

Mat Selection by Rea McDonald

There are three ways to add color to a matted print - 1) a single colored mat, 2) print a colored border around the photo through Photoshop or other image editing software and add an outer mat, or 3) use a double mat. Printing a colored border around your photo will be another talk at a later time. Today we are going to address using two mats of different colors.

There are many approaches to matting prints. Many galleries and juried competitions require all prints be matted with either white, cream or black mats.

Why mat a print? The mat helps funnel the viewer's eye inward and should complement the print. Many matting and framing decisions will boil down to taste and the overall "feel" of your completed work of art. The mat and frame should work together with your print to complete your intent and achieve the effect you want to portray.

However, you need to think about the audience or exhibition venue before you decide on your colored mats. If you mat using a bolder color, you might limit your market or prospective buyers because it might not fit their taste or home décor. If you are matting a print for your home, then you can consider your wall color and your personal color tastes.

Do you pick the inner or outer mat first? I usually pick the inner color first as this is the color that pulls out or enhances a color in the photo. You do need to remember that the inner mat color needs to look good next to all 4 sides of your photo.

Other points to keep in mind when trying to create an overall effect with your choice of mats:

If you use white, use an off-white or cream color.

A light color mat makes the image recede and a dark color mat makes the image or bright colors pop out.

In some instances, a light mat will give a softer effect and a dark mat will make the colors appear darker - this all depends on the colors in the photo.

In general, light colored mats will appear wider than dark colored mats and lighter mats will make the picture look larger.

While certain colors can enhance your print, make sure its hue doesn't overpower. In most prints, there's usually a main color, a secondary color, and a third and fourth color. One suggestion from American Frame Corp. is to focus on the third and fourth colors for mats and liners. This is the general way we started out picking colors, but it doesn't always work or work as well as other choices.

EVERYONE SEES COLOR DIFFERENTLY. As an example, there are numerous shades of red, some are a dark earthy red, several shades of crimson red, a "Chinese red", etc. However, it is difficult to find an orange-red that will go with photos of Indian Paintbrush. We have about 3-4 shades of yellow and gold that we often use as an inner mat - sometimes we need a muted, subtle shade so the yellows in the photo will appear brighter, other times a brighter shade of yellow matches the yellow in the photo, of which there is very little, so it makes it show up more in the photo. Green is another color that comes in different shades and intensities -blue-green, grayed green, bright green, dark green, light green. Most of the time, you cannot match identically the color in your photo with a mat color, so you look for a shade in that hue that goes with or complements the color in the photo.

Sometimes, it is difficult to find one or two colors to use with a certain photo. Some fallback suggestions "when all else fails": A metallic gold inner mat appears to add light to the photo and will tie in with a gold frame; earthy colors go well with landscapes (burnt sienna, greens, yellows). Dark blue outer mats seem to go well with photos of mountains, water, bluebonnets, and other photos with blue shadows or some blue in the photo - as long as there is an inner mat color to separate the blue mat from the blues in the photo.

We will look at some examples of the things I have just mentioned and some insight into why we picked the combinations we did. Each time we select a mat, we look at several options - different color combinations, different shades of one or both of the colors, and oftentimes what effect does a

white or black outer mat have. Then we pick the one we think looks the best - gut feel, personal taste, our mood at the moment, etc.

After we look at some matted examples, we have some photos that we can look at and discuss "where do we start?" and "what looks good?" I think participation in the process will help you formulate your own thoughts and preferences. I don't expect everyone to agree with all of our matting choices. Hopefully, this presentation will start your own thought process about how color matting can enhance the presentation of your photos.