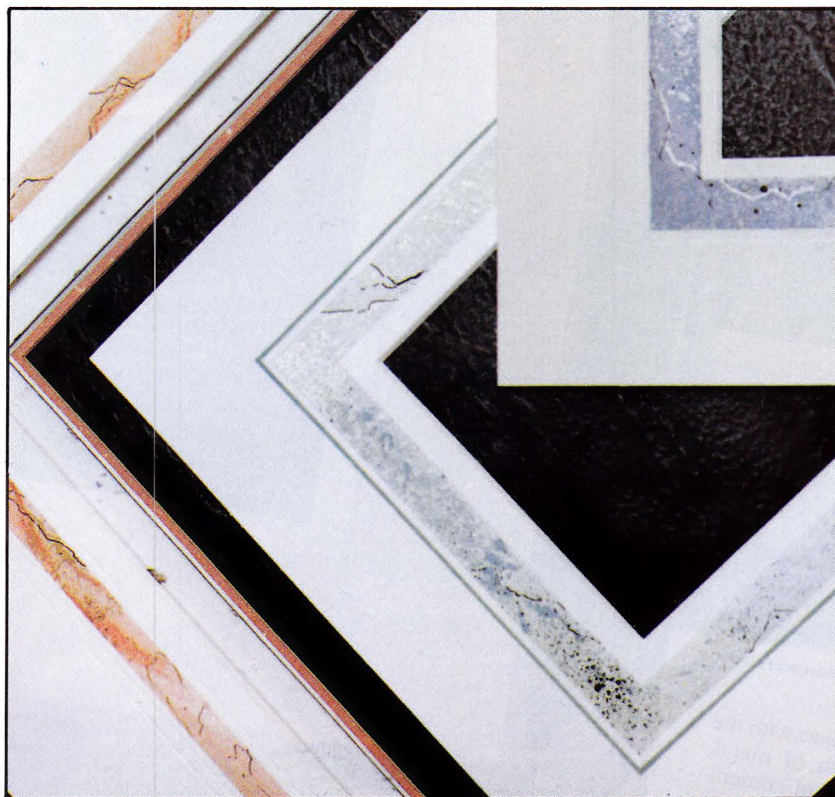




Marble Panels: A Sliver of Stone

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF



Assorted corner samples of various colored marble include an orange marble with gold and black accent veining (top). It illustrates a wavy pattern of dominant orange color. The corner also shows a spacer with a double tiered mat beneath. A pale blue-green marble with dominant gold splatter and black veining is shown in the center, and a lavender marble (bottom right) has gold and black veining and splatters.

Surface mat decoration or enhancement is a great deal easier than it appears, making it a wonderfully creative addition to your mat design portfolio and, once again, opening up the possibilities of increased profits. In a series of articles, I will be addressing the issue of wet and dry pigment application to the mat surface, much as a cross between marbled paper strips and traditional French mat panels.

It needs to be established that the marble in the following panel "how-to" is based on the look of polished marble stone, not the marble pattern created by floating pigments on the surface of water to be transferred to paper. The similarity to marbled papers is the basic accent paper look, yet upon closer examination it is im-

mediately recognizable that the panels not only lack the mitered corners reminiscent of accent strips, but in addition, the look is softer, more subtle and may readily be created to more directly enhance the art work by gently picking up colors from the image. It should also be noted that today's market of marbled papers run the gamut from one-of-a-kind hand made originals (both domestic and European) to self-adhesived photographic reprints. The price, look and quality vary a great deal, and creating original panels is not only extremely cost effective, but once the technique is learned, it's time effective as well.

The similarity to traditional French mat panels lies in the application slightly more than the actual look. All panels are created as originals thus

picking up texture, color and mood . . . each a creative personality of its own. Keep in mind however, the panel must never overpower the art work being framed; you must merely enhance the overall image by bringing the viewers attention down into the art. They must always work as a unit (mat and art), quietly enhancing yet never upstaging each other!

Many of the basic tools and materials used in mat enhancement already exist in your shop and those you don't have are readily found at most fine art or graphic art stores. Although I use a series of specific materials and tools, there are many variations and substitutions which may work well for you (photo 1).

The dry pigments used in this

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particular demonstration include stick pastels, since the edges of the stick may be used to enhance the highlight and shadow of the veining in the marble. Any dry pigment may be used including powdered pigments and non-waxy artists' pastel crayons (not oil pastels).

Mat board selection is important when preparing to do any surface decoration. Many boards are somewhat textured, therefore the pattern may compete with the panel design (photo 2). Some boards may receive dry pigments better making the application proceed much more smoothly.

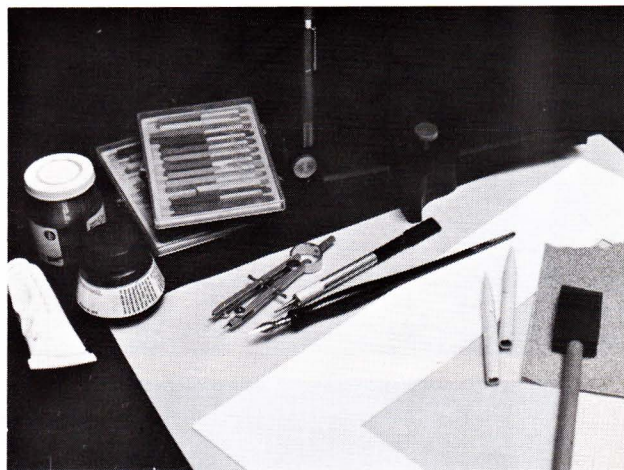
Although softer boards may receive pigment well, the tape or friskit (removable stencil paper) may often damage the board surface when removed. Museum rag boards are wonderful to use not only because of the smooth surface, but also because of the acid-free elements and the solid color core.

Size and cut your mat, leaving 2½" to 3" borders all around. In order to be effective it is easier to work with even borders until the mat is completed, then trim off the three sides in order to weight the bottom just prior to framing. When using this formula don't forget to add the additional ¼" to ½" on the three sides to be trimmed later, when sizing the mat to be decorated. Refit the fallout back into place, to support the sheet of stencil paper and to keep the bevels clean.

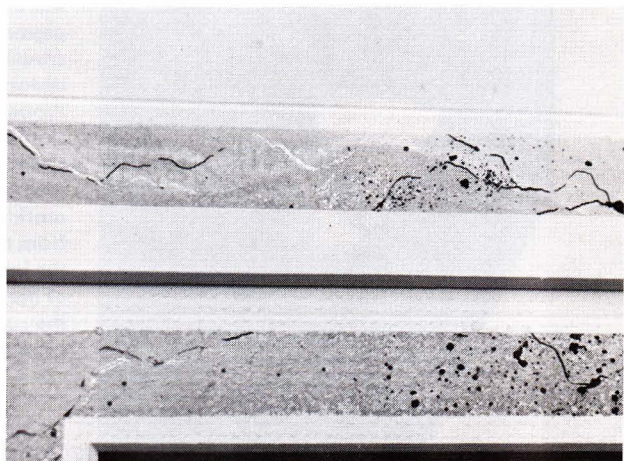
Using a stencil paper or removable tape cover the entire mat border. Cut the stencil paper slightly larger than the actual mat and trim off any excess at the edges (photo 3). Using a mat marking tool, set it to the desired inner distance from the outer edge of the mat (i.e. 2¾" on a 3" mat border) and lightly draw the pencil guidelines around the four sides of the mat (photo 4).

One of the most wonderful tools I've discovered in years is a parallel cutter. It is similar to a divider or compass, yet it has two blades for accurate dual cutting. Set the parallel cutters at the desired width and you are ready to score the stencil paper

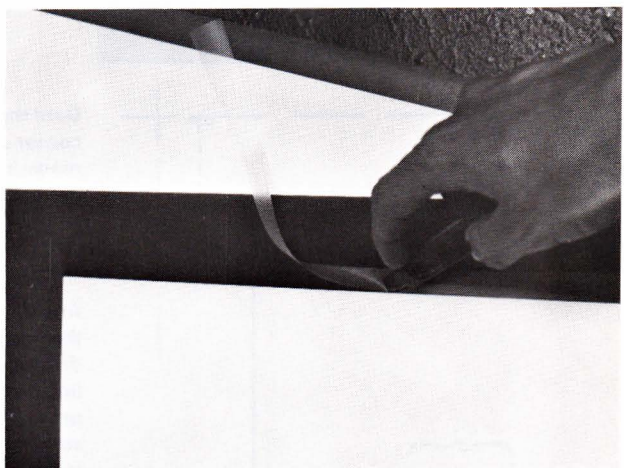
1. The basic tools used in this marble panel pattern include inks, dry stick pastels, parallel cutters, embossing tool, mat marker, sheet Friskit, 4-ply museum rag board, tortillions, Q-tips, crow quill pen and sandpaper.



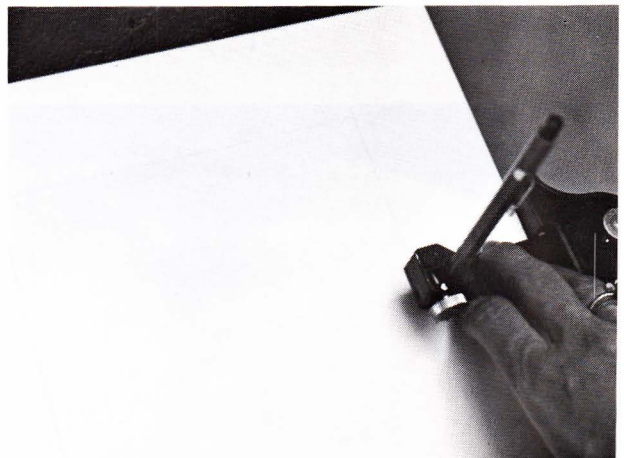
2. Textured mat boards create a slightly rougher look, often picking up a pebble-type imaging. This is a close up of smooth marble on rag and more textured marble on patterned mat board. The top design is grey marble with silver and black veining on grey museum rag; the bottom is purple marble with gold and black veining on textured 4-ply mat board.



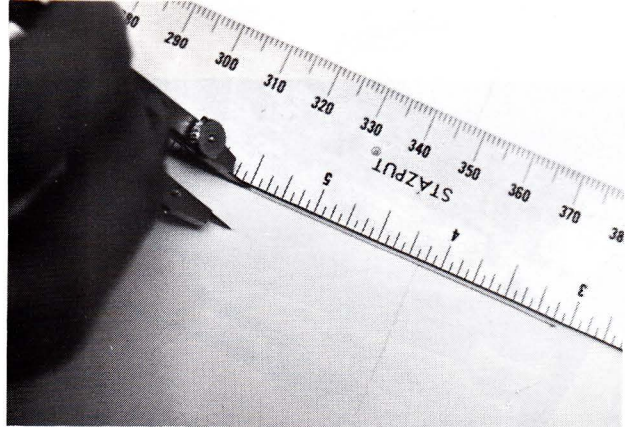
3. Size the stencil/Friskit paper, remove the release paper from the back to expose the repositionable tacky adhesive. Position onto the mat (already cut, with fallout held in at the corners for additional support of the stencil paper). Trim off excess at mat edges. Exact trimming is vital or the accuracy of the marking tool will be affected (see photo 4).



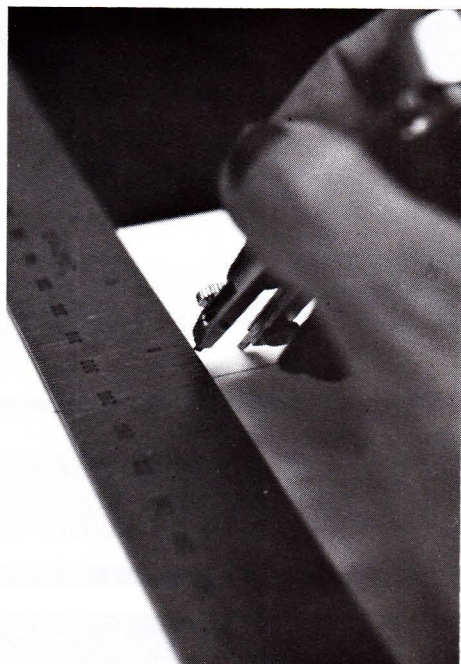
4. Use a mat marker against the edge of the stencil-covered mat to draw light pencil lines at your desired dimension (2¾" on a 3" border mat). Consider working off the edge of the table for greater ease. Note that if the stencil paper is not closely trimmed, a clean pencil mark will not be possible. This tool is a must for saving time and increasing mobile creativity. It is available from a number of different manufacturers and comes in plastic and wood.



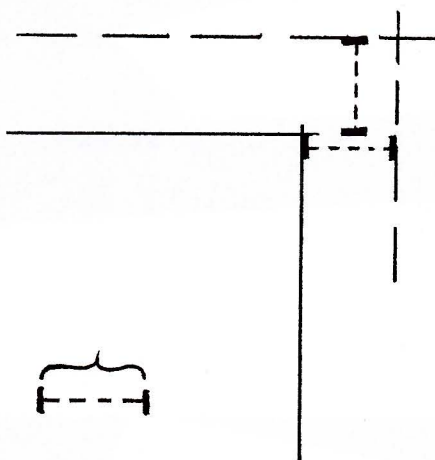
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5. Continue down the side of the straight edge with even pressure on the cutter to complete the cut. Repeat the same lifting process at the opposite end as well (see photo 6). A quality cork-backed ruler helps prevent slipping during the cutting process.



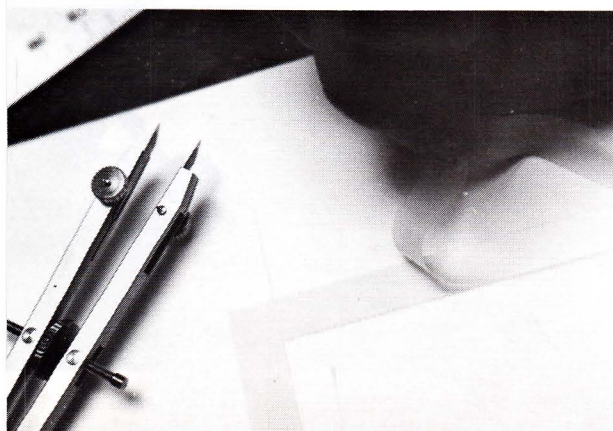
6. Lift the inner leg of the parallel cutter so as not to score into the panel being decorated. Scoring this panel will allow pigment to settle here, creating a visual distortion in the pattern. Proper top spacing of the right leg of the cutter (from the starting line) may be established by marking the distance from the pencil mark to the imaginary outer edge of the panel by using the cutter blade prior to cutting.



Dent the stencil with the corner of the blade after measuring from the inner pencil line.

Actual blade set width.

Another option is to reset the marking tool and draw a second pencil line around. The denting process is actually a time saver once you get used to the process!



7. Remove the cut strip carefully so as not to peel up any cut stencil material that must remain intact. Prepare to add the pigments.

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(photo 5). Use a cork backed straight edge or your mat cutter as the guide along which the parallel cutter will be used. As you reach the corner of the opening, as well as at the beginning of each side, you must lift the inner leg of the parallel cutter so as not to score into the actual panel being decorated (photo and diagram 6). Score marks of this kind readily fill with pigment and show up as glaring mistakes. Remove the cut strip to expose the raw mat board to be decorated (photo 7).

The look of marble can be best recreated when there is an understanding of the makeup and nature of the actual stone. The veins running through the stone don't always exist on the same plane, meaning that by layering pigment colors as well as the inked veining, more depth is visually created—and more visual depth means a more natural look.

Select three shades of stick pigment—one light and one dark, both from the same color family, and one complementary or accent color. Note that complementary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel. Using a small sheet of 120-360 grade sandpaper, powderize some of the stick for application into the board (upper right corner of photo 8).

A 1" sponge brush is excellent for applying the base or dominant pigment color onto the board. The initial pigment layer is applied with the darker dominant shade in a somewhat wavy diagonal pattern around the mat (photo 8). Using the flat side and corner of the pigment stick (or tortillions with powder pigment), apply the second layer of color in the remaining raw board areas. Don't be afraid to burnish these colors well into the board as they are applied, partially blending the two as you go (photo 9). Begin to reinforce the veining pattern with the stick by following the base diagonal pattern.

Contrast the dark patches of color with the integration of the complementary color as a highlight extreme and blend/burnish with a tortillion, stump or Q-tip (photo 10). An established dark edging should always be offset with a corresponding

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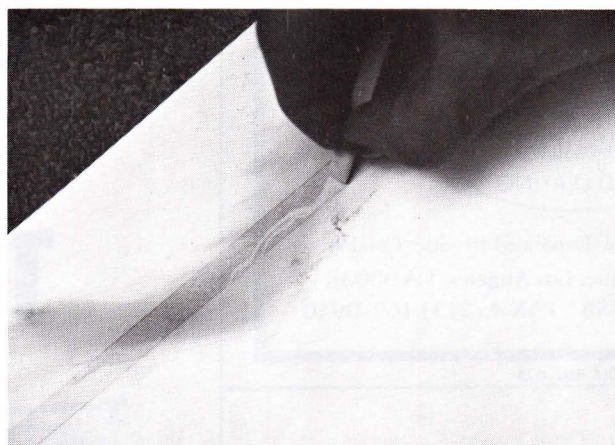
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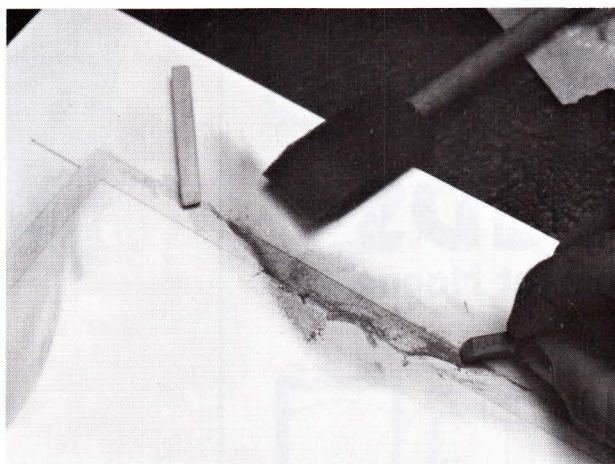
MAT DESIGN



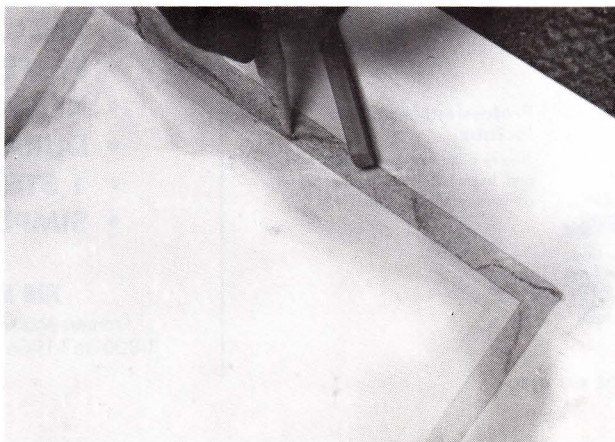
8. Apply a diagonal wavy pattern (of the darkest dominant color) to the mat for the initial step. Keep the waves uneven and flowing. Powderized pigment is made by gently grinding the stick onto sandpaper for application with sponge brushes, cotton balls and tortillions. Be sure to support the stick at the base while grinding or the stick will snap off.



9A. Apply the second layer of color using the stick directly on the mat. This should be the lighter dominant color and it should be used predominantly in the open areas untouched by the initial wave. The darker color may be reinforced with additional stick application as you go along.



9B. Reinforce the darker waves with direct stick application.



10. Blend the veining (accent or complementary) color into the panel, using a tortillion or Q-tip and the corner of the stick itself. These color veins establish the squiggly line that will be echoed by the ink. Green is used as an accent color here rather than using blue's complementary color, which is orange.



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highlight or accent edge. Dust off any excess dry pigment and verify that the pigment is well burnished into the board by going over it one last time with the sponge brush or cotton ball, and blowing away any loose pigment.

The veining is actually hand drawn by a crow quill dip pen nib, using black and/or metallic inks. Sometimes a dried grass works well when dipped in ink and rolled in your fingers. Either method, however, requires an extremely light touch. Since the veins have already been established, the ink squiggles are only reinforcing what already exists.

Think back to the piece of natural marble, its multiple planes and the directions in which the veins move. The veins would never be contained within the bounds of the panel width, so they must cross into and out of the panel randomly (photo 11). Also, note that the smaller veins must branch off larger ones. Generally they should originate from the infinity beyond the panel border; remember, this is representative of only a slice of the marble slab.

If both black as well as metallic inks are to be used, always begin with the metallic to establish the basic veining pattern prior to applying the black. The metallics used should follow the basic warm/cool format of color relations: gold is primarily a red/yellow based metallic and should be used with warm colors (i.e. reds/oranges/yellows) while silver is primarily a blue-based metallic and should be used with cool colors (i.e. blues/greens). This is, however, a gross generality since yellow based silver is a very warm color (but that's a subject for another article).

After all the veining has been completed, metallic and/or black ink splatter may be added. This is easily achieved by splattering an old toothbrush (or the pen nib) dipped in ink by flicking the bristles (photo 12). Make certain you do this in a protected area as you can end up with ink everywhere.

As the marbling process evolves

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*"A reflection of
good taste."*



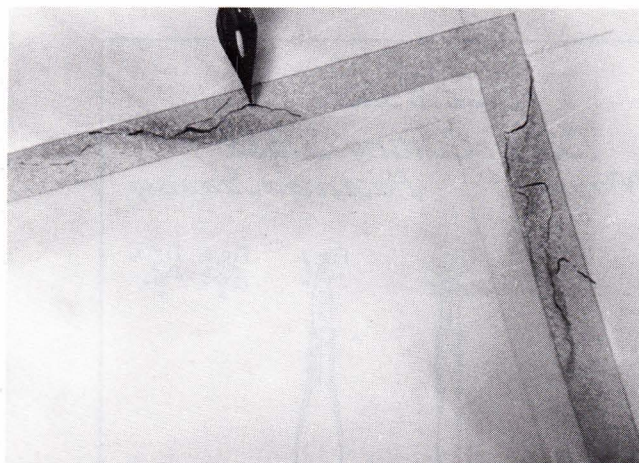
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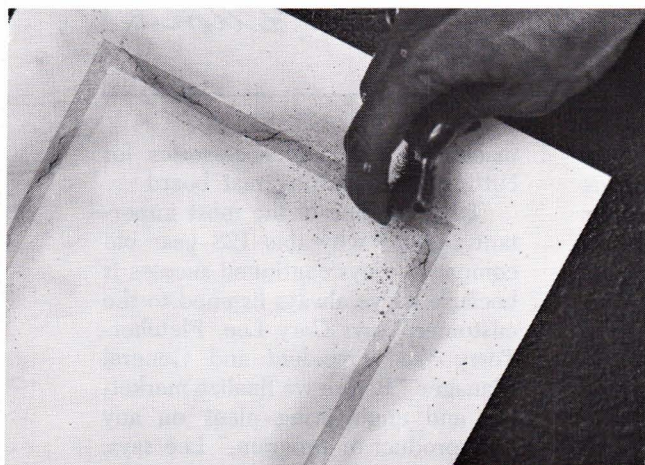
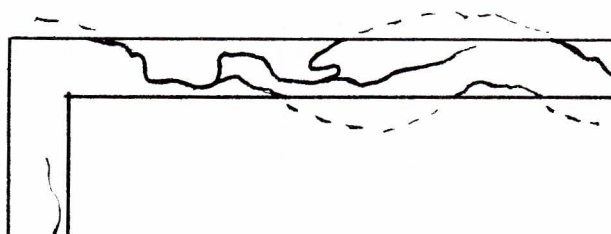
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11. Wet veining is now applied using black ink and a crow quill pen. Maintain an extremely light touch, frequently fading on and off the mat to establish variables in depth. The veins must always extend beyond the edge of the panel (see diagram with photo 11) as well as branching smaller veins off of larger, more dominant ones. When using metallics apply the metallic veins first, never overdo and never vein symmetrically or evenly (the dry pigment was burnished into the board with the sponge brush and cotton balls prior to veining). Imaginary veins continue beyond the panel.



12. Splatter the ink to represent color freckles in the natural marble stone. Layering dry pigment over the splatters adds greater translucent depth to the marble look. Note the triangular pattern of the splatters on the panel. Using this format will prevent a pattern that's too even.

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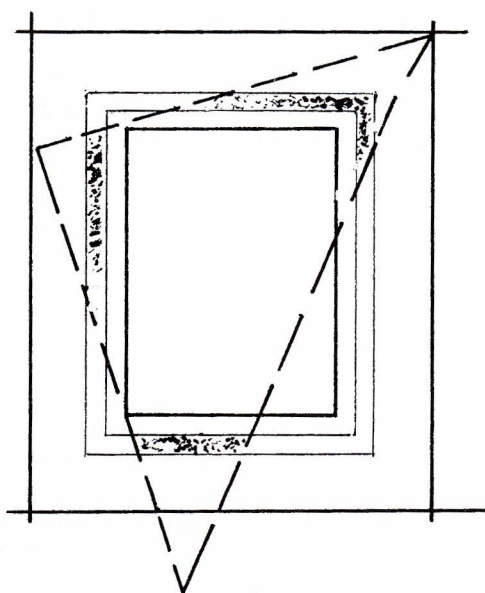
(especially during the veining segment), additional layers of the highest dominant color may be burnished over dry veined lines, while new veins are layered on top. This progressive layering process is what enriches the colors and gives the panel the natural translucence and depth of the polished stone. Although each successive layer of dry pigment applied over veins deepens the panel, the entire process may quickly be executed by the basic dry pigment/veining/spackle format.

Do not overdo the use of black veining. The more subtle, dry pigment shadows and highlights, as well as layering, are far superior. Another tip is to confine the splatter to an uneven pattern, never completely around. Just as with veining, the splatter is only an accent, representing tiny imperfections and natural color freckles in the stone. Apply them in perhaps a bit of a triangular pattern and at different degrees of intensity (diagram 3).

This entire process may sound difficult and confusing, but once the basic concept has been understood a completed marble panel may be achieved almost as quickly as cutting, positioning and affixing a pre-marbled paper panel. Marble may be created in any color range, though most are pale pastel in color. The samples used for this article are a bit intense to produce effective photographs of the process. Besides, color intensity is also part of the greater picture of you, as a designer! Adding embossed accent lines completes and enhances the marble panels, and adds another element for which you may charge. Remember, each additional element you apply to a mat brings in additional revenue *and* rave reviews!

PFM

Chris A. Paschke, CPF is owner of Designs Ink in Orange, Connecticut, specializing in commercial framing, calligraphic design, consultation and education. A professional framer and designer for over 16 years, Ms. Paschke has been an active supporter of PPFA and currently teaches workshops and seminars, demonstrates and lectures on various "mounting and matting techniques" at numerous industry events and open houses around the country.



Triangular splatter pattern.