

## [ HOW - TO ]



Tuesday, September 14, 2010

### **Making A Faux Mat**

**For odd shapes or oversized prints, a mat can be very expensive. Try this technique to create a good-looking alternative.**

*By George D. Lepp With Kathryn Vincent Lepp, Photography By George D. Lepp*

*Labels:* [Printing & Processing](#), [How To](#), [Solutions](#)



A few years ago, I put together a large exhibition of work for the benefit of an environmental cause. The prints ranged in size from 16x20 to panoramas as long as eight feet. Traditional matting and framing of the exhibition would have cost many thousands of dollars. Seeking a cost-effective presentation, I devised a method to add the illusion of a single inset mat directly into each print, a technique Kathy named "the faux mat."

The faux mat technique is extremely useful when mounting very large pieces, such as very long panoramas, where traditional matting, framing and glass would be prohibitively expensive and very heavy. The inclusion of the faux mat adds a finished look to this economical presentation. For smaller framed images under glass, the illusion of the mat technique is even more effective, but you need to be sure the surface of the print doesn't touch the glass. Small spacers may be necessary.

**Here's how to create my faux mat in Photoshop.**

**First, border the image with a fine stroke:**

1. Open an optimized image in Photoshop.
2. Select Layer > New > Layer, and click OK.
3. Once the empty layer is highlighted, click on Select > All. Marching ants should border the image.
4. Select Edit > Stroke and the Stroke menu will appear. Enter the width in pixels you want to use to create a defining line around the image. I recommend one or two pixels. Right-click the Color box and select the color of the stroke from the options offered. I recommend black. Click OK in the Select Stroke Color menu.
5. In the Stroke menu under Location, select Inside. Leave Blending selections at the default (Mode: Normal; Opacity: 100%; and Preserve Transparency unchecked). Click OK.
6. Key Control D (Win) or Command D (Mac) to deselect the image and remove the ants. You've now created a stroke bordering the inside of the image.



**Create the inset faux mat in a border around the image:**

1. Decide the canvas size of your finished print. For this example, it will be 13 inches high and 19 inches wide. Make note of this objective, but don't enter it yet.
2. Size the image. Select Image > Image Size and under Document Size enter a width measurement that allows at least a 3-inch white border on each side of the image. Photoshop will enter the appropriate corresponding height that preserves the proportions of the image. In my example, I entered a width of 14 inches and Photoshop calculated a height of approximately 9.15 inches. Enter the Resolution you use with your printer. Check Scale Styles, Constrain Proportions and Resample Image. In the dropdown menu under Resample Image, choose the option appropriate to the resizing of your image. Click OK.
3. Make an empty layer by clicking on the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette, or by going to Layer > New > Layer. Give it a name and click OK.
4. Select Image > Canvas Size to bring up the Canvas Size menu. Your selected width and height should show at the top under Current Size. In the New Size menu, add 1.5 inches to the width (15.5 in our example) and height (10.65), making sure that the canvas extension color is set to White. In the Anchor box, set the image to the center, so that the border you're creating surrounds the print. Leave Relative unchecked. Click OK. Your image should now be surrounded by a 1.5-inch border.
5. Choose Select > All to bring the marching ants back to the edge of the new border. Select Edit > Stroke to bring back the Stroke menu. Enter the desired width of the mat inset in pixels; in this example, I'm using 60 pixels. Right-click the Color box to bring up the Select Stroke Color menu, and choose a complementary color for your inset faux mat directly from your image. Left-click on the color in your image, and Photoshop will find it in the Select Stroke Color box. Move the color selector in the box to a lighter tone for best effect, and click OK. In the Stroke box, select Location > Inside, Blending Mode > Normal and Opacity 100%. Uncheck Preserve Transparency. Click OK.
6. Deselect the border by clicking Control D (Win) or Command D (Mac). Press the w key to select the Magic Wand tool, then move the cursor to the band of color you've created and click within it. Ants will march on the inside and outside edges of the band of color. At the bottom of the Layers palette, click on the fx icon (add a layer style). From the drop-down menu (Blending Options), click on Inner Shadow. In the Layer Style Box/Structure, leave the Blend Mode at Multiply and the Color box black. Move the Opacity slider to 40%. Rotate the Angle to approximately 130 degrees. Leave Use Global Light checked. Move the Distance slider to select the width of the shadow you're creating; in this case, I'm using 60 pixels. Leave the Choke slider at 0%.

To soften the shadow, move the Size slider; in this example, I've used 24 pixels. The Quality controls can be left at their defaults. Click OK.

7. Deselect the border by clicking Control D (Win) or Command D (Mac). Click Image > Canvas Size and enter in New Size the width and height of the paper you're using, in this case, 19 inches wide and 13 inches high. Be sure the canvas extension color is white.

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Saturday 25 September, 2010

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Great suggestion George and very timely! I'll be displaying 20-25 of my images in local galleries, but would also like an economical way to do so. Questions: after creating the faux mat and printing the pieces, how did you ultimately display them? The lead in to the article sounds as if you didn't frame the pieces. Did you mount the prints on foam core or some other mounting and display without a frame? What type of hanger? Thanks for the article; would appreciate guidance that'll make my presentation look good without breaking the bank.

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Ed makes [this comment](#)

Tuesday 5 October, 2010

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George, I just tried this and it turned out great! I can think of a number of uses of this technique. Thank You!

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