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You make flawless inkjet prints on top-quality media, so go one step further to protect your work.

BY BRYAN LINDEN

Grand finale

PRINT FINISHING

Many photographers with excellent pigment inkjet printers are uncompromising on print quality, yet not when it comes to print finishing. Perhaps they don't know the available options for protecting their prints.

Prints emerge from the printer dry to the touch, but they're not actually completely dry. You may not get ink on your hands, but it's easy to permanently mar the print with the

oils on your hands, lint particles or scratches. The best advice: Look but don't touch for 24 hours if possible. When the print has cured (dried completely) and the glycerol in the inks has evaporated, it's safe to handle and you can add coatings to further protect it.

If you're making several prints, do not stack them until you place blank matte paper between them to allow for proper glycerol absorption. A telltale sign that the curing is complete is the wavy appearance of the interleaved papers, indicating that they have absorbed the glycerol. Always let prints fully cure before framing or otherwise finishing, because the glycerol gas released can fog the print.

Manufacturers' print longevity specifications are typically based on the ideal conditions for

storage, mounting and display, not necessarily your clients' environments. Coating prints with lacquer-based aerosol sprays is often recommended by manufacturers to protect and ensure print longevity. Sprays also eliminate gloss differential on exceptionally high-gloss media.

I protect prints on resin-coated (RC) or fine-art paper with Print Shield by Premier Imaging Products. It works on any surface without yellowing or influencing the natural characteristics of the paper, increasing display life by as much as 100 percent, and making prints scuff- and water-resistant. Print Shield is available in aerosol cans or by the gallon for use with high-volume, low-pressure (HVLP) spray guns.

There are also newer, more eco-friendly products with different finish characteristics, such as PremierArt Eco Print Shield. Water-based rather than lacquer-based, they're less caustic. Available in gloss, satin and matte finishes, they can give a matte surface a gloss finish or a satin protective layer, and vice versa. Eco Print Shield comes in quart bottles or by the gallon, and can be rolled on or sprayed on with an HVLP gun, and is compatible with canvas and fine-art or RC papers.

Eco products work well for gallery wraps

FOR BEST RESULTS

Whether you use an aerosol spray or an HVLP spray gun, coating prints is quick and easy. For consistent results, follow these steps:

- Make sure prints and working environment are free of dust and debris.
- Before spraying, mount prints vertically so the spray doesn't pool.
- Before finishing your print, spray an empty area of the mounting surface from a distance of 6 to 10 inches, so you can see the diameter and pattern of the spray and adjust as necessary.
- Spray at a consistent distance, using a back-and-forth motion, overlapping each pass by 50 percent.

Allow prints to dry 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the requirements of the particular spray, then rotate the prints 90 degrees and dry another 20 to 40 minutes.



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because the water-based formula won't crack due to stretching and won't become brittle with time. Water-based formulas protect prints from moisture, light, humidity, atmospheric contaminants, scuffs and fingerprints. The brand new embellishing gel Eco Elegance can add impasto and brush strokes to your prints.

Spraying prints is not difficult. It can be done in a spray room or, if you wear a good painter's respirator (about \$30 at hardware stores), in well-ventilated areas. Ventilation is critical; there are ventilation fans and commercial spray booths available if you don't have a space with adequate air flow. Hang plastic tarps to catch the overspray.

To prepare to spray, I mount my prints vertically on a piece of black foam board. If the print has a border that will be trimmed, I mount it with clips, especially good with prints made on roll paper, which curls. To mount cut-sheet full-bleed prints, I use loops of large strips of low-tack masking tape on the back of the print.

Delicate, fine-art surfaces like velvet and watercolor paper are easy to flake or scuff. Always spray art surfaces and canvas prints to protect them. It's a good idea to spray prints in albums as well. Many labs offer this service, but doing it yourself is easy enough with a little practice. ■

Tips for using Eco Print Shield at www.ecoprintshield.com.

Epson, HP and other manufacturers recommend PremierArt Coatings for their media (performance certified by Wilhelm Imaging Research). For specs and purchase info on Premier Print Shield, Eco Print Shield and the HVLP spray gun, visit www.premierimagingproducts.com.

Bryan Linden is a photographer and digital imaging expert, who presents workshops on a variety of subjects (www.lindenphoto.net). Linden is the vice president of Marketing and Sales for Album DS album design software (www.albumds.com).



Premier Imaging Products uses this photo to show how a print can benefit from spray coatings. The image was halved, then mirrored. The right half was sprayed with three light coats of PremierArt Print Shield. The image was cured for 24 hours before water testing. The image shows the effects of the following water resistance tests: (top) three drops of water placed on the print for 45 seconds, then wiped away with a sponge; (center) three passes with a moist sponge; and (bottom) three drops of water placed on the print for four minutes and then blotted with a paper towel.