

Creative CMC Designs

Specialized matting designs created with computerized mat cutters can set framers apart from the competition and build customer loyalty

Military Memories

Gunnar CMC

Military Memories and More of Knoxville, IL, is a family-owned business dedicated to honoring and preserving the achievements of veterans. Business Manager Ryan Scalf uses his Gunnar F1 Hybrid and the Gunnar Mat Creator (GMC) software to create unique framed shadowbox designs for each of the stories that pass through his business on a daily basis.

Scalf says, “Most of the vets behind these stories are silent heroes, and our aim is to honor them by making every job we create unique and different, which makes our Gunnar F1 essential in helping us reach that goal.”

The shadowbox shown here was done for a Vietnam veteran who wanted to help capture the story and comradery of his tour as well as pride of his medals and achievements.

“This guy did it all,” says Scalf. “He was a first lieutenant in the Special Forces Group. He was trained in jungle warfare and was also a paratrooper. He fought alongside a South Vietnamese Mercenary Team. His highest award was the Bronze Star for going above the call of duty.”

The best thing about the work done at Military Memories, says Scalf, “is the frequent positive feedback we get from customers. This client sent us a touching message: ‘I received my shadowbox today and absolutely love it. I’ve already received several compliments from friends and family. Thank you for all the work you put into my display!’ ”

“When it came to cutting this mat design,” Scalf says, “the mounted and raised oval-shaped mat with the written gold 5th Special Forces description in the top right corner was the first thing designed in the GMC software, just using a standard Text template. I like to do this instead of a V-groove because it adds a little extra dimension.”

Scalf adds, “I simply loaded a Deco extra fine gold metallic paint pen into the Gunnar T2 pen tool, which is built into the cutting head, and the machine draws the text onto the surface of the matboard. It then cuts the reverse-bevel oval around the design in the same process. We also love the fact there are no blobs with the pen.”

Because of the custom shapes required for the different



The mounted and raised oval-shaped mat—with the gold 5th Special Forces description written in the top right corner—was designed with GMC software using a standard Text template.

styles of patches, medals, and objects, the integrated Draw Mode feature of GMC software is essential to creating this design. Scalf says, “For this design, I uploaded a photo of the Special Forces patch and then used a click-and-draw process to trace the shape around the patch in Draw Mode. I then did the same thing for the Green Beret. It only takes a few minutes for each shape. I use this feature a lot, and it was easy to learn from the free library of Gunnar video tutorials.”

Scalf prefers to avoid using rectangles for openings. He says, “Rectangles can seem a bit off-the-shelf. I prefer the creative library of templates in the GMC software for opening shapes that can be adjusted to tastefully enhance the overall display without going too far.”

Curved openings have become a signature for Scalf’s shop. “It has helped us create an appealing point of difference customers really like. The overall matboard concept takes roughly 30 minutes to design, lay out, and cut, but there’s no way we could offer it without our Gunnar F1.”

Farewell Gifts

Valiani CMC

Don Strouf, owner of Ducko's Custom Framing 2.0, in Springfield, OR, says that he felt reborn after 30 years in custom framing when he was first introduced to a CMC machine 10 years ago. "I couldn't believe how much easier life in framing became," he says.

"About a year and half ago, I realized my life was complete when I was introduced to the Valiani Mat Pro Ultra when I opened my own frame shop. After the initial shock of what this machine could do wore off, I quickly put my mind to work on some of the most creative pieces I've ever done. Using the various cutting heads, software, and pretty much any pen I wanted, the sky was the limit!"

In July 2016, a staff sergeant with the local marines walked in. He was wondering if I made wooden plaques with gold nameplates that he could give to marines who were transferred or discharged. I quickly explained that he had another option. I told him that, with my Valiani, I could create some amazing and more personal gifts to give his soldiers. He agreed to let me try. When he came in to pick up that first piece, he was completely speechless. I knew that I had convinced him that this was the future. Since then, my shop has created dozens of pieces for the military and various local sports teams.

This piece was done for the marines to hang in the entryway at their office building here in town. They gave me a few things to work with and came up with some famous quotes to use.

Taking pictures of the two slightly different sized flags as well as a medal and coin, I uploaded them into my Corel Draw program and created plotter files of each. I was then able to export them into the Valiani program as clip art. In the Valiani "Create" window, I added dimensions of the poster, leaving extra room as a border because that can be adjusted easily to the proper size at the end. I then added my clip art of the flags and sized it all to the proper dimensions.

To give the piece some additional flare, I positioned the flags over the top of the print at slight angles. After welding the flags into the mat hole for the print (which took literally two minutes), I was then able to add a Contour, which is the top mat and $\frac{3}{16}$ " of the bottom mat. Again, adding the clip art of the medal and coin to



For this creative shadowbox, Crescent mat #1578 Williamsburg Blue was used as the bottom mat and

Crescent #9865 Kensington as the top mat. Adhesive and glue dots were used to keep objects in place. The black Roma frame #15125001 provides just the right depth, and Tru Vue Conservation Clear was the final element.

the mat and getting them to the proper size and positioned in their spots, I started adding the quotes on the mat. I was then able to tweak everything just a little to get it all evenly spaced with proper borders.

I also decided that this piece being a shadowbox should have something extra. So, on the shadowbox walls, I had my machine write well-known marine sayings.

Using Crescent mat #1578 Williamsburg Blue as my bottom mat and Crescent #9865 Kensington as the top mat, I was able to get started. After the mats were cut, I started the assembly. Mounting the print and placing the mats on top, I glued the medal, coin, and flag poles using an adhesive. For the flags, I used glue dots to keep them in place. Selecting a black Roma frame #15125001 gave it just the right depth. I finished by using my bottom mat color for contrast and added the writing on the shadowbox walls. Tru Vue Conservation Clear glass was the final element. This frame can now hang anywhere and be enjoyed for many years. And it all was done in just under two hours total time.

A Touch of Whimsy

Wizard CMC

Petra Letson has been part of every aspect of the framing industry in Germany and Norway for the past 25 years. She designed the matting for this lithograph as an entry in a Norwegian framing competition. The image is of Haugesund, a town in southern Norway on the Karmsundet Sound.

The presentation includes V-groove ornaments, a nameplate, ancient Norwegian beads along the sides, and even lights inside—all cut on a Wizard 9000. But the most striking feature is the bridge scene recreated at the bottom. There are two layers of the pattern at the front of the bridge, one cut at a bevel and one cut at 90 degrees. There are spacers creating a narrow path, then a third layer of the pattern behind to complete the bridge.

“Rectangles were lined up using MatDesigner, evenly spaced, and fanned to follow the curve of the bridge,” says Letson. “The finishing steps in PathTrace were drawing a few arcs, breaking lots of intersections, and joining the pieces into the right shapes. So often, framers think that a PathTrace design like this is too complicated. This pattern is simple. The only complication was keeping the three decorative layers straight. And you should hear the surprise when I tell framers that the arrangement of V-groove shapes behind the bridge was easier in PathTrace than it would have been in MatDesigner. Draw the pattern at one corner, and mirror it around to all the other corners.”

The little people on the bridge are from model trains. Letson says, “It was a framing competition, and I was wondering how to add some life to the framing. When we cut a nice mat, there is always some little flaw that we notice after it is finished. Instead of cutting it again, I let the dent stay, and I put a couple of painters there to fix things. Then there is another person cleaning the glass from the inside, because there is always a spot on the glass after the picture is sealed. The other little people are just for fun. Shouldn’t there be old men sitting on the bridge, remembering the old days while street musicians play?”

The lights are strips of LED lights glued to foam-board. “I don’t like the way it looks when the light bulbs themselves are too visible, so I cut long narrow mats for the sides and top with tiny narrow openings to



Top: Petra Letson's mat design for this lithograph includes extra openings for old beads and a nameplate. The main attraction is the bridge motif along the bottom. There are three layers of this crenelated pattern with space between them to accentuate the pattern through depth and shadow. The pattern was begun in MatDesigner and finished in PathTrace. LED lights shine through narrow openings at the sides and top.

Right: This detail of the left corner shows the narrow opening at the side where the light shines through. The inside joke for framers is the little people inside repairing a dent in the matboard and cleaning the inside of the glass. The layers of the bridge construction and the extra depth are also more evident.



cover the lights but let enough light come through to light up the picture. The real irony of this project was that engineering the spacers—to lift the layers to the right height to provide space for the beads, the path on the bridge, and to still let light through—seemed to require more thought and planning than the decorative work.

“Of course, I want people to throw flowers at my feet and tell me how much they love my work,” says Letson, “but the best result is the ‘Six Blind Men and the Elephant’ effect. One framer will notice the nameplate and think ‘Look how effective that is. I’ll do nameplates more often’. Another framer will see the beads and think, ‘Wow, little objects. I can do this with buttons and pins and jewelry.’ Another might study the lighting and think, ‘How nice to see an idea for lighting in a frame that doesn’t look like a Hollywood gala.’ And I hold out hope that some will say, ‘What striking PathTrace work. The depth makes it so dramatic.’ Seeing this, I think, would be well worth spending more time being creative.” **PFM**