colored pencils.

Tools, Materials And Papers

The tools required for hand embossing are simple, inexpensive and may already be part of your tool assortment (photo 2). Metal, wood and bone tools designed for embossing, burnishing and modeling all work well to shape papers. An assortment of sizes and shapes will allow for a gradual transition from the flat sheet to the embossed design. Additional materials include a soft lead pencil, tracing paper, mat scraps, and sharp X-Acto™ knife.

Since the papers will be gently molded and stretched to fit a preestablished pattern or shape, they must be soft, flexible, approximately 40# to 90#, and be pliable enough to conform to the desired shapes.

Long fiber Japanese papers, although strong, are generally too thin to hold an embossed shape. Natural papers such as Mexican bark and papyrus are comprised of pounded natural materials, rather than pulp, and are prone to cracking and splitting, making them undesirable for this type of project.

There are however, many handmade and mold-made papers which can be adapted to hand embossing because of their heavier weight and fiber softness. Ingres, Fabriano Antique, Strathmore acid-free charcoal, Canson, Crescent colored art paper, Stonehenge, Arches watercolor, and Magnani are among the papers I favor (photo 3). The lightfastness of the paper is also important and the pH/acidity issue should be noted whenever matting creativity is considered.

Creating The Pattern

Since the embossing will be done from the back of the art paper, the pattern design must be reversed for the proper placement of the final design on the mat. If you wish the chrysanthemum to end up in the lower right hand corner of the mat, the pattern must be cut into the lower left hand corner of the pattern base, reversed (photo 4).

Any scrap of light colored mat board can be used as a pattern base. Draw the pattern in pencil face up on a sheet of tracing paper. Because the mat blank has a light colored surface paper, the pattern may be easily reverse-transferred to the

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board by laying the pattern face down onto the blank (colored side up) and retracing the pencil pattern from the back. The graphite from the original drawing will then be lightly transferred to the mat for cutting.

Score the board by following the pencil pattern with a *sharp* knife. Mat boards will easily peel in layers when they are scored deeply enough. The top colored surface paper is the first layer and they are most frequently used for embossed designs. The center 2 ply layer will also peel if it is scored a second time deeper than the original cut; do not cut clear through the mat (photo 5).

The Embossing Process

Align the paper to be embossed with the pattern. Tape it in place at two to three points with removable drafting tape to ensure the paper doesn't slip during embossing, which could create a ghosted pattern. The key is not to separate the paper from the pattern until the embossing is completed.

Hand embossing is a three step process. Using a relatively flat scooped tool, preferably metal, press firmly to determine the placement and basic shape of the image to be embossed (photo 6). Do not use the point, but rather the side of the spoon shape to work up to the edges of the pattern.

Once the basic shape of the pattern is visible through the paper, a large ball burnisher (about 1/8") may be used to work towards refining the definition of the pattern edges (photo 7A). The final step is to shift to a small ball burnisher (about 1/16") to clean up and refine any details too small for the larger ball (photo 7B).

Mounting

When mounting a blind embossed image created with an etching press, the definition will be so extreme that dry mounting with a sponge buffer

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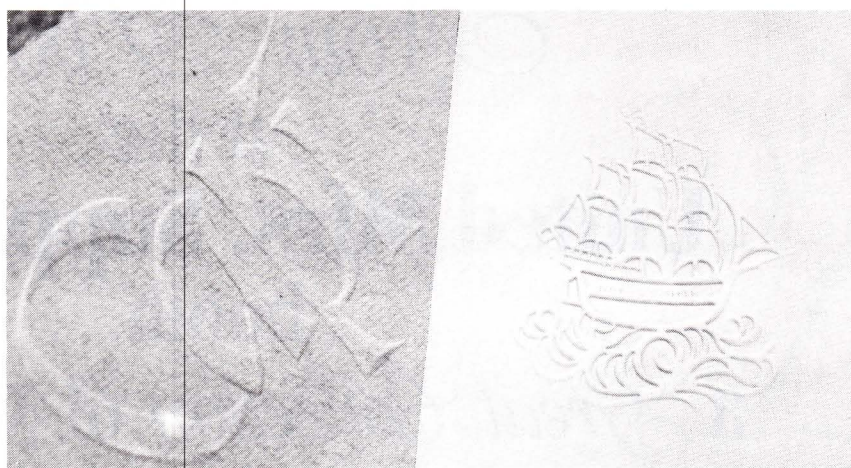


Photo 1: On the left, a hand embossed piece of Fabriano Antique paper as a Logo design; on the right, a blind embossing done by an etching press.

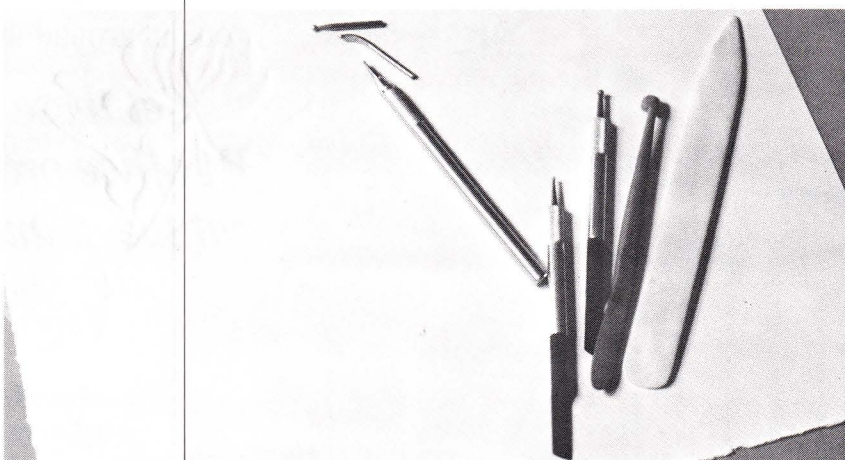


Photo 2: Hand held tools of metal, wood and bone are used to force the soft paper into the pattern mold. The far left metal holder comes with interchangeable spoon, 1/8" and 1/16" balls. The others are solid.

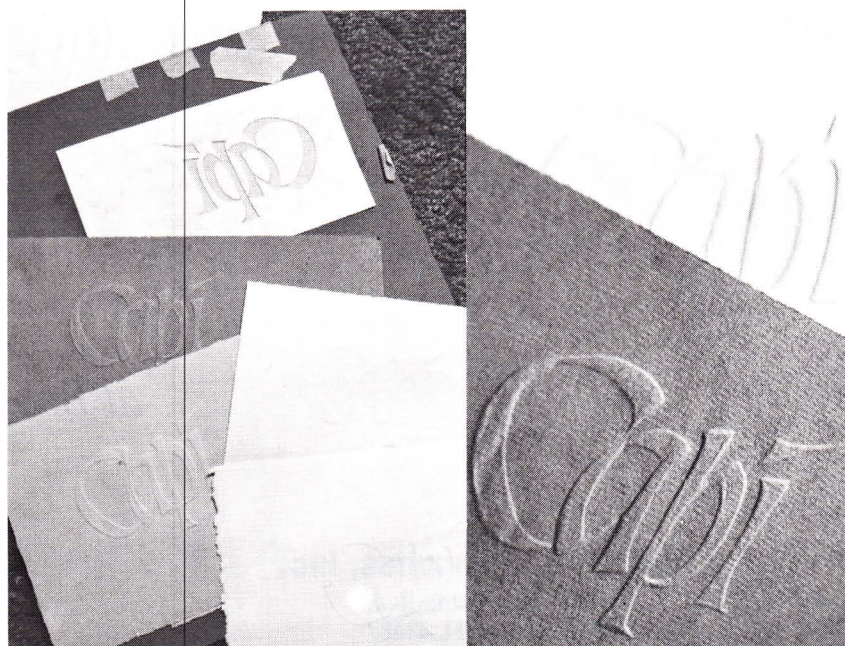


Photo 3 and detail: The pattern must be reversed when cut since embossing is done from the back (upper right corner). Assorted papers 40-90# in lightfast colors work well. Some papers will hold a crisper hand embossed image than others. Both of these examples were done with the same tools. (Capí was my Calligraphic Logo from 1980-1983, for Chris Ann Paschke-Irvin.)

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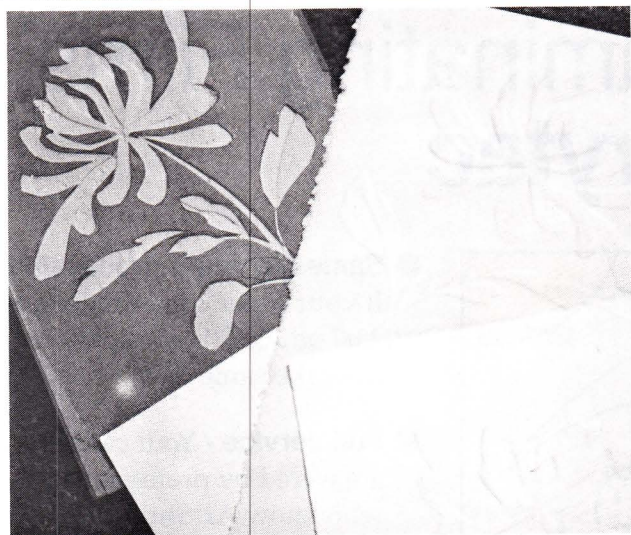


Photo 4: The tracing paper design was glued with rubber cement, face down onto the colored mat scrap. Graphite transfer also works on light colored mats. Notice the reverse image of the completed embossed papers on the right.

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is possible without flattening or deleting the embossing. Unfortunately, when mounting a hand embossed image to a sized mat blank, the pattern and process does not allow for the embossing to tolerate the pressure of dry mounting without losing about half of the pattern definition.

An alternative mounting method must be chosen to affix the paper embossing to the blank. Wet mounting or pressure sensitive adhesive, rather than spray adhesive, is advised. Wet glues may be brayered onto the mat blank by first rolling adhesive onto a separate palette for even distribution (photo 8A and 8B).

Align and apply the embossed sheet to the mat blank, cover with a clean release sheet or kraft paper, and roller flat with a clean 4" to 6" brayer. Be careful not to press too hard when rolling across the newly embossed design. Place a piece of release paper, pellaon or kraft paper over the mat and top with a piece of overlay foam or soft felt. Weight the

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Photo 5: The leaf upper right (#1) is peeled first depth of surface paper on top half and second depth of mid 2 ply on lower half. #2 is second depth only.



Photo 6: Layer the paper over the pattern and secure it with removable drafting tape. Establish the outer edges of the flower by pressing firmly through the paper.

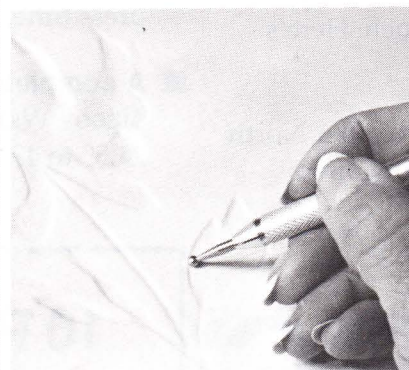


Photo 7A: Graduate down to the 1/8" ball to begin refining the flower.

Photo 7B: Shifting to the 1/16" ball allows for smaller details to be worked.



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project using something heavy such as plate glass or a closed, *not locked*, cold mechanical press until dry.

Design Potential

Once the embossing is dry, complete the project by cutting the desired mat opening. Always take into consideration the elements of design when utilizing an eye-catching image as the featured wedding invitation (photo 9).

If curves are an integral portion of an embossed floral pattern, perhaps an oval opening will best enhance the art and unify the project. If, however, the embossed pattern is based on geometric shapes, a rectangular opening might work better.

Since the mounted top sheet essentially creates a tiered mat, another consideration is to apply a light colored embossed design to a mat blank with a contrasting dark surface paper, achieving a hairline accent at the top of the bevel when cut (see "Surface Tiering", PFM July 1993).

How to charge? Probably the easiest pricing would be to add a flat base rate, perhaps one hour's design time. The process is quite quick and simple once understood, and a small accent can be done in very little time. In addition, the patterns may be filed and used over again and again. Always remember the need for samples—both corner samples and completed framed artworks—after all, a picture is worth a thousand words.

The sales niche for specialized hand embossing could include wedding invitations, paw prints for a limited edition wolf lithograph, or a baby rattle alongside a new baby photo. The possibilities are endless. In any event, adding hand embossed paper designs to your matting menu expands your design potential, and quite simply, adds to your designer expertise and value. ☞

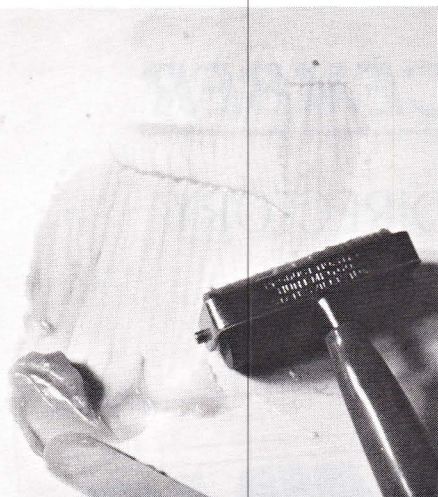


Photo 8A: Brayer the glob of wet glue to a smooth even texture with a 4" to 6" rubber brayer, on mat scrap.



Photo 8B: Brayer a thin, even coat of wet glue onto the face of the sized mat blank to ready it for adhering the embossed paper.

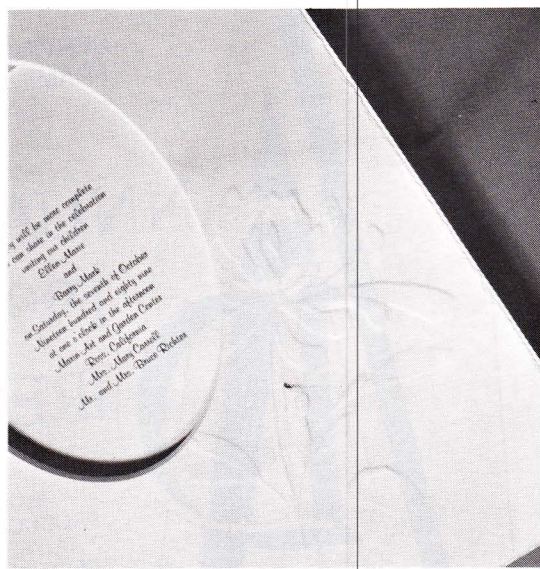


Photo 9: The dried embossed mat blank may then be cut for completion. Carefully design the pattern to work with the desired mat opening shape. Don't forget the elements and factors of design!

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