

Drying Box For Printers And Papermakers

Claire van Vliet

As foundry type becomes increasingly rare and expensive and printers are using handmade papers, damp printing is becoming a necessity to preserve the type from wear while at the same time making a rich impression of it in the paper.¹

One of the major aggravations of printing damp is that if you want the sheets to dry flat it requires having several sets of blotters with a lot of shifting. Also I have found that ominous little discolorations settle in even when I have been conscientious about hanging the damp blotters up to dry immediately. Forty to fifty drying sessions seem to be the limit before acid free blotters begin to have these spores.

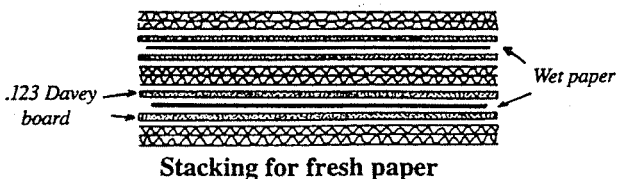
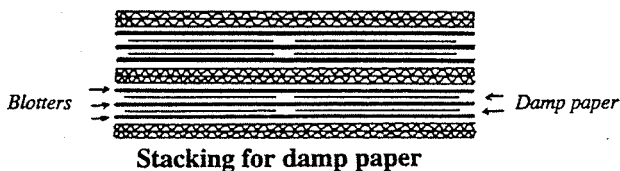
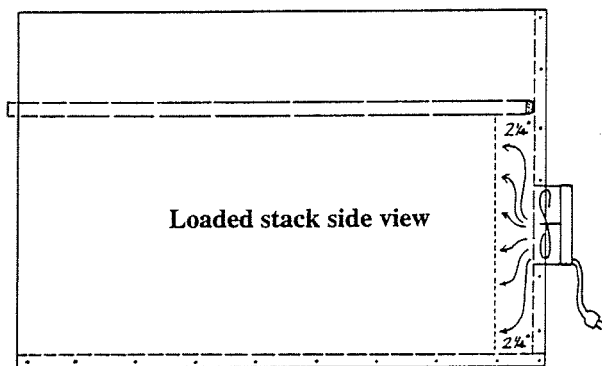
Forced air drying under restraint is the obvious route, using the tried and true layering system botanists use for drying plants: corrugated cardboard, newsprint, plant, newsprint, corrugated, etc. But corrugated cardboard is made of kraft and has groundwood and acid, as does the newsprint. This acid would migrate to the paper being dried. An archival double-wall corrugated is now available and this inspired me to make a drying box two years ago. The box is modelled on a Kodak dryer I saw at Walter Hamady's many years ago. I have been using it for editions of printing and handmade paper for the last two years and it works like a dream. It dries damp printed paper, ink, and blotters overnight and freshly-made paper in two to three days. For freshly-made paper I tried conservation board as the wicking surface, but that developed a warp; a denser board was needed. Last year the Davey Company started making an acid free binder's board. This binder's board withstands the wicking process and remains reasonably flat.

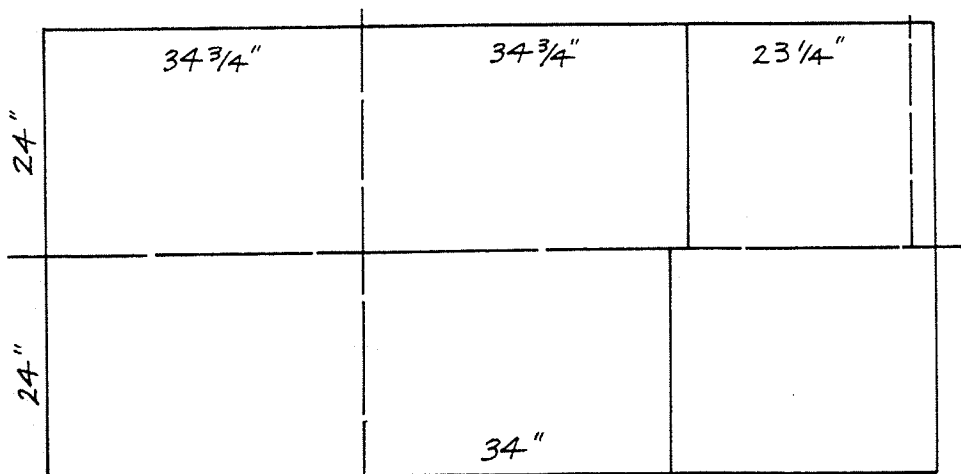
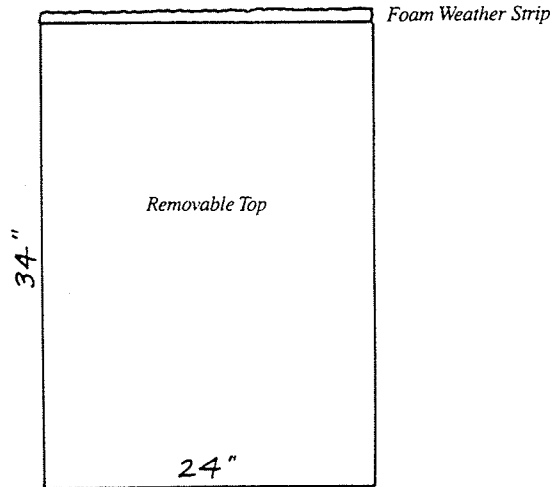
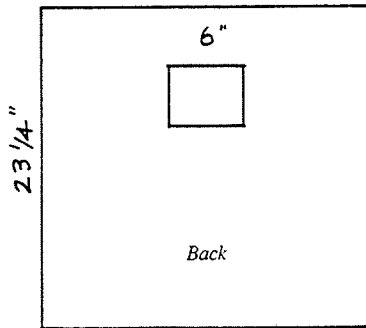
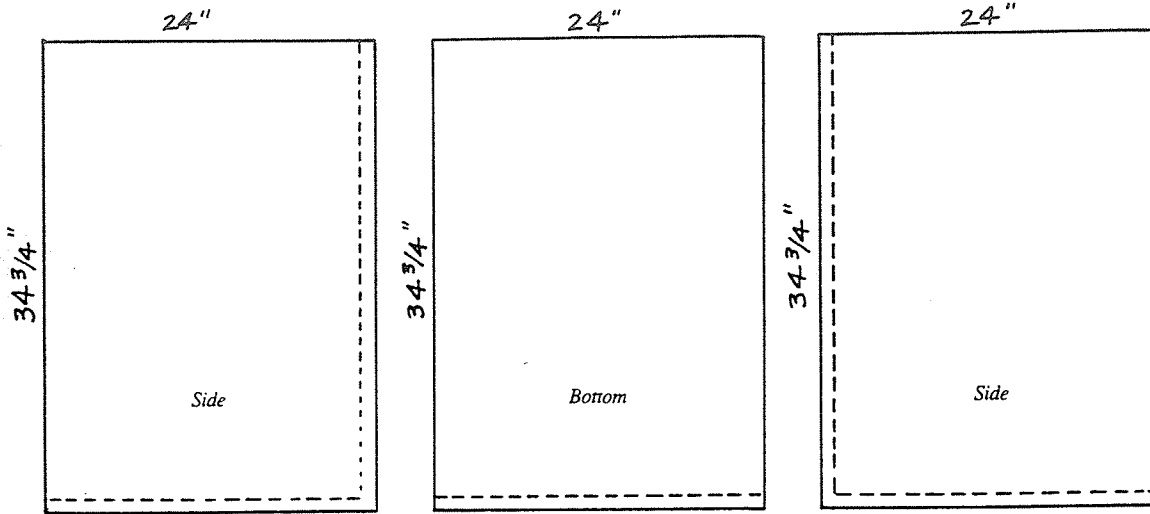
The drier has a drying surface of 24" x 31½" and is ideal for up to 22" x 30" sheets.

Assembly – The basic box and cover are made from one 4' x 8' sheet of good quality plywood. It is best to screw the box together as it will have more stability and can also be disassembled easily.

Fan – A large noisy fan is completely unnecessary. I use a small *Super Quiet* fan. It is mounted flush to the inside of the box. It seems to work without any dead air spaces; the placement (centered in the box, 6" up from the bottom – see diagram) was pure beginner's luck as was the size of the air space of 2¼" between the back wall and the drying stack. It is important to buy the fan before cutting into the back wall as the size and shape of the fan must match the hole.

Loading – To evenly maintain the 2¼" air space, which is important, I have two strips of Davey board 26" x 2¼" that I lean against the side walls in the back corners of the box to act as a stop while loading. Start and end the loading with corrugated. The stack can be ended anywhere between the top of the fan and the top of the box; the stack height does not seem to matter. Remove the stop strips and put the top board on with the weather striped edge pushed firmly against the back wall. For printed paper I put 15-20 lbs. of weight near the four corners and for fresh paper 25-30 lbs.





Corrugated – The board comes in sheets 48" × 32" with the channels running the 32" direction. Cut it in half, making two 24" × 32" pieces. The factory cut of the board crushes the corrugated edge, so trim off ¼" at each 24" end with a sharp knife to expose the air channels fully.

Blotters – Trim to 24" × 31 ½". Ink does offset onto the blotters but even with the heavy inking of the *King Lear* woodcuts² it never re-offset onto the next batch of drying sheets. For soft surfaces and intaglio printing, sizing catchers are a reasonable wicking material.

Board – The Davey board needs to be trimmed to 24" × 31 ½" and I advise getting that done at a bindery or printer's with a guillotine as the .123 board is tough sledding with a knife.

Sources

- **Super Quiet Fan:** 115 Vac, 16 Watts, 50 CFM, 0.19 Amp; Sandy Hill Wholesale / Hancock, NH 03449. I got mine at my local hardware for \$23.95.
- **Archivart Multiuse Board Double Wall** (corrugated cardboard): 32" × 48", 25 sheets per carton, \$110.80 FOB. Process Materials Corporation / 301 Veterans Boulevard / Rutherford, NJ 07070.
- **Davey Acid Phree Board .123:** 26" × 38", 12 sheets per bundle. delivered price c. \$1.50 per sheet. The Davey Company / Downingtown, PA 19335.
- **Cosmos Acid Free Blotters:** 24" × 38", 125 per carton, 8060029, \$.74 per sheet. Dan Smith / 4130 1st Ave. S. / Seattle, WA 98134. 1-800-426-6740.

NOTES:

1. Cf. Ferris, Suzanne and Neal Bonham, "On Damp Printing", *Hand Papermaking*, v. 1, no. 2, Winter 1986, pp. 7-11. – ED.
2. Shakespeare, William, *King Lear*, Theodore Press, Bangor, Maine, 1986. (Paper by Katie MacGregor and Bernie Vinzani, woodcuts by Claire van Vliet.)