

A MAKING A LIGHTPROOF PAPER DRAWER

A light-tight paper drawer is a real boon to a darkroom and it is not difficult to make.

Drawer: Construct a simple drawer from $1/2$ in (1.25cm) plywood, about 3in (7.5cm) deep and several inches larger than your largest paper. I find a drawer of 20in x 24in (50cm x 60cm) ideal as it holds large sheets and several smaller sizes at the same time. Use wood filler to fill any gaps in the joints to ensure that they are lightproof. Paint all the internal surfaces matt black.

The envelope: Construct a plywood envelope, closed at the back and open at the front, just big enough to accept the drawer. Make all joints lightproof. Paint the internal surfaces matt black — this is easier before assembly. Add two or three plastic or metal glider strips to the bottom inside surface to ensure smooth running.

The drawer front: Make a supplementary plywood drawer front 1 in (2.5cm) larger all round than the original front. Around the edge of this, fix four strips of $1/2$ in (1.25cm) plywood up to 1 in (4cm) wide to make a rebate. The envelope will fit snugly into this, forming a light-tight seal. Paint the inside of the rebate matt black.

The envelope seal: Fix $1/2$ in (1.25cm) x 1 in (4cm) plywood strips to the outside of the envelope all around, to abut snugly with the drawer front assembly when the drawer is closed. This completes the light seal. Instead of using a plywood strip on the envelope top, you can use a sheet of the same size as the top. This will make it easier to attach the envelope to the underside of the dry bench.

Screw the envelope under the enlarger, unless you have an enlarger table with a movable platform as described earlier. In this case fix the envelope beneath an adjacent dry bench area.

The drawer and envelope should form a snug fit. If the drawer glides too freely it may open accidentally if your knees brush it as you get up. If so, either fix a small catch at one side or stick a piece of masking tape across the joint. This can be peeled back for opening and pressed down again on closing many times before it needs replacing.

Important: Before entrusting a whole packet of paper to your finished drawer, do a paper test with one sheet as follows. Fog a whole sheet to maximum flash or light grey as described for safelight testing on page 14. Cut the sheet into four quarters and label these 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the backs. Place one piece in each corner of the drawer with a coin in the centre of each. Close the drawer, put on all the lights, and go and enjoy a cup of tea. After an hour or so, develop your papers and dry them thoroughly before assessing them. Any light leak will be obvious, and you will also know which part of the drawer is at fault.

Last but not least, make sure that everybody who is likely to enter the darkroom knows the consequences of opening the drawer to see what is inside!

