

## Photographs: Three Undesirables

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF

Last month I covered the differences between basic contemporary photographs encountered in framing, including fiber-based photos, RCs (resin-coated photographs), and Ilfochrome Classics (aka Cibachromes). But there is still more to know about mounting techniques, materials, and their impact on the ending visual result. There are three major undesirable surface textures when dealing with photographs: fingerprints, orange peel and emulsion scuffing.

### THE FIRST UNDESIRABLE: FINGERPRINTS



It's important to be aware of all surface textures and finishes involved (high gloss, semi-gloss, matte, rough, smooth), whether it is a photo print, selected mounting board, release material, or the condition of the photo when brought in for framing.

The first undesirable surface texture is the result of poor handling—fingerprints—and will be encountered with any selected mounting process, yet is easily controlled.

Fingerprints are more visible on high-gloss than matte finish photos, and impossible to remove from poly-

ester Cibachromes. Wearing white cotton gloves when handling all photographic prints should be mandatory practice. Let any fingerprints visible on the photo surface be that of the customer, not the framer.

Finger oil deposits, scratches and surface damage from inappropriate handling and mounting of photographs are senseless, undesirable surface textures. The professionally framed photo will only be as good as its weakest link. Don't let the most easily controlled "undesirable" be a visual problem.

### THE SECOND UNDESIRABLE: ORANGE PEEL

Along with emulsion scratches, the visual result, "orange peel" is perhaps the second most distracting element when mounting a photograph.

As discussed last month, orange peel can be controlled by material selection and amount of pressure during application as well as choice of surface release materials. The papers and boards for mounting most photographs should have minimal or subtle surface texture (unnoticeable) for both aesthetic and conservation reasons. Warm mounting temperatures relax RC photos (and Cibachromes) into the highs and lows of textured substrates encouraging lumpy orange

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peel. Cold mounting on smoother boards with less pressure produces less visual surface texture.

The surfaces of most photographs begin smooth, and therefore a smooth surfaced mount board is more visually harmonious. The selection of the appropriate mounting board is as important as the mounting method and release papers.

### **SMOOTH COATED CLAY BOARDS**

There are special boards produced for photos for many reasons. Some for smoothness, some to meet competition standards, some for their nonbuffered content. All have a texture of some kind. Textures which appear subtle at first may turn out to be rocky when beneath a smooth, high gloss photograph. Substrate textures are best determined by lightly running the fingertips across the board surface to feel for lumpy irregularities.

Smooth surfaced boards such as regular clay coated foam board, MightyCore™ and Gatorfoam® all make slick surfaces for mounting. The clay coated or polyester film on the surface of many of these boards gives them their smoother surface, but may cut down on the porosity of the substrate. Since a photo is also nonporous, it may take additional steps or variations in standard porous mounting techniques when working with some heat vacuum systems. A two-step photo mounting process might be highly suggested.

Another issue is the absorption limitations of any clay coated surface. Although adhesives will readily bond to them, they will only adhere as best as any two nonporous surfaces can stick. Since no adhesive can absorb into either the photo or the coated surface, there is no saturation into porous paper fibers.

During cold mounting, pressure-sensitive applications on foam substrates allow for better control of

mounting pressure through hand application, without the concern for porosity. Pressure sensitive films, spray adhesives, and wet glues all allow for application onto any selected substrate, while over-riding the porosity and pressure issues better controlling orange peel.

Next to hinging or edge-stripping a photo, spray adhesive on a smooth board may produce less texture, followed by wet, pressure sensitive, and low-temp dry mounting applications. Technique will often dominate over what appear to be smooth materials.

Selecting an appropriate mounting board is as important as the mounting method and release papers.

### **POROUS BUT TEXTURED BOARDS**

There is a range of nicely porous and rigid materials, but some may have more texture than is desirable. Chipboard, masonite, MDF, matboard, photo competition board, and standard mount board are all wonderful for adhesive absorption during bonding, and breathe well for dry mounting, but many are acidic.

It's sometimes a bit of a trade-off between orange peel, neutral pH, or porosity. Materials may need to be chosen based on visual end result and longevity when used with display photos.

### **THE THIRD UNDESIRABLE: SCUFFING**

Both orange peel and scuffing can be somewhat controlled by choosing an appropriate mounting process. Yet while the selection of mounting substrates specifically impacts orange peel, emulsion damage is best controlled by method and materials.

High gloss RC photos are currently the most popular photo finish on the market, but matte RC images are beginning to gain back popularity. Glossy emulsions have a greater tendency to be effected by the application of heat during dry mounting. The bad news: this can create a scuffy appearance across the photo surface. The good



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news is it can be lessened by the type of release material used during mounting. Though damage to the emulsion cannot necessarily be prevented, it can be controlled.

If dry mounting is the process of choice, pay close attention to the release materials used. If cold mounting, scuffing is not an issue.

### **MYLAR RELEASE MATERIALS**

Textured boards used beneath a photo effect the surface texture, but so can the smoothness of the overlaying sheet. The clear mylar release papers sold by Hot Press and Drytac are sheer and smooth and leave the smoothest surface on a high gloss photo, showing little or no scuffing damage.

### **KRAFT PAPER SUBSTITUTE**

It has been reported that a high gloss photo covered with Kraft paper will maintain its gloss. Not totally true! Though the gloss emulsion is less damaged, the kraft paper fibers are somewhat embedded into the warmed emulsion during mounting. This results in a different kind of emulsion damage, also not acceptable.

There are two other problems with using Kraft paper as a cover sheet. One is the need to trim all adhesives or premount the photo so the paper is not mounted along with the photo to the mount board. The second is the orange peel texture that often appears in the sheet which could transfer to the photo.

### **SILICONE RELEASE PAPERS AND BOARDS**

Like Kraft paper, double-sided and single-sided release papers often inherently have an orange peel appearance when taken directly off the roll. The carrier paper itself has a weight and body to it that could transfer texture to the photo.

It has also been noted that silicone release papers appear to have a reaction with heat-sensitive gloss emul-

sions which produce scuffing on these sensitive photos. Remember, not all glossy photos are heat sensitive, but it is impossible to determine any sensitivity ahead of time.

Commercially manufactured release boards have a tremendously high degree of orange peel to them, having been created from single-sided release paper and a chip-board type mounting board, also with a lumpy texture. Orange peel is just waiting to happen on an unsuspecting photo or poster print!

The hierarchy of smoothest to most textured remains: Mylar, single-sided paper, double-sided paper, commercial release boards, then Kraft paper (but you'll have to deal with the paper fuzz).

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### **CORRECT MATERIALS FOR PHOTOS**

The acidity level of the boards selected for mounting is also important. Different photos require specialized handling. Nonbuffered materials should be used when framing natural fibers or materials such as silk, wool, bone, ivory, and leather. They should also be selected when mounting and matting animal,

protein-based photographic emulsions including chromogenic, RC and Ilfochrome Classics.

### **PH AND PHOTOS**

On the pH scale, 0.0 to 6.5 is considered acidic. Neutral pH is 7.0, and 7.5 to 14.0 is alkaline. Common book papers are somewhere between 5.0 to 7.0, while alkaline buffering increases the alkaline range from between 7.5 and 9.5. Though we strive for use of buffered boards with most fine art prints, some photographs are slightly acidic by nature.

### **KNOWING WHAT TO DO**

The longevity of a photograph begins with proper developing procedures and papers, but is influenced by the materials selected for framing. Aesthetically we should



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strive to control emulsion scuffing by choosing the right release materials and orange peel textures by selecting the smoothest substrate with controlled pressure during mounting.

Conservationally we need to consider acidity and UV transmission. A majority of the photographs mounted each year in the U.S. are Ektacolor, Fujicolor or similar chromogenic prints supplied by professional portrait and wedding photographers. For these prints, which have a limited useful life on display, the choice of mount board will have little or no difference besides the above mentioned textures.

Light fading, lacquer-associated discoloration and other forms of deterioration will proceed at essentially the same rates on either inexpensive "illustration board" high in lignin with a chipboard base or the best nonbuffered 100% cotton fiber museum board. This is why it remains

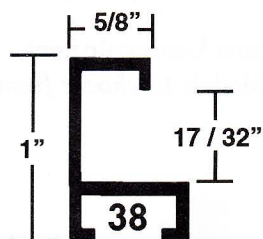
acceptable to mat these display images using buffered conservation grade boards.

It remains our job as the professional to guide and teach the customer about selected materials and to always remember the focus of attention should always be on the weakest link. Better boards make a better long-term presentation. Understanding the "undesirables" is only half the battle, controlling them is being a professional.

*Note:* Photos taken to illustrate the subtle orange peel and scuffing textures discussed do not showcase well enough in close-up photographs for publication. You'll have to take my word for it. Happy Turkey Day! ■

*Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, owns Designs Ink, Oxford, Connecticut, featuring commercial and retail custom framing, product consultation, design and education. Specializing in mounting, matting and design creativity she works with numerous industry leaders, and has just released her first book, The Mounting and Laminating Handbook, available everywhere, including from PFM.*

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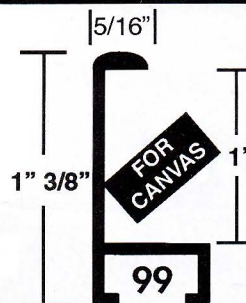
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