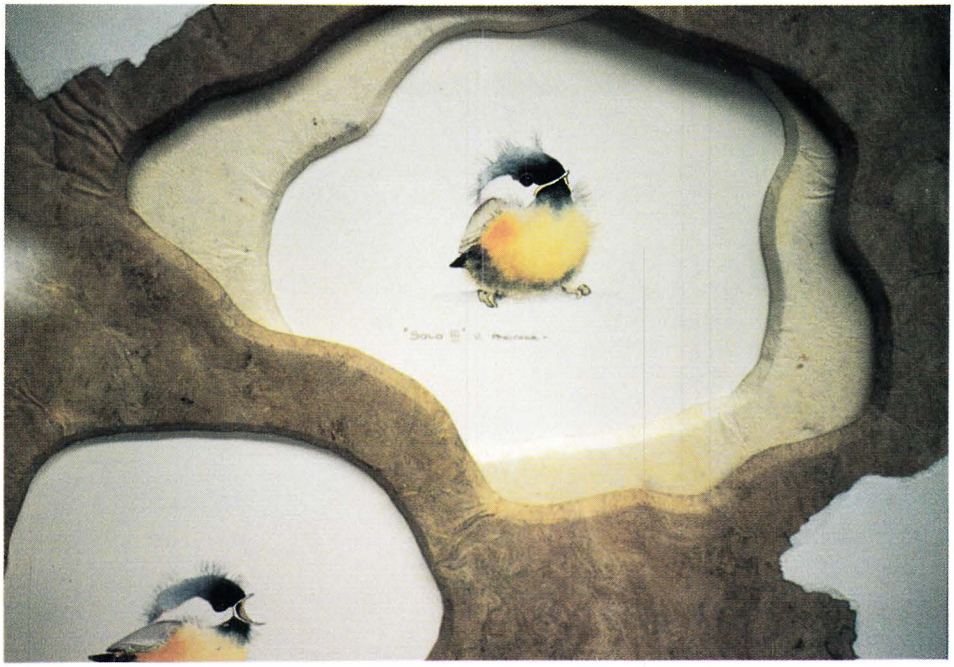

"Little Birds," a double matted, 14 x 18, triple opening free form design, was cut freehand with a Dexter Mini Cutter into acid-free 3/16" foam board and wrapped with Natural Bark Paper and Bleached Bark Paper using Fusion 4000 Plus in a Seal 210M Mechanical Press. Spacers of 3/16" foam board serve as both spacer and substrate.

Free Hand Designs: Foam Board Freedom

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

Framed art work reproduced with permission of Hunt/Bienfang.

The intracacies of this example clearly illustrate the importance of a foam board that cuts cleanly, with no bunching or tearing. Extremely tight curves and exaggerated points may be readily created using a quality hand held mat cutter.

Free-hand cutting of 3/16" foam board introduces you to creative mat design openings that greatly enhance art work. Hand wrapping of these one-of-a-kind beauties using lightweight fabrics and papers, along with the technologies of heat/dry mounting equipment and adhesives, saves time and thereby increases profits.

It has already been established that fabric wrapped mats are something at which every framer should become proficient. Not only do they expand design possibilities through added textures and colors, but they also reinforce your talent and skills as a specialist. Incorporating an economical as well as time efficient process, such as the completion of wrapped mats into their existing repertoire, motivates you to sell the concept even more.

Consider, for a moment, the expansion of substrate possibilities for

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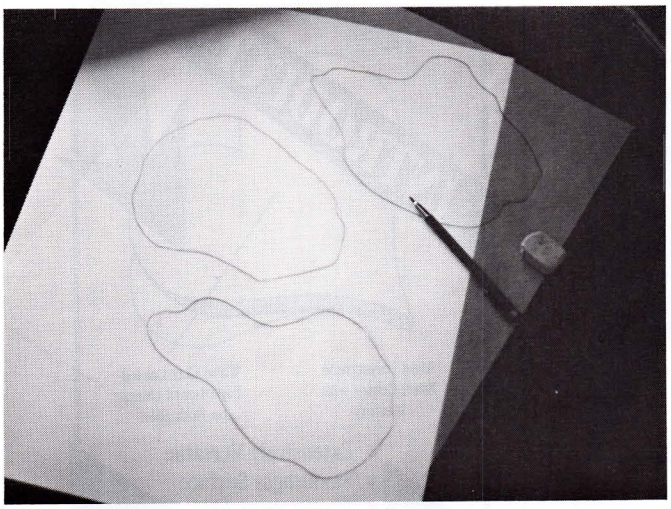
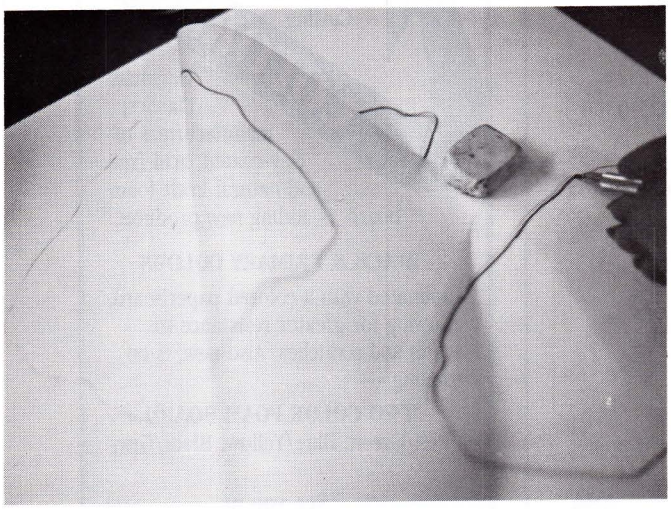
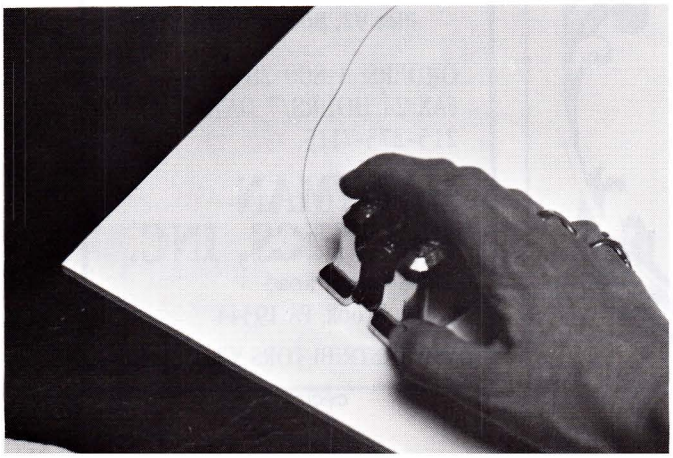
1. The bottom mat has been wrapped with red velour (upper right hand corner) as well as heavy weight hosho paper (wrinkled for greater texture prior to mounting). The top mat remains unwrapped for a close up of the raw cut foam board.



2. The pattern is hand drawn right side up on top of the image to be framed, in order to determine the desired placement and size of the openings. The completed pencil line drawing is now ready to be traced to the foam board (images removed).



3. Turn the tracing paper face down onto the correctly sized foam board blank and retrace the patterned images using the same soft lead pencil (i.e. HB, 2B or 4B) to the back of the foam.



4A. Cut the three free form openings from the back of the acid-free foam board, using a small, versatile, hand held mat cutter.

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wrapped mats to include 1/8″ and 3/16″ foam board. The design potential triples just from the bevel width point of view. Take into account "Deep Bevel Wraps" (PFM February 1991) which doubles up 3/16″ foam boards, and you have yet another bevel extreme.

Materials Vary

Bevel cutting foam board is easy as well as effective. By that I mean it cuts smoothly, cleanly, quickly and without having to use a great deal of pressure or strength. It is imperative to use a foam board conducive to this process of design that works *with* you. Just as you need to use clean, well adjusted equipment and sharp new blades, the base foam board you select must be one designed to readily hold a smooth edge without bunching, pulling or tearing when cut at a bevel. It is safe to say the foam board you choose must work with you. If you attempt to wrap an unclean bevel the end product may produce undesirable bubbles or lumps when gaps are created by cutting that necessary bevel angle.

For the purposes of illustrating this process of mounting in a dry mount mechanical or hot/cold vacuum press, we will use Fusion 4000 Plus pure adhesive and acid-free foam board. This pure adhesive totally liquifies within the press during the mounting process, and 100% bonding is permitted between fabric and board (unlike mounting with tissue based adhesives).

Although tissues often bond extremely well, there is an additional tissue layer between the fabric/paper being mounted and the substrate/foam board, this should be noted when using a mat board substrate as well.

Make sure that whatever acid-free foam board you use has the consistency and ability to be cleanly cut at a bevel (use a *sharp* blade). You should be able to concentrate your attentions upon the pattern and design without holding your breath to see whether or not the board will bunch up (photo 1). The toothed surface of acid-free foam board is preferable to the slick, clay-coated surface of regular foam boards for obvious bonding potential. The cost

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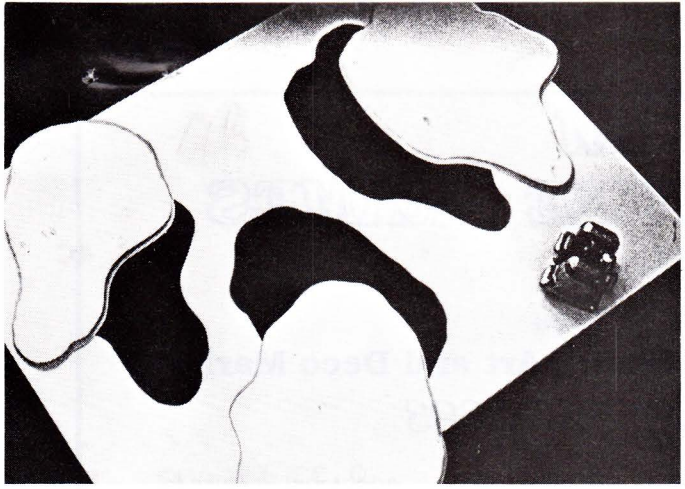
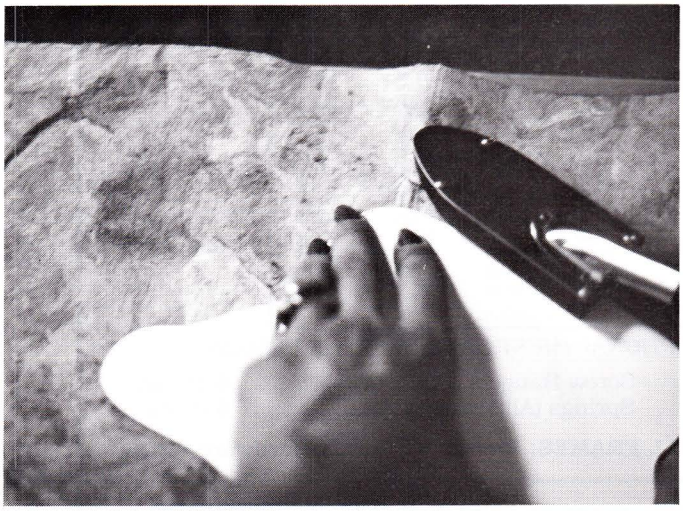


4B. Be sure to number the fallouts for later reference.

5. The depression of the stiffer papers prior to seating the fallout is necessary when wrapping multiple opening mats with a heavy weight paper. This photo shows step one completed and illustrates the depression of the second opening prior to tacking.



6. Seat the fallout firmly in place taking care to center it perfectly. Any offset of the fallout can incorrectly re-dent the cleanly cut bevel and destroy the mat. Holding the fallout in perfect position, tack the stiff Bark Paper with the tacking iron so it will not shift or lift up when moving to the second opening.

7. Having completed the seating and tacking of fallout one, repeat the entire process of finger depression and seating fallout two.

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difference of using acid-free foam boards should already be calculated into your wrapped mat pricing, so using the best materials makes the most sense.

Free hand cut designs may be executed by using a number of different hand held bevel cutting tools. The small Dahle "Cube Cutter" or Dexter "Mini Mat Cutter" are currently two of the most versatile and dependable for free-hand designing (there are other tools on the market, as well). They work exceptionally well on foam board, including 3/16" thicknesses. Although there is 1/2" foam board available for fabric wrapping, unfortunately there is currently no tool, of which I am aware, that successfully bevel cuts that width (manufacturers please take note!). You may, however, successfully layer two 3/16" foam boards, as previously illustrated in "Deep Bevel Wrapping" (PFM February 1991).

Step-By-Step

The project illustrated here, "Little Birds", has a double matted, 3/16" acid-free foam board, paper wrapped with hand-made bark papers. Other materials used included tracing paper, a hand cutter, tacking iron and dry mount press. Fusion 4000 adhesive and a 3/16" spacer between the two mats (which also doubled as the mounting substrate for the middle bird) added to the dimensional illusion of the birds by placing them on different visual planes. This also added to the overall price of the project to the client, since spacers and design elements add to the base project cost for the framer. *Don't ever forget to charge for your design abilities and talents!*

The Layout

In order to lay out the pattern of the hand cut openings on the back of the foam board, lay out the art work covered with a piece of tracing paper and draw the desired free hand openings using a soft pencil (photo 2). On the acid-free foam board (cut to size) turn the tracing paper over (face down) and retrace the pencil design with the same pencil to transfer the graphite onto the back of the foam board that will be cut (photo 3).

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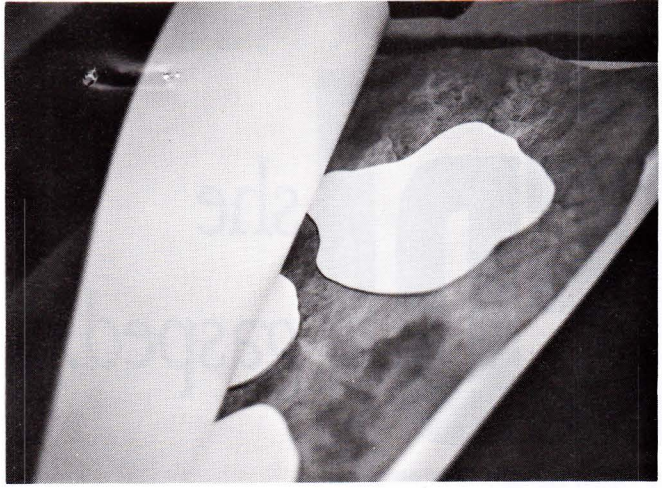
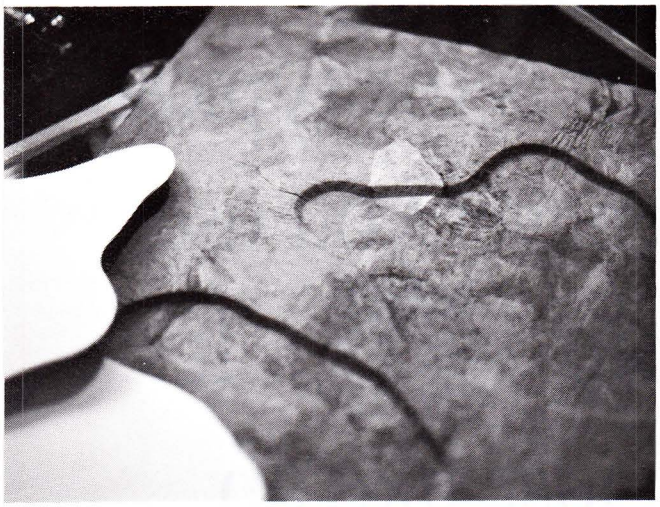
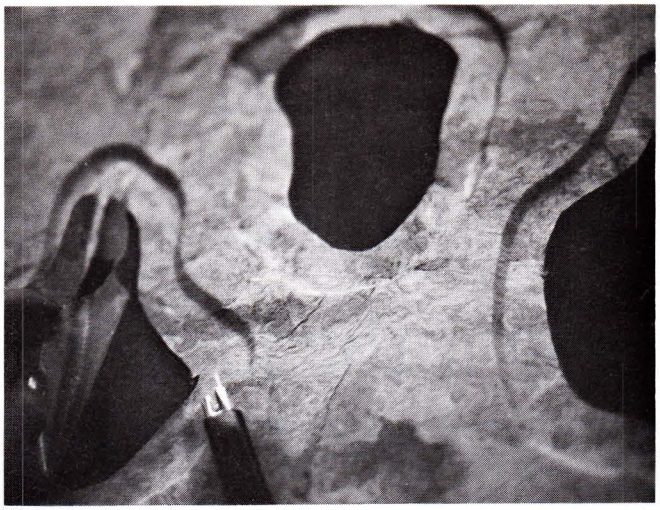
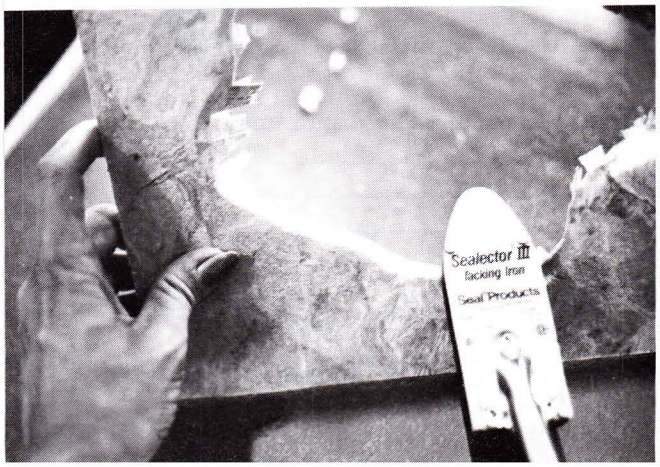




8A. & B. Place the foam board mat, tacked and seated with fallouts, carefully, face up in a release paper envelope for 2 minutes into a 190°F press to establish the initial bevel depressions.



9. Remove the inner portion of the openings by cutting the paper and adhesive, leaving 1″ of material intact for a turnback.



10. Reinforce the bevel with the tacking iron prior to tacking the splayed paper onto the back of the mat. Always work from the front, gently rolling the paper from front to back in order to prevent air bubbles and puckers.

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Insert a sharp, new blade into the free hand cutting tool of your choice and check the blade depth to make sure it extends just beyond the width of a bevel cut in the foam board substrate. Carefully depress the blade into the back of the foam board using a piece of scrap mat board as a slip sheet beneath, allowing the blade tip to penetrate slightly for a clean cut. Follow the pencil design, making certain the bottom of the fallout is established by a light pencil mark. Numbering the fallouts also ensures proper replacement when setting the wrap in the press (photos 4A and B).

It is important to address the slight variations when using different weight materials for wrapping. Obviously, lightweight materials such as silks, velours, linens, marbled and rice papers conform easily to tighter hairpin curves, while heavier canvas or bark paper, as used in this project, requires straight rectangular or soft gradual curves. Be careful not to overdesign . . . the frustration level may not be worth it.

Mounting

Foam board may be readily wrapped in a dry mount press as long as you're working with temperatures of 180°-190°F, for 2-5 minute intervals. At temperatures of 225°F and higher, foam boards begin to melt and they compress when left at lower temperatures for too long a time, or by placing in a too tightly adjusted press. You must be aware of the "time/temperature/pressure" ratios regardless of what substrate you are using. Be certain the press is properly adjusted for each project to insure best results.

If possible, cut the bark paper, as well as the pure adhesive, about 2″ larger than the foam board to be wrapped. Place it on top of the foam board (foam/adhesive/paper/fallout), layering it with the fallouts ready to be re-inserted. Since this paper is extremely stiff and resistant to easy hand moulding, it is necessary to tack the three openings slightly to avoid shifting in the press. Begin with the top opening and depress the paper into the opening with the soft part of your finger to begin establishing the bevel (photo 5). Never use your

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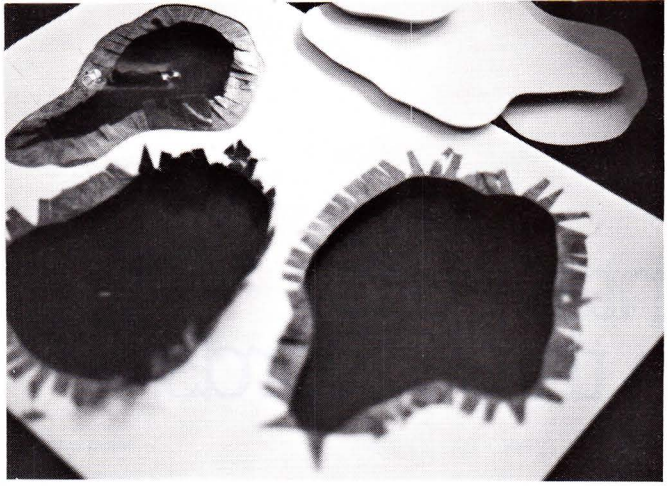

11. Illustrated are the three stages of turnback completion: the top opening has been cut in preparation for bevel reinforcement, the second (middle) opening has been finger splayed and bevel reinforced in preparation for tacking, and the third (bottom) opening has been hand tacked with the tacking iron in preparation for final heat mounting.

12. Return the three free form opening hand wrapped mat to the press face down for final reinforcement and heat setting of the splayed turnback. This will reinforce the bevel one last time, as well. The foam must be face down for the platten heat to reach the adhesive, since foam board is an insulator.

13A. & B. Upon removal from the 190°F press (3-5 minutes) use a bone burnisher to smooth the bevel and round the inner edge of the mat, since a ridge often occurs at the inner bottom when using stiff papers. Fusion 4000 and TechMount 3 both set as they cool and are quite mouldable while still warm right out of the press.

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fingernail or anything sharp (i.e. a bone burnisher) as you will easily cut or tear the paper. Seat the fallout firmly in place and tack the paper to the foam board using a tacking iron (photo 6). Remember—this step is only encouraged when using very stiff papers to wrap, as well as when wrapping multiple openings in the same foam board. The concept is to submit the foam board to the extremes of time/temperature/pressure as little as possible and still achieve the desired end product.

Using the same principle as the first, move to the second opening, depress the bark paper with fingers (photo 5), seat the fallout and tack the paper (photo 7). Repeat with the bottom opening, place the foam board mat into a release paper envelope and into a press of 190°F for 2 minutes (photos 8A and B). This initial mounting will establish the placement of the bevels for cutting and wrapping. Remove the foam board mat from the press, set the fallouts aside to be used again, place the project on a piece of glass or scrap mat, and cut openings leaving about 1″ of material to be turned back (photo 9).

With a sharp blade, cut multiple slits in the paper to be turned (photo 10). *Note:* the tighter the corner or turn, the closer the slits will have to be, as well as having a shorter turnback with more of a hairpin turn. Too much bulk will be created on a hairpin if the turnback is left too long.

Hand Tacking

Initially, turn the edges toward the inside and back by folding the paper around the bevel in anticipation of hand tacking the turnback (photo 10). Complete each opening entirely, prior to moving on to the next, and reinforce the bevel by slowly running the tacking iron around the entire opening. Lay the project face down and begin tacking the turnback by rolling the edges over just ahead of the iron, always pulling from the center to the outer edge (photo 11). Upon completion of all openings lay the project face down in the press with each fallout back in place to set the turnback for the final time. Also,

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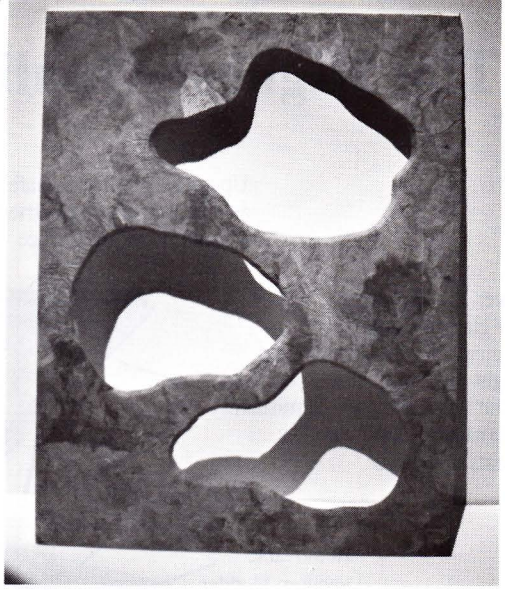
reinforce the bevel one last time (photo 12).

Since foam board does not readily conduct heat through it, and since the heat plate remains in the top of the press, the projects must be placed face down or the turnback will not set well. If left in the press long enough the heat will penetrate, but the foam will also be subject to extended compression and possible breakdown. Use a bone burnisher to smooth the bevel and inner edge of mats wrapped with stiff papers to prevent a ridge (photos 13A and B).

This particular project has a double paper wrapped, acid-free foam board mat of which the bottom mat with the double openings was completed first. The top triple opening mat was featured step-by-step because of certain complications involved needing an additional explanation (photos 14A and B). Complete the project by adding spacers, mounting prints and fitting into frame.



14A. The completed top mat of the featured project, with three free form, hand cut, paper wrapped openings. The small wrinkles (at some of the curves) are a direct result of using a heavy weight material to wrap and maneuvering tight corners.

14B.

Combining Straight And Free Hand

If you wish to combine the look of the straightline mat cutter bevel with that of the free hand curved patterns, the original design will be drawn out on the tracing paper as well. Select the desired mat border width, as you would with any regular mat, and decide where the straights will begin and end. Reset the blade depth in your mat cutter to accommodate the additional depth of the foam board and once again, be certain to use a new, sharp blade. Always cut the straight sides with the mat cutter first, as it is easier to fade in and out of the curved free-form patterns with the hand cutter. Maintain fallout and follow the same step-by-step procedures as previously described.

The freedom you may find by using acid-free foam board for free hand designing of fabric or paper wrapped mats echoing art work patterns, once again opens up unbelievable possibilities. When using papers be sure to consider their lightfastness and pH, as well as their density or stiffness. Even the most beautiful papers aren't worth the potential headaches if they resist conforming to bevels and curves. Remember, the "cutting edge" of "foam board freedom" goes beyond sharp blades and into the aesthetics of design and creativity. *PFM*

Chris A. Paschke, CPF is the owner of Designs Ink in Oxford, Connecticut, specializing in commercial framing, calligraphic design, consultation and education. A professional framer and designer for over 16 years, Ms. Paschke teaches various workshops and seminars on mounting, matting and design at industry events around the country.