

TO WEIGHT, OR NOT TO WEIGHT...

by: Picture It Framed



A bottom-weighted mat is one in which the bottom margin is wider than the other three sides.

It is my style in framing to add more matting to the bottom to compensate for an optical illusion where the eyes will fool the brain into thinking the bottom of a mat is narrower when a mat is actually equal on all sides. A look at nature shows more stability when heavier on the bottom. Trees are wider on the bottom, mountains are wider at the base and buildings have a more solid and balanced appearance when bigger on the bottom. It is the natural order of things. A wider mat on the bottom will bring the artwork and its focal point up within the frame, counteracting a sinking appearance and creating a more visually balanced presentation.

The bottom weighting of mats is a design feature that seems to have drifted in and out of fashion over the years. Antique works of art have weighted mats because that was standard practice at the time they were originally produced. We follow the same aesthetics when reframing them or in reproductions to maintain a period appearance.

For a period of time, we did not see many bottom-weighted mats. More framers seem to have embraced the technique in the last ten years due to better education and a return to implementing more timeless designs.

There is no reason not to weight the bottom of a mat. Some picture framers bottom weight selectively, some always do it, others never do it.

Once you have decided to bottom weight a mat, how much extra should be added. In design, there are no hard and fast rules, only suggestions, rules of thumb and guidelines. The overall composition should be subtle but noticeable, and enough that it looks deliberate. On average, a good place to start is adding an additional one-half of an inch on a three-inch-wide mat.

Bottom weighting mats is one of the easiest design techniques and it works with the simplest framing application like a single mat and a simple frame, metal or wood. It requires no special skills, equipment or materials to create a classic, balanced look.

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