



From Photos, To Canvas, To Cash

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

If you already maintain a heat mounting system, expanding into the use of laminates is a natural progression for realizing more profit potential from your equipment. Not only will this enable you to provide additional services to your customers, but it also creates a market previously untapped.

Laminating is the process of applying a protective plastic film to the surface of paper art or to a photograph using a heat mounting system. "A Clear View of Glazing" (PFM January 1991) correctly refers to film laminates as non-reversible alternatives to glass, but there are many additional reasons these films are used by framers.

As a glass substitute, film is washable, durable, non-breakable, lightweight, permanent, won't finger print, and often has UV protective properties. They come in matte, luster, canvas and linen textures and, as illustrated in this article, may be used by innovative framers to increase profits and expand their framing creativity. Engineers, architects, preschools, hospitals, city/county/state agencies, as well as assorted federal agencies are often searching for alternative ways to mount and protect items they use for oral presentations, short-term viewings or other temporary needs.

Consider for a moment the concept of paying off a major equipment purchase. Obviously, the quicker a piece of equipment that you've invested in has paid for itself, the quicker additional profits will end up in your pocket. Assume for a moment you are charging ten dollars to mount a particular poster. After laminating

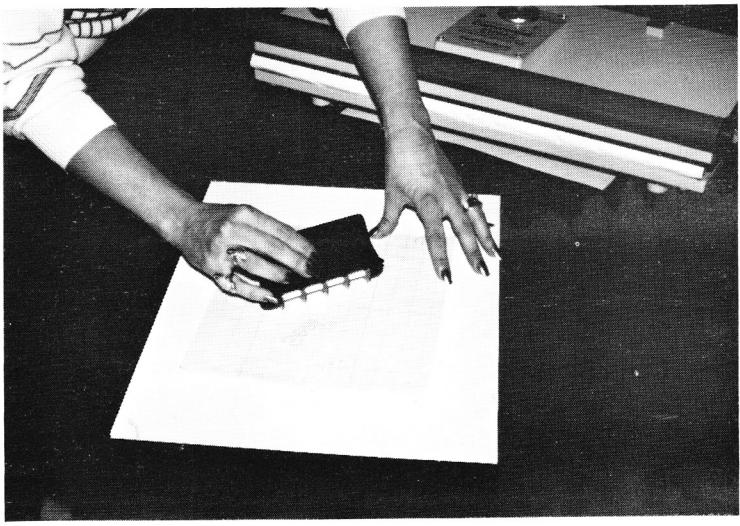
1. The basic materials required for transferring an RC photograph to canvas (as used in this demonstration) are fairly minimal: a heat mount system, self-adhesived fabric, matte or luster finish, blue foam overlay, a perforator and the resin coated photo.



2. Always pre-dry all paper and substrate materials except when they are pre-adhesived. Place the substrate and photo in an envelope of kraft paper, then into a pre-heated press for 10-15 seconds.



3. Perforating the laminate prior to heat bonding is necessary when applying it over any plastic, such as an RC photograph. The tiny air holes allow the air to be compressed from between the materials during the heat application, yet they will seal up just prior to final bonding in the press.





the same item it is generally suggested you charge an additional ten dollars (or the equivalent of the mounting charge) for the laminating process. A number of factors come into play at this point.

Technically, it is possible to mount and laminate the poster at the same time, thus saving you the time and use of equipment for a second mounting. Since the basic materials of adhesive, substrate and overhead have been calculated into the basic mounting price by doubling the mounting charge when laminating (whether you use a basic, United Inch price, suggested dealer price chart or national pricing schedule), only the cost of the film must then be added prior to realizing your profit.

Simple mathematics will illustrate the time and cost effectiveness of adding lamination to your repertoire of services. By using the "doubling format" of pricing lamination there is plenty of room left for discounting or subcontracting if that is your desire. If you decide to venture into the more creative aspects of laminating films by incorporating them into mat design, faux glass etching, and transferring photos onto canvas, there is even more potential for increased profits and added customer services.

The basics of laminating a mounted photograph must be covered briefly in order to establish the process differences between paper art lamination and plastic photo emulsion lamination. In the hands-on portion of this article we will be transferring a pre-laminated photograph onto a self-adhesive canvas, in preparation for later stretching and framing (photo 1).

Before laminating a photo, pre-dry the substrate and photograph (as always) for 10-15 seconds in an envelope of kraft paper (photo 2), mount the photo with an appropriate, breathable, permanent-dry mount tissue designed for use with a non-breathable photo. Keep in mind that any glassine or dry mount core tissue that does not breathe generally will not allow any trapped air to escape from between the photo and tissue core, and air bubbles may result.

Since both the RC (resin coated) photograph and the laminate are plastics, the laminate must be per-

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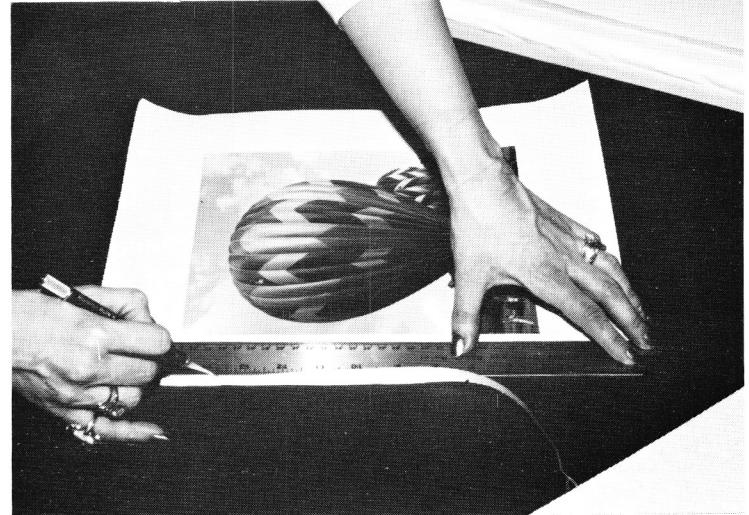
4. Place the substrate (foam board) with the photo already mounted to it, the perforated laminate positioned on top of the photo, and blue foam overlay on top of the laminate into an envelope of release paper. Overlay foam must be used to ensure even pressure and good adhesion.



5. Sandwich the RC photo between the clear perforated laminate and its back release paper. Bond 10-15 minutes turning the temperature from 180°F to 225°F. Be sure to use an oversized piece of laminate and trim it down later to accommodate the desired pre-cut canvas. The laminated photo and canvas should be the same dimensions, and 1½" to 2" should be allowed beyond the edge of the photo for later stretching onto bars.



6. Upon completion of bonding the laminate, and prior to stripping the emulsion from the photo, trim the excess laminate to match the dimensions of the canvas. By sandwiching and mounting the photo onto an oversized piece of laminate you eliminate the need to center the photo exactly, saving a great deal of time by simply trimming after bonding. The entire piece of canvas must be covered by the laminate or the adhesive on the canvas will adhere to and destroy the foam overlay.





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rated to allow the air to be compressed between the layers prior to permanent fusion of the laminate to the photo (photo 3).

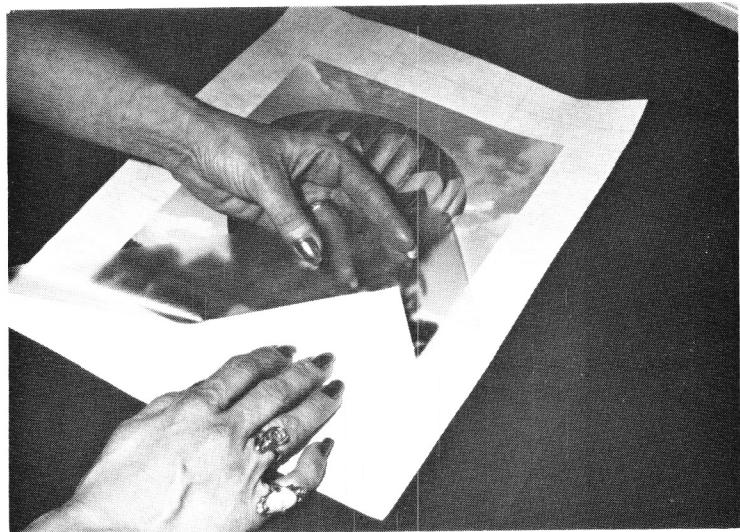
Using a special metal perforating tool, allow the weight of the tool (with just a minor amount of pressure) to roll across the surface of the laminate so that tiny holes are created approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ " apart. Always perforate the laminate on the film side, otherwise the removable paper backing of the laminate may be forced into the puncture holes, leaving white paper residue within the completed photo. Also be certain to perforate on a pliable surface such as a self-healing mat, foam board or mat board. A surface that's too hard will not allow the perforator's teeth to penetrate the laminate enough to create adequate holes for the air to escape before they seal up in the press.

Although 215-225°F is the standard temperature setting required for laminating paper art work, the press should begin at a temperature of 180°F for photographs. Place into the press a package of substrate with photo, applied laminate (with backing paper removed), and sponge foam overlay, in an envelope of release paper. Clamp it closed and immediately turn the temperature up to 225°F. As the press temperature slowly climbs to the desired laminating temperature of 225°F, the air has adequate time to be compressed from between the plastics, and the tiny perforations can melt back together. Although it may take from 10-15 minutes to reach the laminating temperature, once the press reaches the 225°F temperature it will actually only take 3-5 minutes for the laminate to bond to the photo (photo 4).

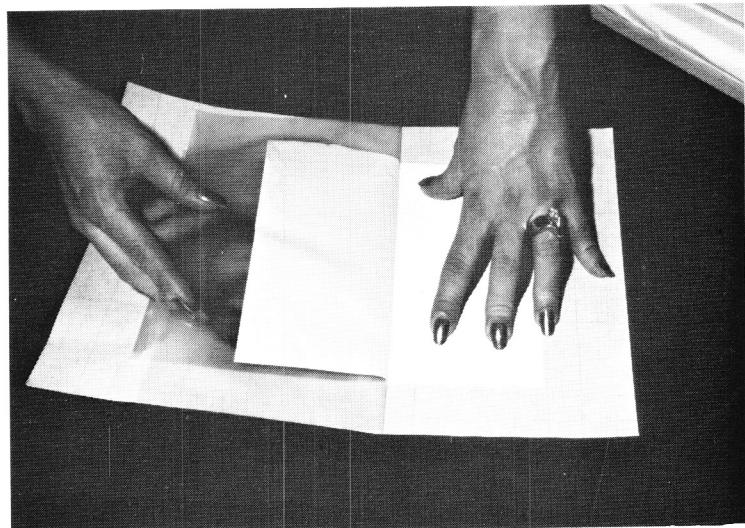
The basic laminating theory for transferring a photo to canvas remains the same as previously described, however the laminate is perforated and bonded to the photo before it is mounted. Sandwich the RC photo between the perforated laminate and its paper backing (photo 5).

Layer the sponge foam on top, place it between release paper sheets

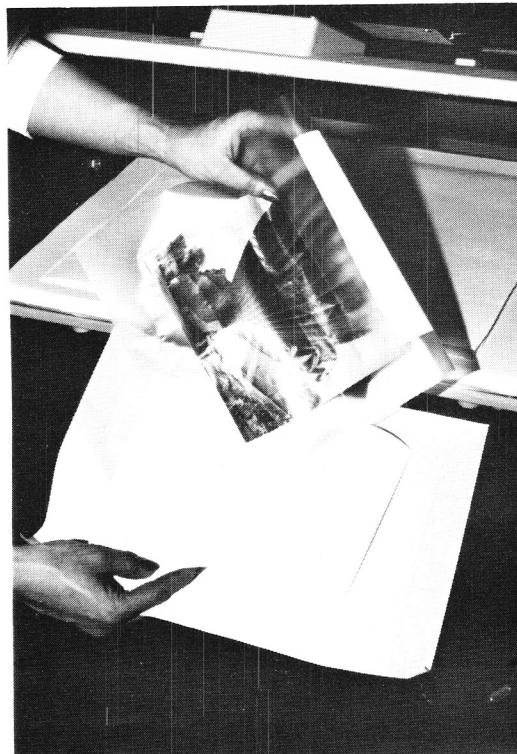
7. Carefully holding the backing paper and RC photo paper down, begin peeling the laminate with bonded photo from the remaining RC paper from one corner. You will quickly see that the thin photo emulsion which is being peeled from the backing resembles a decal.



8. Strip the emulsion from the RC paper by turning the top emulsion in a tight hairpin turn against itself. Pull slowly and evenly. Assistance may be needed for larger photos. Excess amounts of paper remaining on the back of the emulsion may reduce the amount of texture achieved after transfer. Take it slowly and smoothly.



9. The stripped emulsion resembles a decal and will feel rather limp (although it is quite durable). The remaining RC photo paper and laminate backing may now be discarded.



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and close the press. Remember to begin with the press at a temperature of 180°F, turning it up to 225°F upon closing the press. Then be patient for 8-15 minutes. Check your press temperatures by watching the thermometer if you are using a machine equipped with one, or by waiting until the indicator light goes off on other types of presses. Once you are certain the temperature has reached the required 225°F, you need only leave the photo under pressure an additional 3-5 minutes.

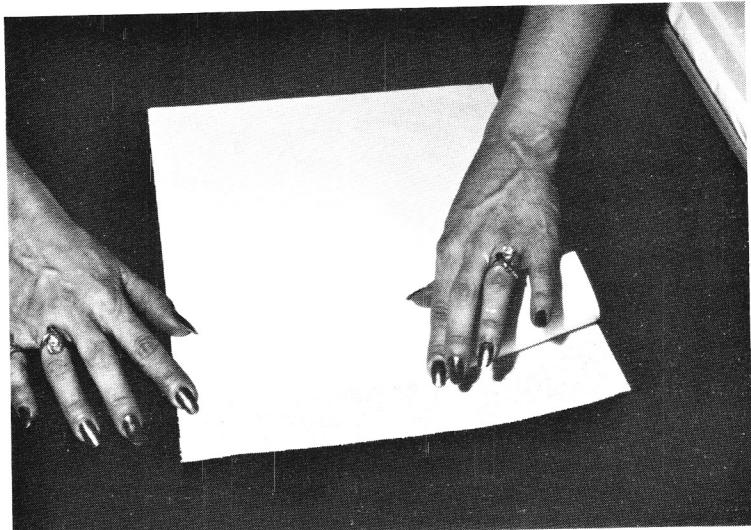
If you intend to use this process of laminating photos, it would be wise to time the entire process and make a note of it for future reference. Then you will only have to set a timer for the entire process without having to monitor each lamination. Remember that "time is money" and watching the entire process each time disallows effective completion of other projects while your press works for you.

In terms of finishes, only matte or luster should be used for this transfer process since the texture of the canvas will be picked up through the photo emulsion upon final mounting. Using pre-textured canvas laminate competes with the natural canvas texture rather than enhancing it and it is visually very ineffective. In this demonstration, Seal Print Guard-UV Matte is being used for a non-reflective finish.

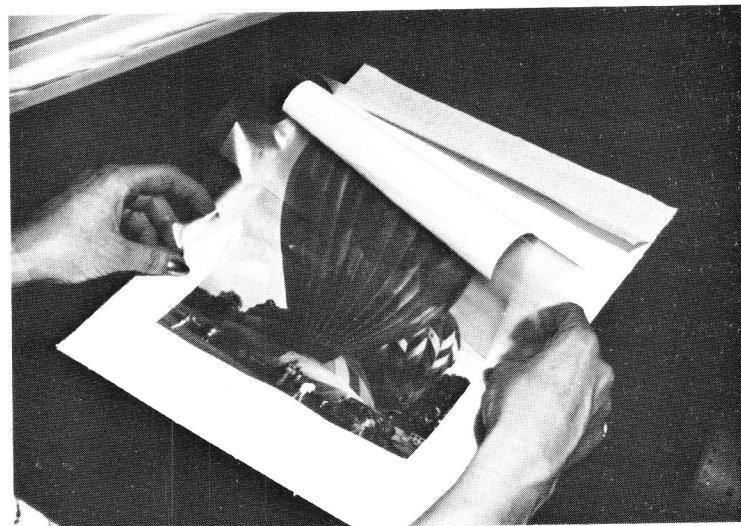
The laminate should be sized large enough to completely cover the mounting piece of adhesive-backed canvas otherwise, when the sponge foam is layered over the surface for final mounting, it will adhere to the exposed adhesive. You must leave adequate material to stretch the canvas onto stretcher bars—1½" to 2" beyond the edges of the photo should be sufficient. Thus, if working with an 8x10 photo, bond it to an oversized piece of laminate and trim it down to allow an adequate border on all sides prior to canvas mounting (photo 6).

After the laminate has been bonded to the photo, the final mounting step may be completed. Cut the adhesive-backed canvas to the matching dimensions of the laminated photo (i.e. pre-sized 11x14 used here) and have it ready prior to removing

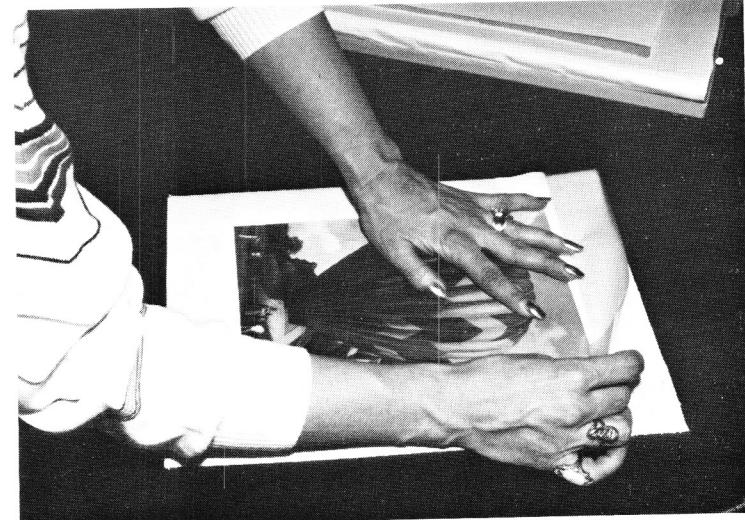
10. Face down on a smooth surface, fold the top 1"-2" of the backing paper onto the adhesive-backed canvas and crease it down exposing the sticky adhesive.



11A. For positioning purposes, line up the laminate/emulsion from the bottom of the canvas with the backing paper still in place. Slide your hand to the exposed adhesive from the bottom up, making certain the placement is correct.



11B. Upon reaching the exposed adhesive, stick the two pieces together. They are not repositionable once tacked in place. Trim off any exposed adhesive prior to setting into the press, since the foam overlay will stick to the adhesive.





the photo from the press. Upon removing the photo with laminate from the press, lay it face up on a hard surface (such as a glass covered work table). As you peel the laminate from its backing paper (using an X-acto knife, razor blade or finger nail), separate the top layer of photo emulsion from the RC paper (photo 7) and begin to peel it against itself in a sharp, hairpin turn (photo 8).

Once you have begun to peel, continue at a smooth, steady speed and pull as evenly as possible, holding the remaining RC paper and backing paper firmly with your free hand. You may need assistance with large photos to keep the tension smooth and constant. Be extremely careful to separate the very top layer of emulsion only, because any paper left on the emulsion will reduce the amount of overall texture achieved. The stripped photo emulsion should be extremely thin and look a lot like a decal (photo 9).

Once the photo emulsion has been stripped from its RC paper backing, prepare the canvas by folding back the top one to two inches of the release backing paper to expose the adhesive (photo 10). Line up the photo laminate from the bottom to ensure proper alignment, since once the two adhesives come in contact with each other they are securely stuck. Slide your hand up from the bottom to the top and carefully smooth down the laminate onto the exposed canvas adhesive (photo 11A-11B).

Carefully lift the lower, unattached photo/laminate, remove the remaining protective release paper from the canvas, and smooth the laminate in place (photo 12). Insert the canvas/photo/laminate unit, complete with sponge foam on top, into a release paper envelope and place in a dry mount press at 180-225°F (properly adjusted to accommodate thinner materials) and set the laminate to the canvas for 3-5 minutes (photo 13). Upon completion of the above steps, the newly transferred photo may be stretched and framed as desired (photo 14).

These canvas transferred RC photographs are designed to resemble oil portraits or paintings. By pressing the texture of the adhesive-backed can-

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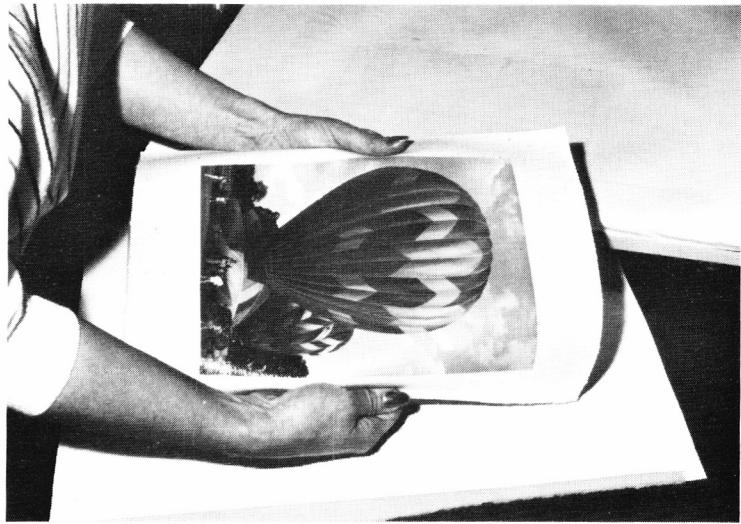
12. Once the top laminate is tacked to the adhesive-backed fabric, remove the paper backing on the canvas by peeling it out from under the laminate. Slide your hand along the face of the laminate/emulsion as you remove the backing to avoid excessive trapped air bubbles.



13. Place the laminate/emulsion/canvas unit into the press, beneath the foam overlay, within a release paper envelope. Close press and heat 3-5 minutes at 225°F.



14. The completed transfer is now ready for mounting onto stretcher bars.



MOUNTING



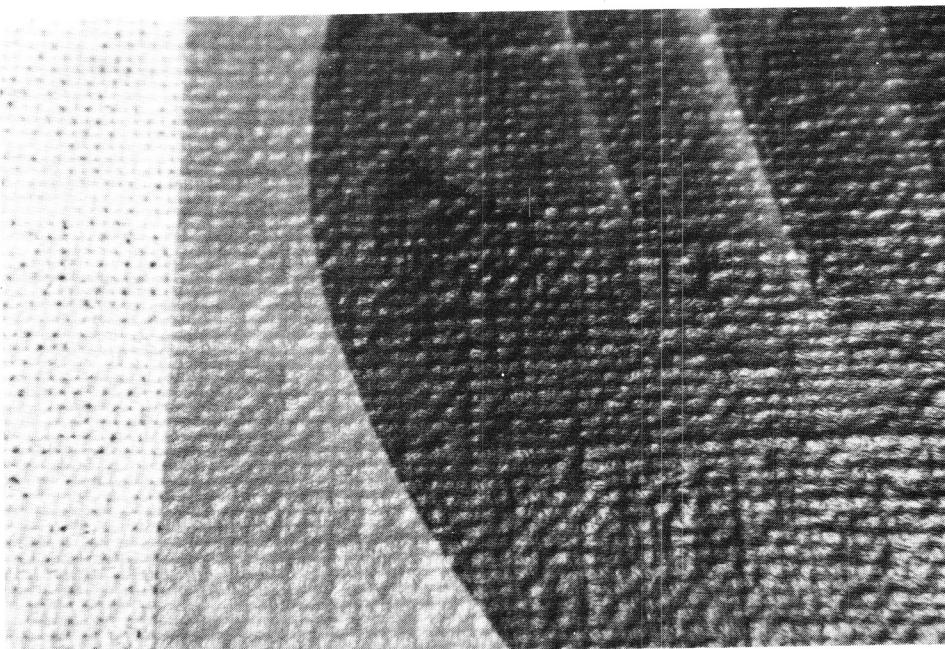
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vas through the emulsion you can achieve the look and feel of authentic canvas art (photo 15). A similar process is readily used within the photographic industry and should cost about \$50 for an 8x10 photo to be transferred to canvas.

This service can yield extremely high profits for framers since the complete process, including basic materials, costs approximately \$5. Even after adding necessary labor costs, there remains a sizeable profit margin plus increased use of the equipment in which you've invested.

PFM

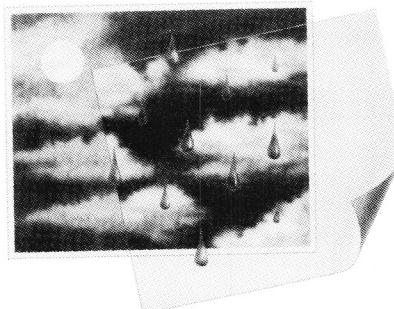
Chris A. Paschke, CPF is owner of Designs Ink in Orange, Connecticut, specializing in commercial framing, calligraphic design, consultation and education. A professional framer and designer for over 16 years, Ms. Paschke has been an active supporter of PPFA and currently teaches workshops and seminars, demonstrates, and lectures on various "mounting and matting techniques" at numerous industry events and open houses around the country.



15. Close-ups of the transferred photo illustrate the textural differences achieved in a photograph once it has been heat bonded to adhesive-backed fabric. Although it will always remain mounted to a foam or board substrate, it will never quite achieve the same deep canvas look, feel and overall impact. The only thing more effective is an actual oil painting.

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