

A French Matting Connection

By Jim Hynes and Alexis Orlacchio

The French Matting Community is bringing framers together from around the globe to advance the art of mat design

In August 2013 Jodie Prymke, CGF, owner of Jodie Prymke Fine Art Picture Framing in North Adelaide, Australia, created the French Matting Community (FMC) Facebook group as an online forum where framers could post photos and share their design work with other custom framing retailers. In the past year and a half, the community has taken off, growing to nearly 300 members worldwide and has become a way for framers to share their inspirations as well as traditional and contemporary French matting techniques.

Many members of the community are independent business owners, and social media has proven to be a successful tool in bringing them together. Linda Wassell, MCPF, owner of Fine Art Services in Spring, TX, and a coordinator for the group, says that the FMC's biggest achievement has been starting a dialogue among practitioners of this mat decoration style. "This site has introduced us to one another and allowed us to share our different styles," she says. "As a group, we have discovered the different tools, techniques, and products that are available."

Another benefit of the group is the ease with which members can share information. "A short time ago, one member asked what everyone used for making hand-drawn gold ink lines," says Wassell. "There were several

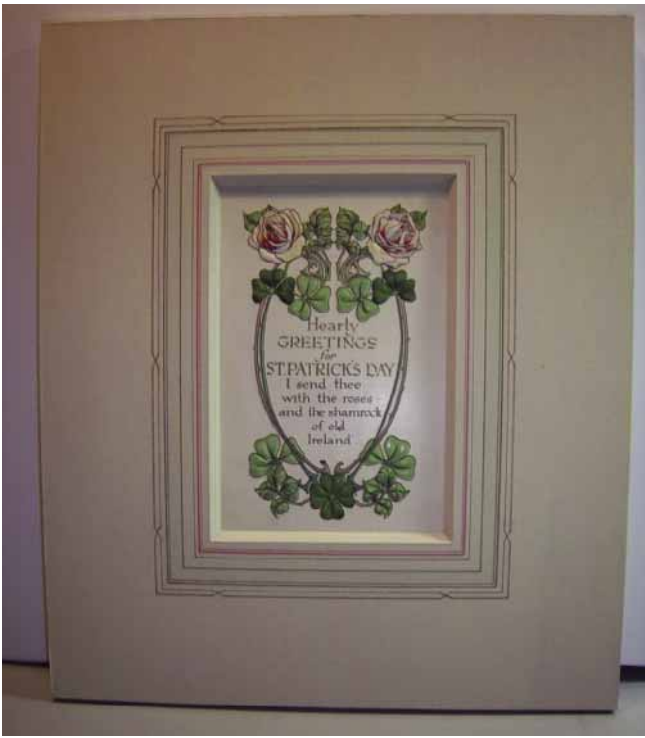


A hand-colored antique fish print is surrounded by fine pigment ink lines in metallic gold, an 18mm band of Italian marbled paper, and a 4mm band of hand-made gold leaf paper. Designed by Jodie Prymke of Jodie Prymke Fine Art Framing, North Adelaide, Australia.



responses that included making custom ink blends to links to catalog sources. There have also been similar threads about sources for marbled and hand-made papers as well as ruling pens."

Edith Antil, CPF, owner of Art, Etc. in Cleveland,



This vintage postcard, circa 1917, was matted with an 8-ply preservation grade matting with a series of lines and washed panel created with India inks. All work was done by hand with a ruling pen by Linda Wassell, MCPF, Fine Art Services, Spring TX.

OH, says, “With this group, you find an opportunity for creativity and uniqueness that you don’t see at the big box stores. You get to do something very custom and unique.”

Today, Antil and Wassell assist Prymke as site administrators along with help from Mira Bishop of Oliver Brothers in Beverly, MA, and Dave Wetterstroem of FrameMakers in Powell, OH. So far, roughly 80 percent of members are in the US, with the biggest block of other framers coming from Australia.

The FMC includes framers whose involvement in French matting range from those who use it on a regular basis in their design work to those who are exploring the design style for the first time. The idea is to help everyone advance their skills. As Russ Wood, owner of Grey Owl Framing in Lakewood, CO, says, “Even understanding just a few of the techniques we explore in the group can help differentiate framers from their competition.”

The FMC group is open to framers interested in learning both the traditional and hybrid approaches to French matting. One ongoing discussion among group members covers the pros and cons of both techniques. Wassell says, “Many of the participants only use traditional line work, made by ruling pens and watercolor washes. Others use their CMCs for creating lines and for incorporating other matting techniques such as marbled papers



A Fuertes litho from 1918, framed by Russ Wood, owner of Grey Owl Framing, Lakewood, CO, features a pastel panel with two ink lines.



A drug store color photo in a Guerni inlaid frame incorporates two wash panels into a traditional mat treatment with a more “contemporary” expression, designed by Edith Antil, CPF, owner of Art, Etc. in Cleveland, OH.

or panels. It makes for a unique blend that is necessary to keep the art form alive and vital in the twenty-first century.”

A sampling of the designs being created by the group ranges from simple line and washed panel treatments of traditional French mats to those that incorporate more complex looks, with marbled paper panels,

pastel panels, gold ink lines, and gold leaf paper panels, sometimes combined with open grooves and textured mats. Other designs feature more complex line work done with CMCs, sometimes blended with traditional washes. The object is to explore design creativity that incorporates French matting techniques rather than focusing purely on traditional methods.



A watercolor mat design incorporates six pigment ink lines in sepia, a 4mm band of Alphamat Artcare Celadon face-paper (peeled from the board) and a 12mm band of Bainbridge Tatami Silk Kyoto Pearl face-paper, peeled from the board. Designed by Jodie Prymke.

“The French Matting Community offers a great visual resource for sharing examples and for asking questions,” says Wood. “If you don’t like the results of what you’re getting, simply post a picture of your project and you’ll quickly get feedback with ideas you can use to make it better.”

He adds that the group also shares decorative ideas that start with French matting but lead into other mat design ideas. “Normally, you think of French matting in terms of the traditional soft shades and muted colors,” he says, “but today we are creating designs with bolder colors and dark pastels.”

Antil says she hopes the group will inspire more framers to try French matting. “Anyone who has never done French matting before can come to the site and learn enough to be able to do it,” she says. “Better yet, they can contact the designer of a piece they see on the site to find out more about how it was made.”

The different styles and design concepts covered by the group also include a few threads featuring related frame design topics such as gilding, eglomise, and using architectural elements in frame design. For more information about the group, visit www.facebook.com/groups/FrenchMatting. ■