

## Presentation Part I: Making Your Images Look Great (RMSP – Aug 2008)

Quite often I walk through a gallery or look at someone's portfolio and see superb work diminished on account of poor display. Even the best, most professional work can suffer under the weight of subpar presentation. On other occasions, I see photographs of substantially less quality seem superior to work that may be technically or artistically better because the photographer knows how to present his or her work. In other words, presentation is the variable that can make or break the end-of-the day impression.

Last month I shared how changes in presentation have substantially affected my work—not to mention the substance of my teaching. When Ansel Adams critiqued my work in the summer of 1973 during a black and white workshop in Yosemite National Park, I was the only person in our group who did not display my entire portfolio on white boards; I had used either black or grey. All photography, Ansel told us (using my work as an example of what not to do) should be displayed to museum standards; in other words, always use white boards, leave ample white space around each image, use a white window mat, and sign and frame your work in a simple and unassuming way as not to overpower the image. It is the image you want to stand out—the presentation should support, not detract from, your art.

Below are some general tips regarding mounting. Next month I will continue on this topic of presentation with signing, dating, and naming prints; choosing window mats; and, framing. Keep in mind that whichever techniques you use, be sure to purchase archival material (i.e. material that should last for more than 100 years without fading). This includes the paper and ink used for printing as well as all matting and mounting supplies. For high-quality products, I recommend Light Impressions.

### Mounting

I recommend using either Westminster 4-ply bright white or neutral white boards. For all black and white images, as well as most color photos, I use bright white. For a slightly warmer look, natural white is better. For instance, natural white is great for black-and-white sepia toned prints; it is also appropriate to use for color images that have mainly warm colors such as reds, oranges and yellows.

The size of board that you mount your print on is also a major consideration. I tend to err on the side of more white space around the photo rather than less. Generally, I follow the dimensions listed below. Again, Light Impressions sells high-quality mat board and will have all of the sizes that I recommend.

Approximate Image Size *	Matboard Size
4 X 5**	8 X 10
5 X 7	11 X 14
8 X 10 (or 8 X 12)	14 X 17 (or 14 X 18)
11 X 14	16 X 20 (or 20 X 24)
12 X 18	20 X 24
16 X 20	22 X 28
* the size of the actual image, not the paper it is printed on ** all dimensions are in inches.	

Next, I consider the method of adhering an image to the board. This is a critical consideration as you prepare your work for display. Below are the most common ways that professionals adhere prints. In most cases, you will need to augment this introductory information through either online research or by enrolling in a continuing education class in order to master the process.

1. Dry Mounting. This has always been the most traditional method used by black and white photographers—Ansel Adams used this method for all of his mounting. Dry mounting permanently mounts an image on a board. There are two methods of dry mounting.

a. Heat Activated Dry Mounting uses an archival, temperature activated, adhesive tissue and a heated press. A print's white edges are trimmed off, along with any extra mount tissue, so that the two sizes are exactly the same. You will then need to use a dry mount press to adhere the print. You should be fine using any fiber based or resin coated black and white paper, as they were made for this type of mounting. With new digital papers, however, only certain kinds can be used for this method without ruining the image, so be sure to consult your supplier.

b. Cold Mounting. This is a newer method developed for most digital papers. In many ways, this method is like heat activated dry mounting except that heat isn't used to fix the image. Instead the mounting tissue has an adhesive that is not heat activated. You position the image on the tissue or adhesive paper and then use a brayer or hard rubber roller to eliminate air bubbles and wrinkles. Crescent makes an easy-to-use, archival, tissue called Perfect Mount, which does not require an expensive dry mount press like previous method.

2. Corners. This method can be used if your image is smaller than the paper used for printing; for instance, when printing a 12" X 18" image on a 13" X 19" piece of paper. This means that a 1/2" white space surrounds the image. It would be important not to trim the white edges so that they remain covered by the window mat (more information on this next month). Place the corners (which should be archival) on the mount board so that all four corners of the print can be inserted. A big advantage to using corners is the transferability—with same-sized prints, you can swap photos whenever the mood strikes.

3. Hinging. Like with corners, this method also requires that the paper size you use is larger than your image, which ensures that the hinging will be hidden by the window mat. The tape used for hinging is an archival linen tape sold by Light Impressions. In this method, your print is attached with archival tape, hinged, to the top of the mat board.

### **Placement on the Board.**

The placement of the print on the matboard is extremely important. The most common, acceptable placement is to have the exact same amount of white space on either side of the print. The amount of white space below and above the print differs; there should be between 1/8" and 1/2" more white space below the print. There are two reasons for this difference: first, if the print is exactly center, it actually looks lower on the board; second, we sign our name beneath the print on the mount board (methods 1 & 2) or paper (methods 3 & 4), and we want to leave enough space so that the signature doesn't crowd the image.

### **Presentation Part II: Making Your Images Look Great (RMSP – Oct 2008)**

More often than not, less is more when presenting your images. In the last newsletter I wrote about positioning and adhering images to a mount board, as well as the mounting parameters that most professionals follow. This month I will continue with the topic of presentation by covering framing, including how and where to sign a print; window mats; frame glass and material; and frame backing. For all these aspects of presentation, I employ museum standards methods. While there are many other creative methods out there, some of which are decidedly more contemporary, I favor the simple and clean techniques that I learned more than 30 years ago from Ansel Adams—the very same techniques that I teach to my students year after year.

**Window Mat.** The window mat is what really makes your print stand out—for better or worse, depending upon how you manage it. The window mat should be made of the same type of board on which you mount your image and should have a rectangular or square cut-out a little larger than the size of your

image. These “windows” are cut out using a 45 degree bevel edge, which many photographers do themselves. I prefer spending any extra time I have in the field shooting, so I don’t mind paying a professional to do the job. In fact, shortly after moving to Missoula, I found [L.A. Design](#) (337 East Broadway Ave.). If you live locally I recommend them— they have handled all of my (and many of my students’) framing needs. In most frame shops you will need to tell them exactly how you want your image framed; be very specific to ensure a high-quality, professional-looking product.

**Dimensions.** Part of ensuring this high-quality look is knowing what dimensions to ask for. The dimensions that I learned from Ansel Adams are as follows: the white space on the sides and top between the edge of the window mat and the image should be between ¼” and 3/8”; the bottom where we sign our image should have a little more space, between 3/8” and ½”.

If you plan on showing your image unframed, it’s a good idea to place it in an archival clear plastic sleeve to protect your work. [Light Impressions](#) sells sleeves of various sizes that correspond to board sizes.

**Signing the Print.** Once the print is adhered to the board, it is time to sign the image. Although the exact location varies depending on your mounting technique, the most common place to sign your image is directly below the image in the lower right-hand corner. In dry or cold method (method 1 & 2 from previous article), the photographer signs directly on the mount board itself, most likely in pencil or with a fine-tipped, archival ink pen. Of course, it is important to do this before putting the window mat over the image. In cornering and hinging (methods 3 & 4 from previous article), one signs on the white space surrounding the image on the window mat itself, with a fine black ink pen, as pencil may be too faint.

As I emphasized last time, the goal of any presentation technique is to emphasize the image, not the presentation—and in this case, you want people to notice the work, not the signature. I have seen photographers sign their work with bright colors in thick-tipped pens, which in my opinion detracts from the image. If your piece is seen and enjoyed, viewers can and will notice the signature on their own without the help of bold colors and over-sized lettering.

*Other Helpful Hints:* If you title your image, center the title directly beneath the print. If you date the image, I suggest doing so under the print in the lower left-hand corner. The same conventions hold for numbering a limited edition print or series of prints within a portfolio: the limited edition or portfolio number would be in the lower left instead of the date.

**The Frame.** The frame you choose should be clean and simple. Two good choices are black chrome or wood frames. Some chrome frames scratch easily, so be sure to look for scratch resistant varieties. A good brand is [Nielsen](#). A nice wood frame is typically natural or painted black. Again, stray away from ornate colors, designs and materials.

**Framing Glass.** With glass, there are three common choices. The first is regular window glass, which is very inexpensive and works pretty well; it has been a go-to for decades. A second choice, which is not much more expensive, is conservation glass. Conservation glass has UV protection and is probably the most popular choice for professional photographers who display their work—I’ve used it for years. I recommend [Tru Vue](#). The extra cost is worth the price unless what you are framing (such as an inexpensive poster) is worth less than the extra price of the glass. A 16 X 20 piece of conservation glass runs around \$10 more than the same size of window glass.

The third choice is museum glass, which you can also buy through [Tru Vue](#). This option is much more expensive and not worth the extra cost unless you are framing very expensive prints. (A 16 X 20 piece of museum glass runs around \$56). Many times a frame shop will talk about glass that has an anti-reflective coating in order to remove glare. To most photographers, however, this is not a good choice because it can substantially soften the image.

**Backing.** The backing in the frame holds the print in place against the glass and should be made of something similar to acid-free foam core. Years ago, before I knew better, I had an Ansel Adams original print framed (*from a framer who also didn't know better*) using corrugated cardboard for the backing (*definitely not archival*). After about 10 years, I noticed that thousands of little brown spots had come through the mount board, which, in turn, effectively ruined a \$20,000 print. I sent it off to a company that minimizes issues of this kind, and after paying a small fortune got the print back—and though it is better, it is officially “damaged” and not worth nearly as much as it would be if I had used archival material. You could say that my archival-allegiance was learned the hard way.

**Hardware.** Finally, you want to make sure that the hardware used to mount the print is very secure. Last year I had an expensive print fall to the floor due to faulty hardware, and a piece of glass scratched the emulsion of the print. Since then, I have had the hardware on all of our frames replaced. This should not be an issue with chrome frames or high-quality wood frames. Thin wood, however, can be problem. I now require four screws on each side of the frame where the hanging wire connects.

I hope the preceding tips on presentation have been helpful. Of course, there is much more to say about the topic, but what I have shared is a great start. By following these simple parameters, you are bound to display your work in a clean, clear and professional manner.

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