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# Sublimation's Big Secret

Follow the evolution of sublimated images  
from traditional canvas to modern metal art.

BY DAVID GROSS, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



To add value to a flat piece  
of metal, stack one piece  
of metal on top of a larger  
one using a spacer block.

A few years ago, ChromaLuxe HD metal photo panels were introduced to the sublimation market and completely changed the game. No longer a secret, ChromaLuxe metal has been providing artists and photographers a completely new alternative to traditional canvas that is in high demand and often sells at breathtaking prices.

It's exciting to know that ChromaLuxe metal and the sublimation decorating process have started an evolution from images on canvas to modern metal art.

Many famous photographers and artists have embraced sublimatable metal as a way to express their creativity. Here, I'll shed some light on this viral trend and how you can partake in it.

## What is ChromaLuxe?

Each ChromaLuxe metal photo panel starts as a high-quality sheet of aluminum. To make it sublimatable, multiple layers of thick, polymer coatings are applied to the metal.

From there, the metal sheet is routed or sheared into a multitude of different sizes and shapes and then sent to fulfillment companies via Universal Woods' distribution network. Once sublimated, the metal provides unparalleled color vibrancy with an intriguing color depth and 3-D look.

The sublimation process uses special dyes that, when heated, turn into a gas. Unlike most traditional pigments and dyes, sublimation dyes have uniquely bright and glowing colors in a large gamut. Using any kind of sublimation printer, full-color, photo-quality images can be



printed onto sublimation-release paper using these dyes.

This printed “transfer” is then taped to the selected ChromaLuxe panel, placed in a flat heat press, and heated at 400°F for about 90 seconds. During the heating process, the coating’s pores open to receive the colored gas. When heat is removed, the pores close, trapping the dyes deep inside.

### **What a Decorated Piece Looks Like**

Since the dyes are suspended in the optically clear coating, a transferred image appears to float inside the metal. On clear metal, you easily can see a 3-D effect as light hits both the suspended dyes and the back of the metal, then returns to your eyes.

This sub-surface encapsulation has two advantages. First, because of the toughness of the coatings, it’s difficult to damage or affect the dyes. Next, because the coatings and dyes are suspended between the top surface and the base metal surface, a light-box-type effect is achieved that gives the decorated piece an appearance of color depth.



*ChromaLuxe metal has been providing artists and photographers a completely new alternative to traditional canvas that is in high demand.*

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## Colors, Finishes, Sizes & Shapes

ChromaLuxe metal comes in two base colors: white and clear. Images transferred into the white coating produce a vibrant, true-to-color image with exceptional quality and detail. Images transferred into the clear coating produce a vibrant, metallic-looking image with the same quality and detail.

Both colors are available in three finishes: glossy, semi-glossy and matte. If you're interested in offering ChromaLuxe panels in your business, buy a set of each to help you decide which color and finish is appropriate for certain applications. Available in a large number of pre-cut sizes from 4" x 4" to a whopping 4' x 8', the panels can be mounted on a wall individually or grouped into a collage or mural.

There also are several sizes that feature a glossy, white imprintable surface on both sides, making them suitable for table displays or hanging. Since the metal is double-sided, it provides more decorating options, including using the same photo on the back and front, using two different photos on both sides or keeping the back blank.

## 3-D ChromaLuxe & Beyond

To add value, stack a piece of metal on top of a larger one using a spacer block. The smaller front piece can be sublimated with a favorite image showing loved ones or a memory from a vacation, while the larger piece can be sublimated with a complementing background.

This is a standard offering in many

photo gift shops, but it equally can be used to make high-value award plaques. This approach has been shown by Gaby Mullinax at Fullerton, California-based Fullerton Photographics. If you're interested, watch her videos (search YouTube using the term "Conde Fullerton"); it's worth your time to see a master at work.

Another way to showcase ChromaLuxe metal is to use a metal column roller to curve it into a self-standing table display. This requires sublimating the metal before it is rolled. I use an Accucutter precision roller that allows curvature adjustment.

For this application, use the double-sided version of ChromaLuxe so that both sides are decorated. You also can easily curve a small rectangular piece of metal in the shape of the letter "C" or "S" by hand using a large roll of paper.

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## TAKIN' IT OUTSIDE

Once primarily limited to indoor use, recent advances in sublimation coating technology have pushed this decoration method outdoors with the introduction of extended-life sublimation metal photo panels and signage. Because a ChromaLuxe metal is sub-surface decorated (meaning the dyes become encapsulated in the coating), it is protected from the outside world.

This now opens new opportunities for outdoor, photographic-quality displays and signage. The metal provides the lasting, vibrant colors you'd expect from ChromaLuxe panels with UV resistance that can stand up to outdoor elements for at least three years.

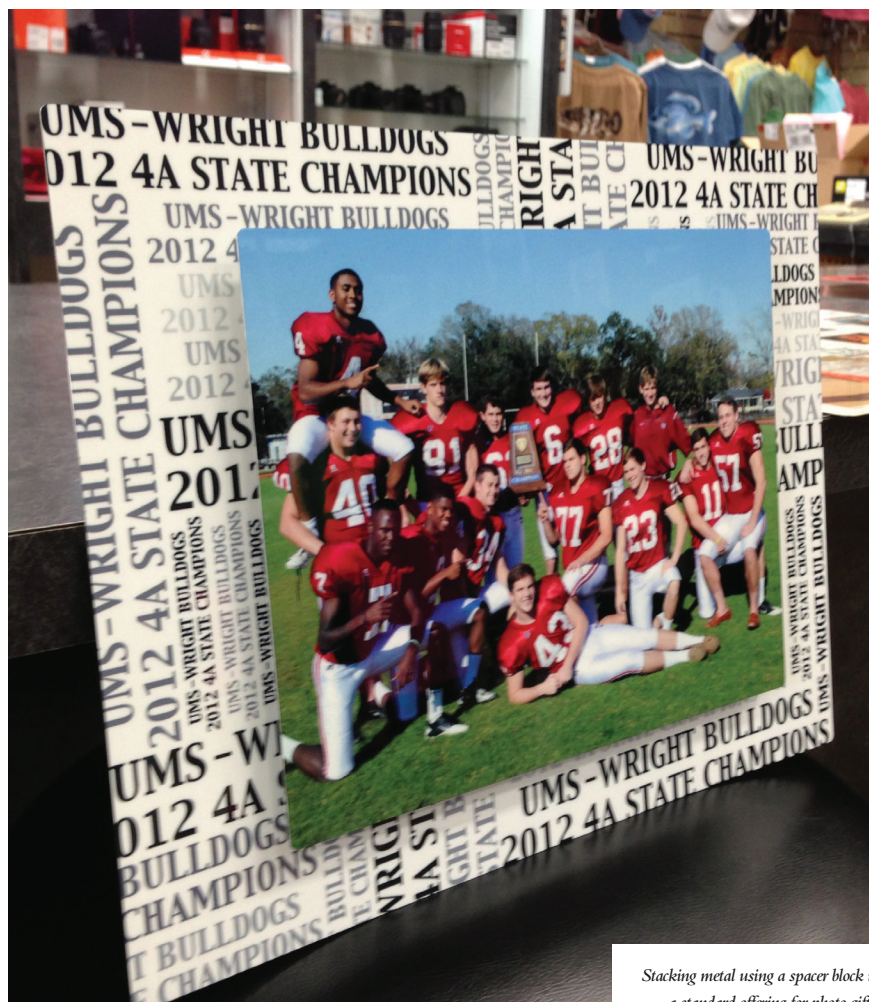
As a bonus, these metal panels also deliver scratch-, graffiti- and chemically resistant finishes rivaling other decorating technologies. So if you're not producing metal prints, you should be.

## Continuing Evolution

Universal Woods, the inventor and manufacturer of ChromaLuxe metal, produces all of its products in the United States at its facility in Louisville, Kentucky. The company continues to evolve ChromaLuxe by improving the product's white point, clarity and longevity.

In addition, the firm works closely with printer, ink and paper manufacturers, and distributors to optimize sublimation for their products. □

David Gross is president of Condé Systems Inc., in Mobile, Alabama. For the past 26 years, he has devoted himself to advancing sublimation decorating technology. For more information or to comment on this article, email David at [dgross@conde.com](mailto:dgross@conde.com).



Stacking metal using a spacer block is a standard offering for photo gifts.

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