

Digital Mats & Frames

There are several reasons for creating a digital mat or frame for your image. Maybe you just want to enhance your image for online viewing. Perhaps you don't have the tools and materials to make a traditional mat for your image. Possibly you can't find the right color or texture of mat to compliment your image. For all these reasons digital matting and framing may be the answer to your needs.

Digital mat and frames can be very elaborate and complex or very simple and basic. Just like the mats themselves, some Photoshop techniques are very complex and intricate, while others are very easy to learn and also look great. This tutorial will help you create digital mats with techniques that are easy to learn but look like you spent hours creating them.

Step One

Open your image in Photoshop. (I'm using CS6 but this technique will work with any of the full versions of Photoshop.) Notice that your image is on a layer called the background layer. Also notice that there is a small lock symbol on the right hand side of this layer. The lock indicates that this layer cannot be moved so we will need to change this setting before we continue. Double click on the background layer. A *new layer* dialog box opens and the default name for the layer is *Layer 0*. You can change the name if you wish or just click OK. Now you will notice that your layer name has changed and the lock on the right side of the layer is gone. This will allow us to go on to the next step.

Step Two

Go to the bottom of the layers palette and while you hold down the *CTRL* key, click on the *create a new layer* icon which is the second icon from the right (next to the delete layer.) This will create a new layer below your image layer.

Step Three

Click on the *Image* tab in the Toolbar in the upper left portion of your Photoshop window. From the drop down menu choose *canvas size*. The *dialogue* box that opens will show the dimensions of your canvas. You can choose to see them in inches, pixels or a number of other choices, by clicking on the arrow in the drop down box in the *New Size* pane. Decide how big you want your mat/canvas/frame to be and enter the appropriate amount into the width and height boxes. Then, if you want to have your image centered in the canvas, just click *OK*.

Step Four

You should now have a transparent frame around your image. We will now fill this frame with a color by going to the bottom of the layers palette and clicking on the *create new fill or adjustment layer* icon (black and white circle.) Choose *solid color* from the menu. You may pick a color from the color picker window or click on a color in your image to choose it for your mat. Click *OK* when you are satisfied with the color.

Step Five

Now select the layer containing your image by clicking on the layer in the layer's palette. Go to the bottom of the *Layers Palette* and click on the *fx* symbol to open the options menu. Choose *Drop Shadow*. Position your cursor on your actual image and holding the left mouse key drag down and to the right. You should see a black shadow begin to appear below and to the right of your image. Position the shadow where you like it. In the *Drop Shadow* dialog box play with the *Spread* and *Size* sliders until you have the look you want.

The DROP SHADOW effect looks great with most images and may be all you need to do with your digital framing. If you would like to try some other effects consider –

1. Create a *Stroke* around you image by clicking on your image layer in the *Layer's Palette* and then clicking on *fx* at the bottom of the *Layer's Palette* and choose *Stroke*. In the dialog box that opens change the *Position* drop down box to *Inside* and adjust the *Size* and *Opacity* sliders to suite your taste. Changing the color of your stroke is easily done by clicking on the black rectangle next to *Color* in the *Fill Type* box. Choose your color just as you did when creating your background layer. Click OK to save and apply your stroke.
2. Similar techniques are used to add a texture to your background mat. With the bottom layer in your *Layer's Palette* selected open the options menu by clicking on *fx* at the bottom of the *Layer's Palette*. Choose *Bevel and Emboss*. In the dialog box that opens click directly on the word *Texture* that appears under *Bevel and Emboss* on the upper left side of the *Styles* box. Choose a texture to add to your mat by clicking the down arrow next to the pattern box. Double click on the texture you like. This will return you to the *Texture Elements* box where you can adjust the scale and depth sliders to modify the texture. Click *OK* when you are satisfied with the result.

Remember that your goal is to produce images that reflect YOUR VISION. I hope this information will help you achieve that goal. If you have any questions contact me at don@dbarnesphotography.com or talk with me at the next North Iowa Photo Club meeting.

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