

Frame Design



by Jodie Prymke, CGF

Dress Up Your Mats With Decorative Papers

Picture framing is comparable to fashion in many ways. If you think of a piece of art as a man or a woman, then the framing would surely be their outfits. It can be simple and casual, like jeans and a T-shirt, or it can be elegant and formal, like an haute couture gown or suit.

Using the same analogy, mat decoration would be the accessories to the outfit. It's the small detail that brings the whole outfit together and adds a "wow" factor to complete the ensemble. Decorative paper is the silk scarf of mat decoration. The right shade and pattern can enhance a piece of art and its frame perfectly. Whether the framing is casual or formal, it is not limited to just one style. Likewise, a smaller metal leaf band is like adding jewelry. A band of 23k gold leaf adds shimmer to a matboard,

and often a mat design just isn't polished without it.

*Customizing mats
with decorative
papers can add
impact to any
artwork*

Step One: The Lines

With modern CMCs and the advent of the pen attachment, lines are very easy to make. A Gunnar CMC with the T2 pen tool was used to

create the five lines for this project, but they can be drawn by any CMC with a pen attachment. They can also be drawn by hand with the aid of a Longridge Corner Gauge. The lines are used as guides for placing the paper. They also help the design remain visually parallel and straight while allowing for slight variations in paper widths that are inevitable when cutting paper by hand.

The pen used in this example was a metallic gold Uniball Posca Marker PC-1MR 0.7mm. It is a pigment paint pen that produces a smooth, solid line of color. If a matboard is dark in color, the



The right shade and pattern of decorative paper can enhance a piece of art and its frame perfectly.

lines need to be gone over two or three times with the pen to achieve an opaque line.

The spacing for this example is as follows. From the cut line, there are five lines:

+6mm ($\frac{1}{4}$ "

+20mm ($\frac{3}{4}$ " (the 18mm decorative paper goes between these two)

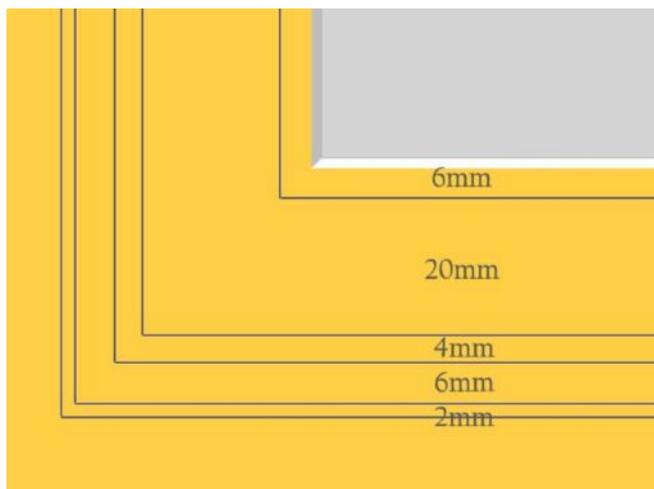
+4mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ "

+6mm ($\frac{1}{4}$ " (the 4mm gold band goes between these two)

+2mm ($\frac{1}{16}$ "

Step Two: The Decorative Paper

Handmade marbled and decorative papers are available commercially from www.papermojo.com,



This Gunnar CMC screen shot shows the positions of the ink lines.



The five gold ink lines were drawn using a CMC and a 0.7mm Posca Paint Pen.



A quilter's ruler was used as a guide when cutting the decorative paper to size.



Three examples show different decorative papers. The printed Italian paper on the right was chosen for its softness and whimsy.

www.talasonline.com, and www.hollanders.com in a wide range of colors and textures. All three companies ship worldwide. Papers range from traditional marbled paper to modern free-form, textured, and printed papers. Antique sheet music or antique newspapers are also suitable and are inexpensive to buy online or at a local secondhand bookstore.

When choosing the decorative paper for a mat design, be careful that the panel doesn't overwhelm the art. Any of the papers shown here would be appealing, but the fine, Italian printed paper was chosen for its softness and whimsy. It is also enhanced with gold ink. The $\frac{3}{4}$ " width of the panel is visually strong, so if a bold paper is preferred, try reducing the width of the panel. Experimentation is the key. Don't be concerned if a piece of paper is too short. A well-constructed join in a panel is acceptable. Either make the join a feature or hide it off-center.

The paper in the example was cut into 18mm wide panels using a very sharp X-Acto knife. A quilter's ruler in mil-

limeters was used as a guide. Use some heavy weights to hold the paper in place while you're cutting it.

Step Three: The Gold Leaf Band

The gold leaf band starts as gold leaf paper, and it's very easy to make. Start with a piece of brown Kraft paper, approximately 12"x24". Brush on acrylic quick gold size; a 1" brush was used for this example. Work quickly but evenly, ensuring that the gold size is not too thick. Paint a section of about 6"x20", but go longer if you need longer strips.

The secret with this type of gilding—making sure the gold leaf doesn't go "mushy" and dull—is to wait until the size is just tacky, about 10 to 30 minutes, depending on room temperature. Apply the sheet or offcut of metal leaf (gold, silver, bronze, or copper). Press it into place with a piece of clean, lint-free cloth or a soft dry brush. Don't rub. Let it dry overnight.

The next day, brush off the excess leaf and apply a thin layer of shellac—blond shellac if you don't want to add color. If you're using imitation gold leaf, you can use yellow shellac to give the appearance of real gold. Once that is dry, which



Adhere the decorative paper panels and gold leaf strips in place, then cut the corners diagonally.



A variation on an artwork's original mat. A single ink line, a marbled paper panel, and a second mat with a V-groove were added.

takes about an hour, you can cut the gold leaf paper into strips. In this example, the gold leaf paper was cut into 4mm wide strips. For a more conservation-quality gold leaf paper, use single-ply cotton rag barrier paper instead of Kraft paper.

Step 4: Completion

Adhere the 4mm wide gold leaf strips and the 18mm wide decorative paper panels to the matboard between the drawn lines. X-Press It double-sided tape (acid-free and solvent-free) was used to stick the paper in place. An acid-free glue stick or wheat starch paste may also be used. If you choose to use double-sided tape, make sure to burnish the paper into place with a bone folder. Cover the decorative paper with a piece of release paper and burnish the lengths but not the corners. Then, use a ruler as a guide to trim the corners diagonally and gently remove the excess paper. Finish by burnishing the corners with a bone folder.

A spacer is always necessary between the glass and decorated matboard when using leafed paper strips. Otherwise, the leafed paper can leave unsightly marks on the inside of the glass. An outer mat or spacer will suffice.

More Ideas for Decorative Papers

Decorative paper enhances old prints beautifully, and don't



A wide-format printer was used to create this rich faux tortoise shell marbled paper. It was shellacked to add gloss.

be afraid to try it on modern artwork as well. Some artwork with original white mats can be customized with handmade marbled or patterned paper. Try drawing a single ink line as a guide on the original mat by hand. The decorative paper can then be taped into place, followed by an additional outer mat with a V-groove, if chosen, as shown in the purple, blue, and white example.

For a plain tone-on-tone panel, try peeling the face paper from a different shade of matboard. Matboards with silk and fine linen can also work well, but you must make sure your cutting knife is very sharp when working with fabric, otherwise it can fray. This technique is very suitable for important documents and parchments, especially if the fine linen is red or dark blue.

If you're fortunate enough to own a large-format inkjet printer, you can easily print your own high-quality decorative papers. There are many websites like www.etsy.com, where you can buy and download high resolution images for a small fee. The rich "tortoiseshell" paper was downloaded as a high resolution image (300dpi, 12"x12"). It was printed on archival-quality paper using an Epson printer. After printing, the paper was shellacked to add gloss. Instead of cutting the corners diagonally, they were cut perpendicularly to imitate the look of genuine veneer. **PFM**

Jodie Prymke, CGF, is an international award-winning frame designer and PFGV Certified Guild Framer. Her boutique framing gallery, Jodie Prymke Fine Art Framing, in North Adelaide, South Australia, opened in March 2008. She specializes in unique frame designs, French matting, and frame restoration.