

Framing Your Photos: Part 1 – Gary Leete

Fancy making your own frames for your favourite bird images? Framing specialist and fellow Birdlife member Gary Leete explains how.

Introduction

Imagine being able to frame all your own photographs just as well as a professional. You can! And you can save enough money to easily pay for all the necessary tools. Add the pleasure of being able to do it yourself and not having to get someone else do it.

To get started, a mount cutter, a frame clamp and a hand-operated frame joining tool is all the equipment you need to make professional looking frames. These tools are easy and safe to operate, inexpensive, and give you a good result.

Picture framing can be logically divided into five steps:

1. Mat Cutting
2. Frame Cutting
3. Frame Clamping
4. Frame Joining
5. Frame Finishing

The tools required to perform each one of these functions are as follows:

1. **Mat Cutting:** A hand-operated bevel mat cutter is essential for all photographic work. The most important feature of modern mat cutters is to have one that runs on its own ruler or straight edge.
2. **Frame Cutting:** The professional framer uses a guillotine to cut wooden frames. This is cost prohibitive for the small volumes. However, there are tools that give you a professional result at a fraction of the cost, or you can have the moulding mitre cut to length for a small fee.
3. **Frame Clamping:** To ensure a tight and stable joint, use a good quality clamp and glue should be applied, especially if the frame is large. While it is possible to buy clamps that join one corner at a time, it's better to clamp all four corners at once. This enables you to see how the corners match up before gluing and securing the mitres.
4. **Frame Joining:** The professional framer uses an automatic V-nail joiner. The "PushMaster" is a DIY version of these machines and is suitable for low-volume high-quality framing such as required for photography or portrait framing.
5. **Frame Finishing:** After choosing one of several ways to mount your artwork you are ready to finish the frame. To finish the frame there are a number of hand-operated tools on the market to make this job quick and easy.

This article is only covering the first step of the process in mounting your image: cutting a mat to suit the image and attaching the photo to the mat.

Mat Cutting

To exhibit our favourite bird images we must have a mat surrounding the image, and mat cutting is the creative face to picture framing. What distinguishes one framed photograph from another is the creative use of mats. There is a wide choice of mat board brands and colours, possibly too many! Supplies are easy to come by, and the cost of the board is not prohibitive. The best thing about cutting your own mats is that once you cut it you get to keep the fallout from the middle, which can then become a mat for a smaller photograph. This saves money, helping to legitimise the purchase a mat cutting system.

Most hand-operated mat cutters available in art shops come with the cutting head only and not with a guide rule. For successful bevel cutting and good clean corners a guide rule that the cutting head runs upon is essential. The FrameCo systems do this and are ideal for the DIY framer.

The best system for home use is a 81cm rule and the #201 Bevel cutter. The 81 cm rule is perfect for cutting the large sheets of mat board down to size as they are also 81cm wide. This is called model #810 and includes the bevel cutter, rule and spare blades.



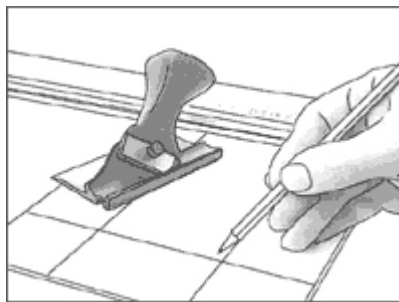
For those producing larger quantities of mats, you can also get mat cutters which come attached to a base board. The base board makes the system steadier, easier to use and quicker to get results. However, if you want to cut only a few mats per year, the basic head and ruler systems are quite sufficient.

Base board cutters come in several sizes but the best models for our use are either the #860B, which takes a complete half sheet of mat board, or the #1060B which will take a full sheet of mat board. A full sheet cutter is essential if you are matting sizes above 400x500mm (20x16") or panorama images.

Another consideration is the sizing or cutting down of full size sheets. Large professional mat cutters can take the full size sheet, but a sharp Stanley knife and straight edge can cut down full size sheets to size ready for bevel cutting. A straight 90 degree cutter is available from FrameCo, which attaches to the rule. This can be used for cutting mat board or foam core board up to 5mm thick. It uses the same blade as the bevel cutter.

Cutting a Single Bevel Mat

The technique for cutting bevelled mats is quick and easy. Firstly we have to work out the size of the border: ie. the size of the mat surround. There is a rule in framing that says: *"the wider the border you more you see the image"*. That means small border widths distract from the image. So what is the best width to use? Usually 60mm is ideal on all photographic sizes from 8x10" up to 20x60". After that you can make the border even wider. The border size has to be added to the image size to determine what size blank mat board to cut. A 60mm border will need 120mm to be added to the image size. Measure up the size of the blank you need and cut the mat board down to the right size. This is also the frame size and the glass size for future framing.



On the back of the mat board blank rule lines 60mm from the outer edge of the mat board. This will give you all the lines of where to cut for the border size that you require. The bevel cutter head then attaches to the rule, so it's steady when cutting. Following the ruled lines on the back of the mat makes it easy to get good straight bevels, but to get clean crisp corners you need to know where to start and stop the cut. The FrameCo bevel cutting head has a start/stop indicator and a retractable blade. It can sound confusing, but it's not once you get the hang of it! The most important aspect of mat cutting is - ***with the right tools you can get a professional result easily.***

Once you've mastered cutting single and double mats you can also add decorative finishes to the mats; this can enhance the image and add interest to your mat work. But before we go any further, let's now look at mounting your image so that it is ready to take the mat you have just cut.

Hinging & Mounting Your Photographs

To preserve your photograph it should be mounted onto acid-free materials. The recommended backing board is Fome-Cor as it is acid free and will not damage your images.

There are several different ways to mount your images, and hinge mounting is the best and most popular method. Hinge mounting means the photo is suspended to the back of the mat with acid-free hinging tape. Never use masking or cellophane tape as they will stain and

damage the photo paper. The hinge is made in the form of a "T" - the tape is placed in such a way that half the length is adhered to the back of the photo and the other half is adhered to the back of the mat. Then a small additional piece is applied across the top of the hinge piece making a "T" shape. This will reinforce the tape hinge.

The tape is never applied across the bottom or down the sides of the image. Hinging is only done from the top allowing the image to hang from the top of the mat. This method of mounting is easy and safe for the DIY framer. If tape is applied all the way around the edges of the image then it cannot expand or move and buckling may occur. Once the image is hinged to the back of the mat the combination is placed onto a Fome-Cor backing and held in place with double sided tape.

Permanent mounting or gluing down of photographs involves mounting them onto a firm substrate such as Fome-Cor using acid free glue or using self-adhesive Fome-Cor. Permanent mounting will produce a perfectly flat finish. If using the self-adhesive Fome-Cor then hinging is not necessary. The mat is then placed over the image mounted to the Fome-Cor and held in place with double sided tape. The materials needed for this process are acid-free hinging tape, double sided tape and Fome-Cor.

Mat Board Decoration - V-Groove

A double mat can enhance the image by increased contrast and guiding your eye to the image. Another technique for is the V-Groove. One of the most important techniques in decorative mat cutting is the "V" groove. This is a small V-shaped cut set into the front surface of the mat. The V-groove adds a stylish look to all your framing. It is that creative touch that gives any picture a professional finish. The professional framing industry uses existing large mount cutters to cut V-grooves. It is a two stage process because it involves cutting two separate bevel cuts to make the V-groove.

FrameCo has a neat small hand tool which cuts these V-grooves easily and quickly and attaches to the same rule that you use for the bevel cutting. The tool is called the GrooveMaster.



*An experienced picture framer, Gary Leete is the owner of Melbourne based company, **FrameCo**. The company has designed and manufactured all the DIY tools for the home-based picture framer, and exports world wide. They conduct framing courses all over Australia, and can be contacted on 03 9873 1685; or go to their web site: www.clubframeco.com.*